THE POETRY AND POETIC THEORY OF ANDRÉ BRETON,
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE IMAGE

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CHAPTER THREE

"CLAIR DE TERRE" (1923)¹

Whereas Les Champs magnétiques was the first collection of automatic texts to be published, Clair de Terre is generally regarded as Breton's first recueil of Surrealist poems. Even though the imagery of Clair de Terre is the principal concern of this chapter, one cannot really ignore other aspects of the poetry, if only to show what part the imagery plays in the structure of the poems. Consequently we shall discuss the imagery in the light of Breton's classification of surrealist images, but in addition the significance of the different types of texts ("experimental" poems, dream-narrations, prose-poems, poems in "vers libres") and the way in which the themes are presented will be considered; and in the latter part of the chapter there will be an examination in some detail of certain individual poems.

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In an epigraph Breton provides an explanation of the title of the recueil: the phrase was discovered in the book Nouvelle astronomie pour tous, in the section on "le ciel":

"La terre brille dans le ciel comme un astre énorme au milieu des étoiles. Notre globe projette sur la lune un intense clair de terre." (CT 33)

The title-phrase was therefore given to Breton. It is a phrase which clearly attracted him at first sight on account of its unusualness. The image of the "clair de terre" is now, of course,

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¹. Paris: Collection Littérature. We shall concentrate our attention on the poems and récits de rêves included in Clair de Terre; Paris: Gallimard (Coll. 'Poesie'), 1966.
almost commonplace; for astronauts, at least, it has become part of their experience of reality; but in 1923 the transformation of the stock "clair de lune" into the novel concept of a "clair de terre" was a marvellous modification and extension of reality. For the poet it presented a new standpoint and a new vision of the cosmos, even though the tercets of Mallarmé's sonnet beginning Quand l'ombre menaça de la fatale loi.... suggest a similar picture:

"Oui, je sais qu'au lointain de cette nuit, la Terre jette d'un grand éclat l'insolite mystère, sous les siècles hideux qui l'obscurcissent moins.

L'espace à soi pareil qu'il s'accroisse ou se nie roule dans cet ennui des feux vils pour témoins que s'est d'un astre en fête allumé le génie." 1

The cover of the first edition of Clair de Terre, designed by Breton himself, tried to match this new vision by means of a typographical arrangement. Black and white change places to create what at first glance appears to be an exotic kind of script.

It is common knowledge that Breton chose his titles very carefully; and the choice of Clair de Terre, though it may at first seem quite gratuitous, provides a clue to a better understanding of its poems.

Mary Ann Caws, when discussing briefly the appositions of diametrically opposed elements in Surrealist writing, mentions the paramount importance in this respect of the clash of light and dark:

"But the great majority by far are oppositions of light and dark, clarity and shadow. Such oppositions reappear constantly in most of the poetry associated with Surrealism, and especially in that of Tristan Tzara and Paul Eluard; for any of these poets, one can make an almost endless catalogue of light/dark alternations, sometimes identified with rapid changes of mood, but sometimes a mere spectacle." 2

2. Caws, M.A., André Breton, p.95.
Two pages later she makes the more revealing reference to the value of the alchemical lesson, "for it is within the dark that the light is to be found", and it is this latter notion that helps one to see Breton's motives in Clair de Terre, where one is struck by the search for light, not only in apparent chaos but also in life's superficial dreariness. The "earthlight" image suggests perhaps that man can seek salvation and illumination on this planet, even within himself, especially as the moon has long been a symbol of the imagination, as well as a source of inspiration, and glimpses of this "clair de terre" become the major thematic feature of the recueil, present in the récits de rêves and in the poems proper, but only in a half-latent, half-manifest manner.

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Clair de Terre opens with five récits de rêves. It has already been pointed out that dream-narration was one of the methods employed by the Surrealists in their exploration of the subconscious and in their search for poetic material. A number of years earlier Desnos had amused himself by writing down what he could remember of the previous night's dreams; but the impetus to Breton's interest in dreams and dream-narration was provided, of course, by the work of Freud, whom Breton visited in October 1921, while on honeymoon.

Despite the objections occasionally raised to the analysis of automatic texts and récits de rêves (v. supra, p. 325), one can note in the five dream-texts placed at the beginning of Clair de Terre certain characteristics and significant elements, which are

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of interest to the student of Breton's development as a poet. Some of their more important themes and motifs are to be found in the poems proper of Clair de Terre and in Breton's other writings of the period. Moreover, the dream-narrations may provide the critic with an important justification for his interpretation of automatic texts and poems, since Freud's distinction between the manifest and latent content of dreams and his search to discover the distorted latent content can be applied to the analysis of poetry, and particularly Surrealist poetry.

Reference has been made already to the basic characteristics of these récits de rêves, which are, not surprisingly, found in most dreams (v. supra, p. 94): constant switches and transformations, constantly changing tableaux. It will be seen that this kaleidoscopic effect is shared by Breton's récits de rêves and his poems. The dream-work, the making of symbols, almost invariably involves displacement and condensation; it is apparent in the second of the récits de rêves in Clair de Terre, which opens with Breton sitting opposite a woman in the métro. They get out at Trocadéro and emerge into a vast meadow, where Breton follows the woman until she is met by a footballer. The woman and three footballers resume the game. Breton joins in but meets with little success. In the fifth text Eluard and a naked woman go off together; they are replaced immediately by a group of dwarfs, all dressed in blue jerseys. The dwarfs surround Breton and one of them prepares to stick a dart in Breton's calf, but the latter runs away after knocking down some of the dwarfs, falls down and narrowly escapes being tied down by the others. A short while later, however, one of the little men in blue jerseys emerges from a cart which had
crashed into a river and swims to the bank opposite Breton. At the
beginning of the third dream Breton is bathing by the seaside with
a small child, but in the next scene the child is replaced by a
number of people.

At times the interval between the disappearance of one figure
and its replacement by another is suppressed altogether, with the
consequence that the dreamer seems to witness a veritable metamor-
phosis. This process is illustrated by the next incident in the
third dream. Suddenly two birds are flying by. One of the company
shoots at the birds, one of which is hit. As Breton and his com-
panions draw nearer to the birds, the latter are transformed into
horses and cows.\(^1\) In Text IV Breton hardly has time to notice in
front of a piano M. Charles Baron, when this young man is replaced
by Louis Aragon. In the opening scene of the final \textit{récit de rêve}
Breton, Eluard and Marcel Noll are in a room somewhere in the
country; Breton is fascinated by a bright object, which suddenly

\(^1\) This example of metamorphosis is mentioned, in fact, by Freud.
Thus, Breton's dream may be in turn a recollection of a passage
from The Interpretation of Dreams:

"The question why the dreaming mind misjudges the nature of
the objective sensory stimulus has been answered by Strümpell,
and in an almost identical fashion by Wundt; their explanation
is that the reaction of the mind to the stimulus attacking sleep
is complicated and confused by the formation of illusions. A
sensory impression is recognized by us and correctly interpreted
- that is, it is classed with the memory-group to which it belongs
according to all previous experience if the impression is strong,
clear and sufficiently prolonged, and if we have sufficient
time to submit it to those mental processes. But if these con-
ditions are not fulfilled, we mistake the object which gives
rise to the impression, and on the basis of this impression, we
construct an illusion. 'If one takes a walk in an open field
and perceives indistinctly a distant object, it may happen that
one will at first take it for a horse'. On closer inspection
the image of a cow, resting, may obtrude itself, and the picture
may finally resolve itself with certainty into a group of people
sitting on the ground." (Authorized translation by A.A. Brill,
London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.), 1950 edition, but first
published in 1913, p.44.
disappears, to be replaced by Philippe Soupault, dressed in white. In the same dream the wings of a pheasant are transformed into two boxes and an aeroplane looping the loop becomes "un gros wagon noir".

In addition to the kaleidoscopic effect created by these ever-shifting tableaux, the récits de rêves share with the poems proper of Clair de Terre various kinds of distortions of reality: images negating elementary physical properties, examples of visual "dépaysement" and even the rarer phenomenon of surreal aural images. One naturally expects to find such hallucinatory images in récits de rêves, given the basic similarity between the hallucinatory episode on the one hand and the dream or daydream on the other.

The metamorphosis of birds into horses and cows in the third dream is strange enough, but what is even more curious is that the animal which was wounded and dying had one bright eye and one dull eye "assez semblable à une coquille d'oursin" (CT 40). The likely explanation of this fact is provided, however, by the subsequent anecdotes about the monocles of a M. Roger Lefébure and the couturier and interior decorator, Paul Poiret. Presumably these anecdotes were the starting-points or the causes of the whole dream. There is a truly supernatural incident in Text IV, when a woman in a photograph suddenly comes to life and touches Breton on the shoulder before disappearing with equal abruptness.

Because of the distorted reflections on the gleaming walls and floor of the vast gallery which is the setting of the fourth dream, several of the characters appear simultaneously in different postures, giving rise to touches of humour:
"Adonis, par exemple, était couché à ses propres pieds." (CT 41)

The very word "dépaysé" occurs near the end of Text V, when Breton observes what he thinks at first is an aeroplane, as he heads for a station not unlike the stations at both Nantes and Versailles.

In the previous dream Breton, pursuing his research for a novel he is writing, consults a dictionary, where he is struck by the figure accompanying the word "rheostat": a number of parachutes or clouds suspended in the air like children's balloons. In each parachute or cloud a Chinaman is crouching. The unnatural suspension of people or objects in mid-air is a favourite feature of both surrealist poetry¹ and Surrealist painting. One of the finest examples of the treatment of this theme by a Surrealist artist is Magritte's La reconnaissance infinie (1953), (v. SF 271). This picture is dominated by a vast and shining sphere, hanging motionless in the sky above dark, mysterious mountains; on top of the sphere stands a man gazing upwards to the heavens. The picture conveys at one and the same time a sense of deep foreboding and of sublime awe, suggesting perhaps the prospect of Man overreaching himself in his aspiration for the Infinite and the Absolute.

The above examples of "dépaysement" operate on the visual plane, but also in the fourth dream there is an example of a similar kind of distortion of reality on the aural plane. The hen- pheasants cry out: "François, François, François." One is tempted to dismiss this image as a simple case of personification, but in the context of a récit de rêve or, for that matter, of a Surrealist

poem, the literal meaning is so strong that it has to be accepted at face-value. There is a very marked quality of "littéralité" in Surrealist poetry and this is justified by Breton's attack on Remy de Gourmont's "explanation" of certain of Saint-Pol-Roux's images (cf. supra, p.120). It is a clear case of a hallucinated voice, which one expects to encounter in dreams. Again one is reminded of The Interpretation of Dreams, where Freud observes:

"Not only pictures, but auditory hallucinations of words, names, etc. may also occur hypnagogically, and then repeat themselves in the dream, like an overture announcing the principal motif of the opera which is to follow."

It can be seen from the above examples that the persons featured in the dream-narrations of Clair de Terre are, by and large, friends or acquaintances of Breton. The plaster-cast moustaches of Baudelaire, Nouveau and Barbey d'Aurevilly could suggest that these authors have a particular place in Breton's private hall of fame, though Barbey d'Aurevilly's name seems somewhat surprising in this context. The footballers and dwarfs may be embodiments of subconscious anxieties and fears, though Breton's reading of Swift may account for the dwarfs, or else their appearance in the odd dream may simply reflect incidents in the poet's life in the days prior to the dreams. The motif of the naked woman who appears suddenly from the depths of a wood, in a meadow or a lake possibly has links with the myth of the birth of Aphrodite, and in turn with the awakening of sexual desire. In Text 22 of Poisson soluble (1924) Breton follows a woman in mourning:

"Je me disposais pourtant à la rejoindre quand elle fit volte-face et, entrouvrant son manteau, me découvrit sa nudité plus ensorcelante que les oiseaux." (M 107)

1. op.cit., p.47.
In Nadja there is a similar occurrence:

"A la fin de l'après-midi, l'année dernière, aux galeries de côté de l' Electric-Palace', une femme nue, qui ne devait avoir à se défaire que d'un manteau, allait bien d'un rang à l'autre, très blanche. C'était déjà bouleversant." (N 44)

There Breton prefases the anecdote with the expression of the general desire:

"J'ai toujours incroyablement souhaité de rencontrer la nuit, dans un bois, une femme belle et nue, ou plutôt, un tel souhait une fois exprimé me signifiant plus rien, je regrette incroyablement de ne pas l'avoir rencontrée." (ibid.)

The important theme of the encounter with a woman is present in the second dream, in the métro scene. This scene is significant, for, as Maxime Alexandre has pointed out, the métro, in Breton's eyes, was "le théâtre du mystère érotique." ¹

The métro, is in any case, one of the major motifs of the great Surrealist theme of "le merveilleux moderne"; likewise the street-signs: a placard seen in a deserted street in the "quartier des Grands-Augustins" is the starting-point of the first dream. ²

Other aspects of the décor of these récits de rêves, the allusions to hotel lounges and staircases, are inspired no doubt to some extent by the fact that Breton lived for a time at the end of the war in hotels. ³ The staircase, a classic dream-symbol, could, however, be seen as a suggestion of the descent into the subconscious.

2. The deserted street or square is a favourite motif in the work of Chirico, to whom the text is dedicated. It is present in some of his finest paintings: The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914), The Delights of the Poet (1913), The Rose Tower (1913), and The Lassitude of the Infinite (1913), to name but a few. There is in existence a photograph of Breton, taken in 1922, with another such painting by Chirico in the background. (v. Poésie & autre, p.24). In 1918 Breton would have seen the two Chiricos in Apollinaire's flat.
3. Breton reveals that in 1918 or thereabouts he lived in the "hôtel des Grands Hommes, place du Panthéon" (N 22); he alludes to his stay in the "City Hôtel" near the place Dauphine (N 92).
As with so much of Breton's poetry, as with Nadja, Les Vases communicants, L'Amour fou, the city of Paris looms large in the récits de rêves of Clair de Terre: the "quartier des Grands-Augustins" is one of Breton's favourite spots in Paris - some of the incidents in Nadja take place there too - and it is under the Arc de Triomphe that Breton and Aragon at the end of the fourth dream deposit their empty picture-frames.

Possibly of even greater interest in these five récits de rêves, however, is the way that Breton's obsession at that time with the problem of writing, of composition, comes into them. In Text I, in the first room Breton enters he observes a young man, sitting at a table, writing poems. In the next room, which is a little better lit, there is the same kind of scene, but this time the man in question is Pierre Reverdy. In the third room, Breton finds an empty armchair, decides to sit down and begins writing a poem, but he can only manage two words: "la lumière...." He writes the same two words on three successive sheets of paper. These words do have a clear connection with the title of the recueil and with all its implications, of course. In Text IV Breton is seen writing both an article and a novel. The two words "la lumière" reveal another aspect of Breton's obsession with poetic composition, though they clearly have thematic significance too. This phrase, together with a number of other words and phrases which are dotted about these récits de rêves ("Vie végétative", the verb "être", "énigmatique", "rhéostat"), are related to the famous phrase of the first Manifeste (v. supra, pp.66-67) and to the whole question of the arbitrary image. Some of these words and phrases are examples of hallucinatory voices. In addition, "rhéostat" is
an instance of Breton's interest in specialized or technical vocabulary, whilst the idea of conjugating a new tense of the verb "être" recalls some of the experiments of Desnos in his recueils of the same year, L'Aumônome and Langage cuit, especially the poem Idéal maîtresse, where Desnos tries to conjugate nouns and adjectives. Breton was certainly familiar with what Desnos was trying to do at that time.

The basic style of these five récits de rêves is a simple narrative style: Breton merely reports on what he remembers of the dreams in question. There is not the flood of surrealist metaphors one finds in the automatic texts of Les Champs magnétiques or in the poems proper of Clair de Terre. The constantly switching tableaux (purely visual images) are not accompanied by a spate of purely verbal images, in the traditional sense of the word: figures of speech or figures of rhetoric.

Although formal considerations are normally unimportant for the Surrealists, it is not entirely irrelevant to recall what Sir Herbert Read said about the presentation of dreams in literary works:

"Ignoring the fact established by Freud, that the dream as remembered is nearly always a fragment, and may indeed be a positive distortion of the dream as originally dreamed, we still have to cross the gulf between experience and expression. It can only be done in a state of trance or automatism, in which state the images of the dream draw words from the memory very much as a magnet might draw needles from a haystack."

Breton makes no attempt to translate the raw material of the dreams into poetic form, and perhaps the original quality of the five

dreams might have been captured better simply by the use of automatic writing to recall and transcribe them. Jung, of course, saw symbols in dreams as being the best possible way of expressing something for which no verbal concept exists, however.

It is significant that in none of his later recueils will Breton include further récits de rêves. The implication must surely be that he concludes that the récit de rêve cannot stand in its own right as a poem. He would therefore appear to have endorsed in practice the distinction Eluard made in 1926 between the récit de rêve, the texte surréaliste and the poème (cf. supra, pp.150-151).

If, however, the flat narrative style has the effect of making some of the stranger incidents seem prosaic, it does not erase completely the oneiric atmosphere. The allusions to dark corridors, huge halls, staircases leading to vast meadows, the sea, have a vagueness which evokes in very simple terms the realm of the subconscious, known to all yet still uncharted, an underworld wherein man can descend and find a golden bough. The theme of the quest is suggested by the figure of the guide, the genie, in the first dream, by the woman whom Breton pursues into the daylight in the second, in the poet's researches and his following of Aragon to "l'Etoile" in Dream IV, in the allusions to enigmas, to the examination of bizarre reliefs, to the presence of a closed book and an open book. The dreams give more of an insight into reality, the darkness always seems to lead to light. The first text closes with the repeated writing of "la lumière", at the end of the staircases and corridors there are invariably new vistas. This pattern in the dreams may well symbolize the poet's deep aspiration for light and in so doing becomes a key to the poems.
Although dream-narration, hypnotic sleep and, above all, automatic writing were the principal techniques tried by Breton in the early 1920's in his desire to capture new types of images for his poetry, it can be seen from a cursory glance at Clair de Terre that Breton had not entirely rejected at that time the possibility that twentieth-century poetry might need to evolve in other directions. A number of pieces in Clair de Terre indicate that some of the more avant-garde theories of Apollinaire, the Cubists and the Dadaists had not been forgotten by Breton.

The five récits de rêves are followed by two such experimental poems, Pièce fausse and PSTT. Pièce fausse had appeared first of all in Vous m'oubliez, a Dada sketch. It is a very repetitive poem and comes close at times to the phenomenon of echolalia to which Breton refers in the Manifeste (cf. supra, p.73). The opening lines particularly recall this disorder:

"Du vase en cristal de Bohème
Du vase en cris
Du vase en cris
Du vase en cristal
Du vase en cristal de Bohème". (CT 47)

In addition to a possible attempt on Breton's part to create a "calligramme" in which the lay-out of the poem would bear some resemblance to a vase, the poet reflects in terms of sound the different facets of the crystal vase: indeed, the theme of reflection enters the poem at the end:

"Aube éphémère de reflets
Aube éphé
Aube éphé
Aube éphémère de reflets"  (CT 48)

Breton creates "aural crystals", whose effect on sound is akin to that of real crystals on light.

1. It is, however, the dislocated version of an earlier poem: v. Bonnet, M., André Breton, Naissance de l'aventure surréaliste, p.285.
PSTT, though its title fuses together the interjection "psitt" or "pst" and the initials "PTT", is a "ready-made", a "poème trouvé", so to speak, the equivalent in words of Duchamp's "ready-mades" in the plastic arts. It is simply an extract from a telephone directory, giving the numbers, addresses and occupations of a group of people named Breton. Though Durozoi and Lecherbonnier see this poem as an appeal by Breton to his "bande homonymique", it does not really stand up as poetry.

A little later in the recueil comes another "ready-made", Mémoires d'un extrait des actions de chemins. There is nothing more to this "poem" than its title, presumably a heading cut out of some report. The handful of words in strong black type are placed on an otherwise blank page. It is slightly different from the Dada "collage" poems justified at the end of the first Manifeste, because the cutting is reproduced just as it is, without having its words rearranged.

The last of this group of poems in Clair de Terre is Île, which prefigures the more recent "concrete poetry". It consists solely of the title-word, printed in thick black lettering on the white background of the page. One could argue that the motif of the island evokes discreetly the theme of solitude, but this is probably not the most important aspect of the poem. This is the last time, however, that Breton essays such poetry, which was the obvious next step towards unifying the two worlds of poetry on the one hand and the plastic arts on the other. The "poème-objet" was to be Breton's serious attempt to link the two domains. Île is, of course, a visual image, in the literal and original sense of the term.

1. André Breton: l'écriture surréaliste, p.104.
One further text in Clair de Terre is little more than an exercise rather than a true poem, Le buvard de cendre (v. supra, p. 86), a series of unconnected jottings. It marks no real step forward from the automatic texts of Les Champs magnétiques: the cryptic juxtaposition with which it ends, "coeur lettre de cachet", recalls similar phrases in the earlier work, for example, "pneu pattes de velours". It includes, too, an absurd Surrealist mathematical problem:

"On commence par donner la solution du concours
A savoir combien de larmes peuvent tenir dans une main de femme
1° aussi petite que possible
2° dans une main moyenne". (CT 66)

Even the phonic qualities of these lines - particularly the alliteration - are not sufficiently striking to elevate them to the level of real poetry. It is not therefore in the experimental poems, nor in the exercises or sketches, nor in the dream-narrations, that the collection Clair de Terre reveals the great potential of Breton's Surrealist style. Its finest texts are to be found among the poems proper.

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It would be perfectly feasible to consider first the prose-poems of Clair de Terre, then the poems written in "vers libres", or vice-versa. The basic difference of form is not completely unimportant, but as many of the themes and motifs, and also many of the poetic devices, images and other aspects of their language are common to both types, we are not separating the two genres in the remainder of this chapter.

There is little direct evidence regarding the degree to which these poems are the fruits of automatic writing. Breton has
confided that he altered one or two of the phrases in the poem *Tournesol*, which is fairly typical of the poems in "vers libres", at least as far as its form is concerned, though, as will be seen later, it is unique in other respects. As the prose-poems are often very reminiscent of the majority of the texts in *Les Champs magnétiques*, it is quite probable that they are basically automatic texts, whereas there is at least some degree of conscious arrangement in the poems written in free verse. Breton has never denied that there must be a "minimum de direction" or a "minimum d'arrangement" in the latter.

No single theme overtly dominates *Clair de Terre*, though as was seen at the beginning of this chapter, the interplay of light and dark, or rather flashes of light out of the darkness, suggested by the title of the recueil, provide the symbolic backcloth. The sudden switches and fluctuations which characterized the récits de rêves are matched by the ever-changing themes of the poems proper. There are fleeting allusions to major preoccupations of the Surrealists: death and suicide, love and Woman, sleep and dreams. Not one of these themes imposes itself on the recueil, however, for they do not recur sufficiently frequently, or with sufficient force. *Clair de Terre* tells us very little about Breton, the man.

*Plutôt la vie* perhaps throws most light on Breton's frame of mind at the time. Though L.G. Gros refers to its "quête de la vie immédiate", employing the phrase which Eluard used as the title of one of his recueils, it is possible to see this poem in

a more negative light, in which Breton clutches at life, as a drowning man is reputed to clutch at a straw. It is common knowledge that Breton was preoccupied with the problems of death and suicide during the years of the 1920's, and we have seen indications of this in *Les Champs magnétiques*; and it is not without significance that the second number of the new Surrealist review, *La Résolution surréaliste*, the edition of January 25th, 1925, contains a special inquiry on suicide.

The first section of *Plutôt la vie* appears to deal with death, though the images Breton produces are hardly conventional:

"Plutôt la vie que ces prisms sans épaisseur même si les couleurs sont plus pures
Plutôt que cette heure toujours couverte que ces terribles voitures de flammes froides
Que ces pierres blettes
Plutôt ce coeur à cran d'arrêt
Que cette mare aux murmures
Et que cette étoffe blanche qui chante à la fois dans l'air et dans la terre
Que cette bénéédiction nuptiale qui joint mon front à celui de la vanité totale". (CT 72)

It may be that Breton sees some resemblance between the wedding-blessing and the words spoken at a funeral. The first image in the sequence, the "prisms sans épaisseur" seems to suggest not only a loss of materiality but also the decomposition of light; this paves the way for the image of the "pierres blettes", a favourite Dali motif, which possibly evokes stages in the gradual transformation of matter after death; the "étoffe blanche qui chante à la fois dans l'air et dans la terre", though it may suggest the notion of ascension into heaven to the accompaniment of choirs and angels, is perhaps the result of a fusion of a number of separate things: a bridal gown and the clothes of a dead person, the singing in a church, a burial. Interpreted quite
literally, however, this image is simply another case of "aural surrealism".

Deterred by such images, Breton in the remaining stanzas tries to turn his back on thoughts of death and considers instead the alternative, but though he accepts the challenge of life, as he always will, his vision is somewhat personal and unusual:

"Plutôt la vie avec ses draps conjuratoires
Ses cicatrices d'évasions
Plutôt la vie cette rosace sur ma tombe". (ibid.)

He accepts life's scars and difficulties, he knows that it will be followed by death, but the motif of the rose-window, an archetypal symbol of perfection, as well as an emblem of the wheel of fortune, expresses the other side, the possibility of discovering beauty and mystery; and the rather unusual word "conjuratoires" could well suggest life's more magical aspects, associated here, because of the word "draps", with redeeming Eros; and the next line comes a little closer to the Surrealists' idea of "la vie immédiate" to which L-G. Gros refers, as Breton insists:

"La vie de la présence rien que de la présence".

Yet this is a transient mood, because Breton has to confess that he rarely felt part of such a life.

Whereas the style of the poem up to this point is rather rhetorical, with the title-phrase being repeated over and over again, it appears only at the beginning and end of the third stanza, which is still devoted to the theme of life, though its images are as unusual as ever, with one outstanding example of the surrealist image of apparent contradiction:

"Plutôt la vie plutôt la vie Enfance vénérable". (CT 73)
(v. supra, p. 81).
The third stanza is perhaps the most attractive section of the poem, building up, as it does, to its splendid evocation of the delectably devastating effect of a woman's caresses:

"Tu songes en contemplant la trajectoire tout du long
Ou seulement en fermant les yeux sur l'orage adorable qui a nom ta main". (ibid.)

The force of these lines resides not so much in the linking of the storm and the woman's hand, though they are "distant realities" and representatives of the abstract and the concrete, the natural and the human, as in the surprise created by the choice of the adjective "adorable" to describe the "orage". Furthermore, there is a more conventional lyricism in the assonance; and this lyricism probably reinforces the oneiric or visionary atmosphere introduced by the verbs "songes" and "en contemplant". However, such "sudden lifts" are a permanent feature of the diction in this poem; there is in Plutôt la vie an interesting contrast, or even a conflict, between its somewhat depressing basic ideas and its lyrical language.

The fourth and fifth stanzas, though presenting further series of images inspired by the title, again depict life as being basically dreary and disappointing, with allusions to waiting-rooms which lead nowhere and to drab small towns. The opening words of the final stanza may evoke some discord in the poet's marriage:

"Plutôt la vie comme fond de dédain
A cette tête suffisamment belle
Comme l'antidote de cette perfection qu'elle appelle et qu'elle craint". (ibid.)

Then the juxtaposed terms, "La vie le fard de Dieu", may suggest a false god or else that real life must be sought beneath appearances. Life is like an unused passport, but at least there is always the possibility of a journey and excitement to look forward to at some
point in the future; and the poem does end as it began with the title-phrase, "Plutôt la vie". Breton is ready to accept the good with the bad, he recognizes that the veil of humdrum "reality" must be lifted before life's magic can be disclosed.

The theme of death is, however, obviously present in an intriguing text, *Ma mort par Robert Desnos*; the title is significant, for Desnos, the poet Breton describes in the first *Manifeste* as the best exponent of Surrealism (M 38), was at that period preoccupied with the question of death. When Rosa Buchele, who has written the most comprehensive, if not the most critical study of Desnos to date, discusses *Deuil pour Deuil* (1924), she points out this fact in the following terms:

"L'heure où Desnos s'aperçoit écrivant à toujours pour lui le rayonnement funeste du désastre. Il n'est guère de recueil où il ne se voie, ne se sente, au plus profond de lui-même mort......." 1

Even in the linguistic experiments that are the poems of *L'Aumonyme* and *Langage cuit* the theme of death is never far away for Desnos. In the poem *Coeur en bouche*, where the poet addresses his night visitor, he cries out to her:

"On me cloua avec des clous aussi maigres que des morts dans une mort de silence." 2

Breton's poem appears to be written from the point of view of Desnos, looking back on his death, and the account is both amusing and highly imaginative:

"Jamais la religion au secours de l'opinion
Ne s'était à ce point commise
Dans une cabine de bains
J'entrais avec la Vierge en personne". (CT 70)

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Breton captures the ready humour and the anticlerical spirit of Desnos; and the second half of the poem is even more extravagant, being based on a comparison between the journey of Desnos and that of the five jockeys in a horse-race, a comparison which gives rise to a number of gratuitous images. Unfortunately, when treated in such a fashion, the theme of death is submerged in the verbal buffoonery.

The feeling of despair, which lies behind Breton's thoughts of suicide and death, pervades Ligne brisée (CT 83). The opening metaphor of this poem sets the tone:

"Nous le pain sec et l'eau dans les prisons du ciel".

The prison motif, noticed already in Les Champs magnétiques, returns a few lines further on, and coupled with the suggestion of death in such phrases as "Rien ne nous exprime au-delà de la mort" and "Nous portons son deuil en jaune", heightens the gloom, despite the substitution of yellow for the customary black of mourning.

Furthermore, there is a "correspondance" between the outside world and the poet's inner universe, for Breton refers to the weather breaking up.

Suddenly he writes explicitly of the lifting of one corner of the veil. He can conceive of dreams' will being done, and the final line, which begins with an enigmatic, if attractive, image, ends with a clear statement of hope and purpose:

"Le ventre des mots est doré ce soir et rien n'est plus en vain". (CT 84)

The thought of death and the feeling of despair are really dispelled for Breton by the sudden appearance on the scene of Woman, the herald and incarnation of love. The twin themes of Woman and love are seen at their best in Clair de Terre in two of the poems which
we propose to discuss presently in some detail, *Au regard des divinités* and *Tourne3ol*, but they are touched on briefly elsewhere. In *Amour parcheminé* Breton encounters a dreaming girl:

"J'appelle une fille qui rêve dans la maisonnette dorée; elle me rejoint sur les tas de mousse noire et m'offre ses lèvres qui sont des pierres au fond de la rivière rapide." (CT 54)

The tone of this sentence prefigures that of some of the fine love-poems of *L'Air de l'Eau* (cf. *Au beau demi-jour de 1934*), but in *Amour parcheminé* everything is very evanescent: the girl disappears from the mental screen; the scene switches from town to country and then back to the town. Similarities with *L'Air de l'Eau* are seen, too, in *Il n'y a pas à sortir de là*, particularly in lines 25-29 of this poem:

"Dans l'autre monde qui n'existera pas
Je te vois blanc et élégant
Les cheveux des femmes ont l'odeur de la feuille d'acanthe
O vitres superposées de la pensée
Dans la terre de verre s'agitent des squelettes de verre".

(CT 64)

Despite the reference to the acanthus-leaves discussed earlier (v. supra, p. 93), other aspects of these lines - the theme of the whiteness of the skin (though not here a woman's skin), the technique of superimposing, the motif of glass - are all important features of the poems in the 1934 collection, inspired by Breton's new bride; and these lines possess the same lyrical qualities as the poems of *L'Air de l'Eau*, qualities that can only in part be explained by the internal rhyming of "terre"/"verre" and the alliteration and the exclamation in "O vitres superposées de la pensée" with its possibly symbolic representation of the abstract by the concrete which serves to evoke the clarity and the purity of the vision, or even the movement from the material world to the spiritual world, suggested, if rejected, in the opening line of the
sequence. The lyricism resides as much in the rhythm, and Breton succeeds in giving to the "vers libres" of irregular length some intrinsic pattern which makes them sound almost as natural as alexandrines.

Il n'y a pas à sortir de là is also the setting for the return of the motif of the naked woman:

"Une jeune fille nue aux bras d'un danseur beau et cuirassé comme saint Georges". (CT 63)

One can interpret this line both literally and symbolically, since the woman's nakedness and the armour of the male dancer might serve merely to emphasize her soft, gentle fragility and eroticism and his virile hardness.¹

The theme of love is brought back in Mille et mille fois, a poem built loosely around the motif of a mysterious tower. Radiating from this central motif are a number of images, the most significant of which allude to the themes of love and Woman:

"La neige que je prends dans la main et qui fond
Cette neige que j'adore fait des rêves et je suis un de ces rêves......
Et pendant que les onze signes se reposent
Je prends part à l'amour qui est une mécanique de cuivre et d'argent dans la haie

1. Edward Lucie-Smith has commented thus on this theme: "If the more commonly encountered erotic symbols often suggest that the role of the female is to be destroyed by sex, there is also imagery which seems to preach the gospel of male invulnerability. In Cranach's Judgment of Paris, the hero wears armour, while the three goddesses are naked; and the contrast between soft flesh and shining armour continued to tickle the taste of European painters from the 16th century onwards. We find this contrast strikingly employed in many paintings by Rubens - for instance, in The Hero Crowned by Victory in Dresden, and The Triumph of the Victor in Kassel. Perhaps one reason for the interest taken by painters in the image of the armoured man, juxtaposed with the female nude, was that armour is characteristically both rigid and form-fitting, so that it is a kind of substitution (taking the whole body for part of the body) for a permanently erect penis." (Eroticism in Western Art, London: Thames and Hudson, 1972, p.246.)
Je suis un des rouages les plus délicats de l'amour terrestre
Et l'amour terrestre cache les autres amours
À la façon des signes qui me cachent l'esprit." (CT 79)

As the title of his next collection of automatic texts, 
Poisson soluble, implies, Breton sees himself as becoming soluble
in his thoughts and dreams, like melting snow, and the snow
suggests both purity and transient beauty. The image or symbol
of the snow, as William Y. Tindall has indicated, can be seen in
terms of the death/life opposition which is, of course, a mani-
fest theme of Clair de Terre:

"Since snow is a form of water, a traditional image of life,
it holds the possibility of thawing. Ambivalent, therefore,
it may hold suggestions of life as well as the death to
which its coldness and whiteness appear to confine it." 1

As evening falls, Breton feels himself at one with the
world; thanks to love, he feels part of its mechanism, at once
delicate and mysterious, rich and metallic, like the copper and
silver interplay of the leaves and the filigree frost in the
hedgerows. There is a veritable cascade of fine imagery in this
poem, a strange metaphor of day and night seen as two gardens
"dans lesquels se promènent mes mains qui n'ont rien à faire",
and a splendid simile in which the heavens are evoked in terms
of a wondrous bed:

"J'ai défait le ciel comme un lit merveilleux
Mon bras pend du ciel avec un chapelet d'étoiles
Qui descend de jour en jour
Et dont le premier grain va disparaître dans la mer
À la place de mes couleurs vivantes". (CT 79-80)

Ideas associated with the two terms of the simile, the sky and the
bed, are interwoven so that the poet, lying in bed with his arm
over the side, is transposed into a surreal cosmic setting, reminding

1. The Literary Symbol, New York: Columbia University Press, 1955,
one of Valentine Hugo's Constellation (1935), which places a six-starred pleiad of Surrealist poets, including Breton, together with some naked women in a celestial setting.¹ In Breton's poem the disposition of the stars suggest the additional element in the sequence, the beads of a marvellous rosary which Breton lazily tells; and the mood of delightful indolence is conducive to the state of receptivity required for successful automatic writing.

Nevertheless, the importance of the paramount Surrealist themes of love and Woman is far less obvious in Clair de Terre than in some of Breton's subsequent recueils. Love tends here to remain an abstraction. Breton's first wife, Simone, was never the Muse that Jacqueline or Elisa were; or perhaps it would be fairer to conclude that the more sustained use of automatic writing in the poems composed during the time of his first marriage led, almost paradoxically, given the supposed direct tapping of subconscious thought, to a less personal and intimate portrait of the beloved.

The allusion to dreams in Mille et mille fois may suggest that this poem, if not entirely a "récit de rêve en vers libres", contains nonetheless some oneiric passages. If so, one should perhaps try to relate it to the claim Breton makes some years later in Les Vases communicants:

"Je ne vois rien dans tout l'accomplissement de la fonction onirique, qui n'emprunte clairement, pour peu qu'on veuille se donner la peine de l'examiner, aux seules données de la vie vécue." (V 57)

Obviously Breton alone would have been in a position to interpret the poem in such a light, yet one can hasaré tentative explanations of certain of the ideas and images. The lines from Mille et mille fois quoted above suggest that the snow is one of the manifest sources of the poem or the dream. The mysterious tower, the

principal motif, is possibly a transformation of some building familiar to Breton. It acquires at once, however, a symbolic air, if not a symbolic sense, for its real purpose and significance are never made apparent; it has an archetypal quality. One may conjecture whether it is a reference to the sixteenth major arcanum of the Tarot pack, the absolute meaning of which is held to be "les constructions fictives des désirs de l'homme"; one can think in terms of phallic symbolism, or of the ivory tower, or of the lighthouses which Baudelaire employed to evoke the world's great artists; but none of these interpretations are justified by any clue in the text; nor does Breton even slightly hint at the significance of the eleven signs which inhabit it. The only support for another possibility, that Breton is thinking of the Tower of Babel, the symbol of man's pride and the confusion and diversity of tongues, is the subsequent allusion to "un lit merveilleux", since Herodotus claimed that the temple on the top of the Biblical tower was furnished with a magnificent bed and a table of gold, where a priestess would spend the night to await a visit from a god.

The possibility that certain images, if not entire poems, are supplied by dreams is hinted at, too, in *Epervier incassable*, constructed around the theme of night in a dormitory, and in *Tout paradis n'est pas perdu*. This attractive and intriguing little poem, which begins with the picture of exotic birds, "coqs de roche", like knights of old defending the dew, their bright crests thrashing like swords, develops implicitly the idea of a combat,

1. The motif of the tower, like that of the deserted street, mentioned earlier, is often found, too, in the works of Chirico.
not only with the Miltonic title and the closing allusion to evil, but also with the various images of light piercing the darkness: "la devise charmante de l'éclair", "une horloge phosphorescente", "la campagne/dressée aux approches et aux reculs célestes". After the fine personification of a villa, Breton suggests that the night is the source of his images. (He does not specify whether he is thinking of dreams or simply of the sights of the night):

"Les tempes bleues et dures de la villa baignent dans la nuit qui décalque mes images". (CT 69)

The relationship between dream-images and "le merveilleux" is, of course, at the heart of Surrealism. One interesting aspect of Clair de Terre, which may combine these two phenomena, is its strange bestiary. In one of the prose-poems, *Rendez-vous* (CT 60-61), there is a truly surreal creature, "le bombyx à tête humaine", but the most significant text in the collection in this respect is *Dans la vallée du monde*. The stage is set by its opening line:

"Des animaux disjoints font le tour de la terre". (CT 77)

Henceforth bizarre zoological images dominate the poem; "seize reptiles étoilés", "l'ombre des ailes des pattes des nageoires", "singes marins", "le rossignol qui vit dans les épaves", "les oreilles des éléphants qu'on prenait pour des pierres tombales", "les femmes dont le troupeau est conduit par les animaux fabuleux". It is as if Breton has taken the reader back to a prehistoric era or to some valley isolated from the rest of the world, a place evolution has by-passed and left in the same state as it was at the dawn of civilisation. In most of these zoological images there is either an element of "dépaysement" or the juxtaposition of distant realities.

If, however, one thinks more of "le merveilleux moderne",

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371.
this is represented in Clair de Terre by the motif of the street-sign, which we have seen already in the récits de rêves, but which returns in the poems proper in Au regard des divinités, where the title itself could even be taken from such a street-sign, which would act as a symbolic indication to the poet of the workings of objective chance. In the body of the poem one specimen is used as the tenor in a fanciful simile:

"La lettre cachetée aux trois coins d'un poisson
Passait maintenant dans la lumière des faubourgs
Comme une enseigne de dompteur". (CT 67)

The street-sign is generally held to be an object lacking in taste. This "unaesthetic" quality, coupled with its considerably augmented role in a modern world where advertising is literally changing the face of our cities, makes the street-sign appealing to the Surrealist and the Pop-artist alike. Furthermore, the inscription on an old street-sign was often a rebus (v. supra, pp.177-178) and would attract Breton for this reason.

The Surrealists were ever open to the incursion of "le merveilleux" into everyday reality, and they desired and welcomed its incursion. One line in particular, in the poem Le soleil en laisse, remains in one's mind, for it summarizes the Surrealist attitude admirably:

"Nous regardons l'incroyable et nous y croyons malgré nous". (CT 87)

Yet apart from the isolated examples mentioned, "le merveil-
leux modernes" is, somewhat surprisingly, not an overtly important theme of Clair de Terre, but it is always present in the imagery itself. Indeed, Clair de Terre is really far more interesting for its images than for its thematic content, though, as usual, it is extremely difficult to separate the two, unless one is content to study the imagery from the purely formal angle.

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The images in these poems do lead lives of their own, as Breton claimed they should in Les mots sans rides. They no longer serve as mere illustrations of the themes of the poems; they are no longer little ornaments decorating the ideas.

A number of the fascinating images in Clair de Terre have already been mentioned en passant. This recueil does contain examples of the various types of surrealist images Breton lists in the Manifeste du Surréalisme. One can, in fact, take each type in turn and find specimens:

(a) The image of apparent contradiction:

"Enfance vénérable" (CT 73; supra, p. 81).

(b) The image in which one of the terms is curiously hidden:

As we saw in the discussion of this category in the chapter on the first Manifeste (cf. supra, pp. 85-6), it is not entirely clear what Breton understood by this term, especially as he did not choose a very good example. We related the category to the traditional symbol, but a line from Il n'y a pas à sortir de là may reveal what Breton, in fact, had in mind; "Cet explorateur aux prises avec les fourmis rouges de son propre sang". (CT 64)

This line stands isolated from the rest of the poem. The
reader is left in suspense, waiting for a verb and a complement. The explorer could be seen as a symbolic figure, an embodiment of the theme of the quest, and the image of the ants in the second half of the line could be read as an amusing, but apt, expression of a tingling sensation experienced by the explorer/poet. However, one cannot ignore that the sentence, if one is to see this line or image in terms of a sentence, is incomplete.

(c) The image which suddenly closes the angle of its compass:
"L'air est taillé comme un diamant". (CT 59)

The second half of the line is to some extent an anticlimax, since the comparison is quite orthodox, but as the diamond for Breton is usually a symbol of beauty and revelation, the image does not, in fact, fade away, and the linking of the air and a diamond, relatively "distant realities", still reverberates in the reader's mind, as he strives to imagine the degree of purity the poet has evoked.

(d) The image which derives from itself an absurd formal justification:
"Sous l'ombre il y a une lumière et sous cette lumière il y a deux ombres". (CT 88)

Though this line may at first sight appear to be rather an image of apparent contradiction, it is in fact the intricate form of the cross-correspondance of "lumière" and "ombre" which causes one to smile. Furthermore, the reader lingers more on the significance of the thematic interplay of light and shade in this image, which brings out yet again the quality of merely partial revelation, than on the purely formal consideration.

(e) The image of a hallucinatory order:
One could cite any oneiric image, or indeed any oneiric text, as an example of this category. Of course, in the Manifeste Breton illustrates this kind of image with his inaccurate quotation from Au regard des divinités: "Sur le pont la rosée à tête de chatte se berçait."

(f) The image which naturally lends to the abstract the mask of the concrete or vice-versa:

"les vices aux noirs sourcils". (CT 56)

Though this phrase with its Homeric epithet appears on the page as a personification of an abstract, it was presumably at the outset the very reverse; it is almost an example of synecdoche, in which the part (the attributes of the intruders into the dormitory), "les vices", stands for the whole (the intruders themselves).

(g) The image which implies the negation of some elementary physical property:

"à cette heure les premiers scaphandriers tombent du ciel". (CT 62)

The divers are removed from their normal element, water, and are seen falling from the skies. The distortion in this case may be a simple substitution of divers for parachutists or else the image may pre-figure modern space-walkers, especially as "scaphandre" is now used to designate the outfit worn by cosmonauts. Attempts at rational explanation, however, do not wholly erase the violence implicit in the invasion of reality in this image.

(h) The image which raises a laugh:

Again, most surrealist images could be placed in this category, which is the most subjective of all. An obvious example,
however, is the mildly sacrilegious image from *La mort par Robert Desnos*:

"Dans une cabine de bains/J'entre avec la Vierge en personne". (CT 70)

It is probable that Breton's classification of the types of surrealist image in the *Manifeste* was based to some extent on the images he found in his own poems, especially the ones in this recueil, and, as was seen above, one of Breton's examples in the *Manifeste* is taken from *Clair de Terre*.

It appears that the most common types of surrealist images in *Clair de Terre* are hallucinatory images, images which lend the mask of the concrete to the abstract, or vice versa, and humorous images.

One could argue that many entire poems, not just isolated images, are of a hallucinatory order. This is certainly true of some of the more oneiric texts, such as *Epervier incassable* (CT 56), *Tout paradis n'est pas perdu* (CT 69), and *Mille et mille fois* (CT 79). If, however, one concentrates more on individual images, one finds that *Clair de Terre* abounds in images based on visual distortion or visual "dépaysement". A series of these visual images occur in *Epervier incassable*:

"On voit des mains se couvrir de manchons d'eau. Sur les grands lits vides s'enchevêtrent des ronces tandis que les oreillers flottent sur des silences plus apparents que réels." (CT 56)

The empty beds tangled up in brambles is a classic visual surrealist image: it contains a fusion of the natural and the man-made; it is almost an example of "la beauté convulsive" like the locomotive abandoned in the forest (cf. supra, p.242). Moreover the literal notion of the floating pillows constitutes a kinetic
hallucination, as it endows with movement an object which in the real world cannot move of its own accord. The use of the impersonal subject "on" and the reflexive verbs adds a dream-like vagueness to the action. The poet is a detached observer, struggling to make out the successive scenes and incidents. The conscious part of his mind seems to be wrestling with the images surging from his subconscious.

There is a similar fusion of the natural and the man-made, and a similar "convulsive beauty" in Privé:

"Ce qui reste du moteur sanglant est envahi par l'aubépine...." (CT 62)

This tableau would make a good subject for a Surrealist artist, for a Dalí or an Ernst. The engine is not in operation, but its latent dynamism is still felt: the blood oozing from it implies that it is still warm and yet the hawthorn is already growing around it, embracing it almost sadistically. The poem ends with an equally splendid but more pleasant cosmic image which betrays a note of optimism:

"Et pour une fois ne se peut-il que l'expression pour la vie déclenche une des aurores boréales dont sera fait le tapis de table du Jugement Dernier?" (ibid.)

The reader's first reaction is probably to imagine a Surrealist version of Michelangelo's famous ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, but perhaps one should go beyond this and note with awe in the sudden allusion to the Northern Lights, which will be one of the starting-points of the long poem, Les États généraux, the attempt not only to evoke resurgent hope but also possibly an intuition of the experience of the "point suprême", especially as the Aurora Borealis is associated in the image with the Last Judgment. Once again the "earth-light" theme returns.
Michel Carrouges does not make the claim that such images of light evoke the "point suprême", but in the extract he quotes from the *Zohar*, this concept is expressed in terms of "un mince filet de lumière" which forms around it "des ondes lumineuses".\(^1\)

Similarly, *Silhouette de paille* is noteworthy primarily for its images, which form a Surrealist tableau in words; once again it would be easy to transpose much of the poem into a painting. In addition to the striking visual images, however, Breton includes others which operate on the aural plane, evoking strange surreal sounds such as the one near the end of the poem which is followed by an unusual example of synaesthesia:

"Ma rame de palissandre fait chanter vos cheveux
Un son palpable dessert la plage
Noire de la colère des seiches
Et rouge du côté du panonceau." (CT 75)

If the aural image in the first of these lines is entirely arbitrary, at least the alliteration, the assonance and the rhythm make it lyrical;\(^2\) and the obvious effect of the adjective "palpable" is to increase the immediacy and the resonance of the indeterminate "son". There is only apparent contradiction in the opposition of the two colours in the two final lines, but they are made more surreal by the impression that the escutcheon-sign is removed from its normal position and by the allusion to the wrath of the cuttle-fish.

Another basic feature of surrealist imagery, the fusion of the abstract and the concrete, is particularly common in the prose-poems. Though *Les reptiles cambrioleurs* opens with a series of

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1. André Breton et les données fondamentales du surréalisme, p. 27, ff.
2. Likewise one of the secrets of Eluard's lyricism is his judicious use of these traditional poetic features.
visual images, relying on a kind of "dépaysement" and not without a touch of humour, gradually the Surrealists’ penchant for images where the abstract is merged into the concrete gains the upper hand. In the space of a few lines, one finds a number of examples:

"Sur le 'sarrau' couvert d'étincelles de lait passent successivement la paresse des distractions, la tempête de l'amour et les nombreuses muées d'insectes du souci. Marie sait que sa mère ne jouit plus de toutes ses facultés: des journées entières, coiffée de réflexions plus coulissées qu'en rêve, elle mord le collier de larmes du rire." (CT 51-52)

The abstract concepts of "la paresse des distractions" and "la tempête de l'amour" are made almost concrete by the force of the verb "passent", by the possibility that Breton is, in any case, describing in abstract terms things that are, in fact, concrete (motifs on the smock) and by the use of nominal constructions.

Breton exploits the homonymy of "souci" which has both an abstract and a concrete meaning: "care" and "marigold". Similarly, "réflexions" almost takes a visual form and "le collier de larmes du rire" adds to the fusion of the abstract and the concrete an apparent contradiction. Breton appears to be enjoying himself here, as he repeats the basic device over and over again.

Fine examples of the fusion of the abstract and the concrete are found, too, in Amour parcheminé:

".......Des pressentiments voilés descendent les marches des édifices.......Si l'on prend un bain dans la moire des rues, l'enfance revient au pays, levrette grise. L'homme cherche sa proie dans les airs et les fruits séchent sur des claies de paper rose, à l'ombre des noms démeurés par l'oubli. Les joies et les peines se répandent dans la ville. L'or et l'eucalyptus, de même odeur, attaquent les rêves....." (CT 54)

The abstract nouns threaten to become allegorical figures stalking around the town, ghostly forms haunting the streets and buildings, but since they are mentioned only once each, they never quite materialize. The poet seems to have brief glimpses of another
world, if only the world of dreams and fancies, a world where the
distinction between abstract and concrete is irrelevant.

As for the humorous imagery of Clair de Terre, this is
basically of the formal variety, featuring different kinds of word-
play. In the final section of Epervier incassable (CT 56) there is
a modification of a cliché: "Il y a un message au lieu d'un lézard
sous chaque pierre". This new statement acquires greater signifi-
cance for Breton, however, especially later in his life, when in
company with his friends he would spend hours looking for unusual
stones. 1 In Il n'y a pas à sortir de là (CT 63), Apollinaire's
famous image of the "soleil cou coupé" is modified by Breton and
becomes "le soleil chien couchant", with its further hint of word-
play in the fact that the adjective could well be applied to either
noun.

Yet despite the importance Breton attaches in the first
Manifeste to the arbitrary metaphor, despite his compilation there
of a provisional list of types of surrealist images, there is in
Clair de Terre side by side with the more modern and more unusual
imagery, a fair sprinkling of more traditional devices: similes,
synaesthesia, personification. This can be seen from the opening
sentences of Les reptiles cambrioleurs:

"Sur la tringle de la cour la petite Marie venait de mettre
le linge à sécher. C'était une succession de dates fraîches
encore: celle du mariage de sa mère (la belle robe de noces
avait été mise en pièces), un baptême, les rideaux du berceau
du petit frère riaient au vent comme des mouettes sur les
rochers de la côte." (CT 51)

The orthodox simile concluding this extract is apt: the whiteness
and the motion of the curtain (and also of the clothes blowing on

1. cf. the article Langue de Pierres. (PC 147-155)
the line) suggest to Breton seagulls with their flapping wings. Another very comprehensible simile appears in the next sentence, "l'enfant soufflait les fleurs de la lessive comme des chandelles". The only unusual feature of this image is the substitution of flowers (possibly dandelions) for bubbles. So despite the clearly stated preference for the metaphor rather than the comparison, the latter still plays its part in Clair de Terre.

The use of the conventional simile, together with another traditional poetic device, synaesthesia, is perhaps the most interesting feature of the imagery of the poem, C'est aussi le bagne....(CT 58): against the background of a convict ship in the harbour of possibly an exotic port, there is an atmosphere of love and serenity, not only in the comparison,

"...le bagné avec ses brêches blondes comme un livre sur les genoux d'une jeune fille",

but also, more explicitly, in the lines,

"On voit le soir
Tomber collier de perles des monts
Sur l'esprit de ses peuplades tachetées règne un amour si plaintif
Que les devins se prennent à ricaner bien haut sur les ponts de fer".

The mountains are transformed into a beautiful woman, perhaps even a goddess of the night, by the reference to the string of pearls.

There is the suggestion that the convicts are about to make a fresh start in life. In the line "C'est la Nouvelle Quelque Chose travaillé" au socle et à l'archet de l'arche" there may be an obscure

1. The 1948 edition of Poèmes has the variant "travaillée", which at least serves as a reminder that writers of the classical period treated "quelque chose" as a feminine pronoun. The only other way of justifying the form "Nouvelle" is to read it in its sense of "novelette, short story". (The use of the capital letter might be explained in this way). In any case, my tentative explanation of the relationship between this phrase and the rest of the poem relies solely on the formal, rather than the semantic bond, between "Nouvelle Quelque Chose" and "Nouvelles-Galles du Sud".
allusion to New South Wales (Nouvelles- Galles du Sud) and, more precisely, to Botany Bay, the place to which criminals were once deported. Although the train of thought in this poem is by no means coherent, the poem has a certain indefinable attraction, due largely to some of the images, the evocation of nightfall quoted above, and also the final lines with their pleasing synaesthesia and their lucid simile:

"L'air est taillé comme un diamant
Pour les peignes de l'immense Vierge en proie à des vertiges
d'essence alcoolique ou florale
La douce cataracte gronde de parfums sur les travaux". (CT 59)

The orthodox image evokes, as we have seen, the clearness, the purity of the evening air, and the previous suggestion of a female deity is developed by the image of the huge Virgin, whose tresses are seen in the waterfall, to which she lends her sweet perfume. In this splendid image, blending woman and nature, the Virgin's combs are cut from the air, from the breeze, like a diamond.

A similar conventional image, a similar type of personification, occurs at the start of Rendez-vous, (CT 60), where in the magnificent evocation of a storm lightning is portrayed as a knight in armour; and beneath the silent stride of his horse the mountain seems to open its eyes, more fascinating than Siam - Siam being employed as a symbol of the mysteries and the attractions of the Orient. The lightning no doubt reminds Breton of the lance thrusting forward and gleaming in the sunlight, as the knight rides on to meet his foe; and the mountain, disturbed by the storm, appears to rouse itself from its millennial sleep like an ancient dragon, a further motif with Oriental connotations. In this poem it is the thematic lightning which helps to create and to reinforce the visual surreal effects.
Despite the marvels of such images, however, many of the texts of Clair de Terre lack coherence. The love-play of the imagery rather than logical or rational considerations determines the structure of most of the poems. The reader is perhaps too conditioned to the need for order, and it is only when one can sit back and enjoy the verbal firework-display for its own sake that the poems of Clair de Terre become fully acceptable.

* * * * * * * * * * *

In their style the prose-poems are very reminiscent of the automatic texts of Les Champs magnétiques: everything is still very evanescent; there is constant switching of themes and motifs, constant change of scene and subject; there is frequently little obvious connection between a poem and its title; and in fact these remarks are equally valid for the poems in "vers libres".

Occasionally one discovers in the text of a poem some comment which bears on the question of style. For example, the poem Il n'y a pas à sortir de là, which was compared in one way with Apollinaire's Zone, contains a reference to the absence of punctuation, which reinforces this comparison, for Apollinaire, after all, was one of the first French poets in modern times to dispense with it:

"Rivière d'étoiles
Qui entraîne les signes de ponctuation de mon poème et de ceux de mes amis". (CT 63)

Breton may even have been thinking of Apollinaire in the allusion to his friends in the latter line.

If one examines closely the vocabulary of Clair de Terre, one finds in these poems a subtle mélange of polyvalent common nouns and generic terms (e.g. nuit, neige, sable) and precise,
often specialized or technical terms (bourrache, eucalyptus, rhéostat, héliotropisme), and this mélange is one of the factors responsible for Breton's obvious originality; it is expressed in what amount to cryptic formulae, despite the length of the lines. The length of the lines creates an illusion of order, or rational presentation; but this is pure "trompe-l'oeil". Disparate ideas and images are juxtaposed and left to interact to generate reactions which are almost chemical in their nature.

Breton is still exploiting the "espaces blancs" between the words and he uses them to set up a tension between the words; he manages to create a charged atmosphere, a feeling of expectancy.

In order to give some indication of the way in which the poems of Clair de Terre operate, we propose at this juncture to give a more detailed analysis of some of the texts; the prose-poem Cartes sur les dunes and two poems in "vers libres", Au regard des divinités and L'Aigrette, to be followed by a few comments on Breton's own interpretation of Tournesol.

"Cartes sur les dunes".

"L'horaire des fleurs creuses et des pommettes saillantes nous invite à quitter les salières volcaniques pour les baignoires d'oiseaux. Sur une serviette damée rouge sont disposés les jours de l'année. L'air n'est plus si pur, la route n'est plus si large que le célébre clairon. Dans une valisette peinte de gros vers on emporte les soirs périsposables qui sont la place des genoux sur un prié-Dieu. De petites bicyclettes côtelées tournent sur le comptoir. L'oreille des poissons, plus fourchue que le chêvrefeuille, écoute descendre les huiles bleues. Parmi les burnous éclatants dont la charge se perd dans les rideaux, je reconnais un homme issu de mon sang." (CT 55)

This is a typical short prose-poem and perhaps reveals a basic secret of Breton's method of composition, which he will employ throughout his career: the art of blending together or juxtaposing series of themes and motifs, whether they are clearly linked
to each other or apparently unrelated. The structure of the vast majority of Breton's poems is not linear, in the sense that the ideas and images are not assembled in a logical sequence. Later in his career the poems are more obviously based on an analogical structure rather than on a logical pattern, but in Clair de Terre the structure of the poem, as of the typical surrealist image, is founded on the juxtaposition of distant realities.

In Cartes sur les dunes the title does determine in part the content of the poem. The cards and the sand-dunes lead to the two principal motifs of the poem, a desert and a café; and Breton superimposes images and ideas from the one on to the other. Café scenes, both in the "real" world and in the world of art, often contain groups of men playing cards. Breton appears to be contemplating and describing two different tableaux - possibly there is a desert-scene depicted somewhere in the café - and referring to elements of each in turn. This would help to explain the sudden switches in the text. Breton is describing the various things which catch his attention in the café, but because he gives no clear, rational explanation of his process of composition, the reader is for a while bewildered.

The opening phrase of the poem, "L'horaire des fleurs creuses", contains an interesting piece of word-play, for the word "l'horaire" leads the poet to think, possibly subconsciously, of "heures"; from there the next step is to think of the set phrase "heures creuses", which is distorted into the phrase which finally appears in the poem, "fleurs creuses". This is a good example of how auditory hallucination, experienced perhaps in a day-dream, leads to the creation of word-play in a poem.
The remaining motifs in the first sentence, "des pommettes saillantes", "les salières volcaniques" and "les baignoires d'oiseaux" resemble each other in their fundamental circular shape. Possibly each in turn is distorted and then changed into one of the others in the poet's mental picture, if it is not simply a case of the poet actually seeing each of these things before him. There follows a series of largely visual images, as Breton alludes to items which catch his attention:

"Sur une serviette damée rouge sont disposés les jours de l'année. L'air n'est pas si pur, la route n'est pas si large que le célèbre clairon."

Although the first of these sentences appears to be a fusion of the abstract and the concrete, it can be explained more simply, for in certain calendars, especially the very elaborate ones devised by some Central American peoples, (e.g. the Mayas), the days of the year are set out in the way Breton indicates. In the second sentence there is a typical arbitrary Surrealist comparison. Even when the basic "code" of the poem is cracked, however, one is still left with some intriguing images, such as the next one in the poem:

"Dans une valise peinte de gros vers on emporte les soirs périssables qui sont la place des genoux sur un prie-Dieu."

Part of the difficulty lies in the ambiguity of the word "vers". Breton would have been aware of the homonymy and has not sought to destroy it or avoid it. One is perhaps reminded of Cubist paintings, in which words are added to the canvas, if one reads "vers" as "lines of poetry", but the other possibility, in which worms would be substituted for paintbrushes, cannot be entirely excluded in the context of a Surrealist poem. This image yields in turn to another curious visual image:

"De petites bicyclettes côtélées tournent sur le comptoir."
The allusion to the bar brings the reader back to the setting in the café, and it is possible that Breton can see the little bicycles to which he refers. Even this motif is distorted in the poem, however, for the spokes of the wheels presumably suggest to Breton the idea of "côtélées".

After this visual distortion comes an example of aural Surrealism:

"L'oreille des poissons, plus fourchue que le chêvrefeuille, écoute descendre les huiles bleues."

The gills of the fish are first of all converted into ears, and this then becomes the pretext for the aural "dépaysement".

Finally, the poem returns to the other basic motif of the desert, with an allusion to men in "burnous éclatants" amongst whom Breton recognizes one born of his blood.

Thus the poem, despite the switches, despite the arbitrary images, despite the hallucinatory distortions, does gravitate to some extent around some basic motifs and does not suffer because of this. However rudimentary it may appear, it is interesting because it illustrates in miniature the structure one finds in Breton's later long poems and in Nadja, Les Vases communicants, L'Amour fou and Arcane 17; a structure that tends to be more parallel than linear and which blends together to greater or lesser degrees apparently disparate ideas, themes, motifs and images.

Yet remarks of this nature do not suffice to convey the real secret of the poem. By a series of subtle manoeuvres Breton generates a genuinely poetic diction. In the varying lengths of the sentences there is a curious combination of regularity and irregularity; (the poem begins and ends with long sentences, and there is a third long sentence in the middle; between these three
which form the backbone of the poem there are two groups of two shorter sentences). This combination of regularity and irregularity creates a feeling of rhythm, which is reinforced by the symmetry of construction, the repetition of "n'est plus si" in the third sentence. Furthermore, the simple explanation of the opening phrase (in terms of word-play) fails to reveal the intrinsic melody in the sound of the words in their new relationship; the words suggest an atmosphere of relaxation, a state of receptivity on the poet's part, a note of expectation, to be developed by the opening verb "invite". The attraction of the central section resides in the novel phrase "soirs périssables"; the adjective in itself has a quality which could be defined as "convulsive beauty" for it reconciles suggestions of the enduring (its length) with the ephemeral (its meaning); but the juxtaposition of the two words in this new coupling is also just pleasing to the ear. In the sentence beginning "L'oreille des poissons" there is the hint of variations in the volume with its second phrase accentuated before the remainder fades away after the hushing effect of "écoute"; and there is a similar contrast in the final sentence which opens with a fresh surge of sound, "Parmi les burnous éclatants", where the epithet is very strong, before subsiding gently. It is, in short, a poem one can appreciate better simply by reading it aloud than by seeking to discover a rational meaning. It is a poem which succeeds by its visual and its aural effects in evoking an atmosphere of relaxation, a mood of contentment, but one which is destined to be transitory.
Au regard des divinités

"Un peu avant minuit près du débarcadère.
Si une femme échevelée te suit n'y prends pas garde.
C'est l'azur. Tu n'as rien à craindre de l'azur.
Il y aura un grand vase blond dans un arbre.
Le clocher du village des couleurs fondues
Te servira de point de repère. Prends ton temps,
Souviens-toi. Le geyser brun qui lance au ciel les pousses de fougère
Te salut.'

La lettre cachetée aux trois coins d'un poisson
Passait maintenant dans la lumière des faubourgs
Comme une enseigne de dompteur.

Au demeurant
La belle, la victime, celle qu'on appelait
Dans le quartier la petite pyramide de réséda
Décousait pour elle seule un nuage pareil
A un sachet de pitié.

Plus tard l'armure blanche
Qui vaquait aux soins domestiques et autres
En prenant plus fort à son aise que jamais,
L'enfant à la coquille, celui qui devait être.....
Mais silence.

Un brasier déjà donnait prise
En son sein à un revissant roman de cape
Et d'épée.

Sur le pont, à la même heure,
Ainsi la rosée à tête de chatte se berçait.
La nuit, - et les illusions seraient perdues.

Voici les Fères blancs qui reviennent de vêpres
Avec l'immense clé pendue au-dessus d'eux.
Voici les hérauts gris; enfin voici sa lettre
Ou sa lèvre: mon coeur est un coucou pour Dieu.

Mais le temps qu'elle parle, il ne reste qu'un mur
Battant dans un tombeau comme une voile bise.
L'Éternité recherche une montre-bracelet
Un peu avant minuit près du débarcadère." (CT 67-68)

A possible explanation of the title has been suggested already, (v. supra, p.372); but a more profound, metaphysical interpretation need not be ruled out on that account. Though the poem contains allusions to the White Fathers, to vespers, to God, the precise nature of the "divinités" in the title is not disclosed.

The poem opens with a series of instructions, presumably given to Breton or perhaps to Aragon, to whom the poem is dedicated, in the "lettre cachetée aux trois coins d'un poisson" referred to in
line 8, (cf. supra, p.372, note 1). The letter comes from a mysterious "geyser brun qui lance au ciel les pousses de fougère."¹

Once more the opening lines create an immediate feeling of expectancy; midnight is the proverbial magic hour, "l'azur" is the traditional symbol and synonym of the Ideal and the "débarcadère" is a symbolic setting and provides a symbolic meaning, since it is an appropriate starting-point for the voyage that is the poem. Although Breton never related the dishevelled woman mentioned in this poem to Nadja, there appears to be almost as good grounds for doing so as there are for relating the woman in Tournesol to Jacqueline. Firstly, Nadja is such a woman: when she is first described, she is said to be shabbily dressed and gives the impression that she had not had time to finish her make-up, and, of course, near the end of the book, Breton reveals that she had been removed to a mental hospital. Secondly, both the initial encounter between Breton and Nadja and a number of subsequent incidents in Nadja take place in the neighbourhood of the Gare de l'Est and the Gare du Nord which could well be the setting for Au regard des divinités. The "débarcadère" in this context is perhaps more likely to be an arrival platform at the railway station than a landing-stage, though the importance of context in a Surrealist text is by no means crucial (and in any case the "dépaysement" created if one interprets "débarcadère" in its sense of "landing stage" would be interesting,

¹. In the manuscript reproduced on p.2 of Sarane Alexandrian's Breton par lui-même one reads "touffes de fougère" and sees that the colour of the "geyser" was changed from "gris" to "brun". Perhaps the precise shade Breton had in mind was halfway between the two. As for the change from "touffes" to "pousses", which indicates that these poems were not entirely automatic texts (or that they were "touched up" later), the latter has the advantage of evoking better the upward spurt.
and by heightening the air of unreality would perhaps help to increase the sense of expectancy. The "geyser brun" could even evoke a jet or stream of smoke issuing from an engine in one of the stations. Thirdly, there is in this poem an allusion to a street-sign, which is an important motif in Nadja.

The next instruction in the letter, with its allusion to the vase, is of course a good example of an image based on the concept of visual "dépaysement". It is just possible that a simple pun may lie behind the creation of this image, for one of the meanings of "vase" in French is the "calyx" or "vase" of flowers such as tulips, but despite this one inevitably thinks of the more normal meaning of the word. Anna Balakian interprets the vase according to the hieroglyphic meaning attached to it, the dispenser of "the fire of the wise - that is, again the symbol of invocation. It is in the tree - that is, in nature."¹ One could also relate this image to the golden urn, the vase of fire, from which the naked woman, depicted on the 17th arcanum of the Tarot pack, pours, but although Breton had listened to Derain interpreting the cards years before, he did not take a deep interest in hermeticism until the latter part of the 1920's.

After the initial epistle and the setting of the poem in "la lumière des faubourgs", a mysterious female figure, possibly the "femme échevelée", is introduced, though now Breton describes her in somewhat different terms as "la petite pyramide de réséda", at first sight yet another image bringing together very dissimilar things, but to some extent this image is yet another modification of the age-old comparison between woman and flowers, but the choice

¹ Balakian, A., André Breton, p.136.
of the specific variety of flowers is particularly unusual and refreshing; it lends the phrase a discreetly alliterative quality. Moreover, this flower has a certain fragrance and visually evokes a girl's golden curls. The mention of the pyramid adds to the connotations the flower possesses a hint of mystery and exoticism.

The activity in which she is engaged, unstitching a cloud like a sachet of pity, is another instance of the mask of the concrete being lent to the abstract; but this generic explanation hardly begins to penetrate the secret of the image, and in fact there are more than these two terms involved. This complex image brings together (a) the action of the verb "découdre"; (b) the object of the verb, whether it be the "nuage" or the "sachet"; (c) the impression, or expression, of pity. Though the previous description of the woman as "la victime" may imply that it is the poet who feels pity for her, even this is by no means certain. The precise meaning of the image is less important, however, than its gentle preciosity, a quality again created by the alliteration.

It is possible that the next few lines evoke the woman's daydreams: there are allusions to a white suit of armour, the personification of which makes one think more than ever in terms of the chivalrous and valiant knight for whom it is intended, a child in a shell (perhaps a reference to an unborn baby) and the more explicit hint in the lines:

"Un brasier déja donnait prise
En son sein à un ravissant roman de cape
Et d'épée."

From the point of view of the form of the lines, the example of "enjambement" is uncharacteristic of Surrealist poetry, and may be a hark-back upon Breton's Mallarméan period. Similarly, at the
end of the poem, when Breton reverts to a couple of stanzas of alexandrines (though the penultimate line would not meet the requirements of a strict prosodist), he appears to be making a conscious return to his former style.

The illusions are shattered, however, by the sudden appearance of the famous "rosée à tête de chatte".

In the first of the two more regular stanzas Breton introduces some members of the organisation of the White Fathers and "les hérauts gris". Anna Balakian makes the interesting comparison between them and the phantom figures bearing keys Breton mentions in the first page of L'Amour fou, though the latter are clad in black. What is important is Breton's interpretation of their function:

"Boys du sévère, interprètes anonymes, enchaînés et brillants de la revue à grand spectacle qui toute une vie, sans espoir de changement, possédera le théâtre mental, ont toujours évolué mystérieusement pour moi des êtres théoriques, que j'interprète comme des porteurs de clés; ils portent les clés des situations, j'entends par là qu'ils détiennent le secret des attitudes les plus significatives que j'aurai à prendre en présence de tels rares événements qui m'auront poursuivi de leur marque." (AF 7)

Furthermore, Breton's image of the great key suspended above the White Fathers recalls a seventeenth-century painting on silk in his collection, which is an illustration from "The Eighth Key" by Basile Valentin. It shows a target surmounted by a key, at which the archers are taking aim, a man sowing the seed, and sprouting corn; and its theme is resurrection. In the context of the poem the key could reinforce the note of expectancy introduced in the opening lines and supported by the allusion to the heralds, and possibly evokes the science of clidomancy. The omens are

favourable; Breton senses that something is about to happen, the atmosphere is similar to that at the beginning of Chapter IV of *L'Amour fou*, when Breton is about to meet Jacqueline. The poem may evoke the anticipation of Spring, and the anticipation of new love.

This atmosphere is apparently undermined, however, by the word-play of the afterthought: "...enfin voici sa lettre/Cu sa lèvre" and the amusing metaphor, "... mon coeur est un coucou pour Dieu," unless the cuckoo is heard as a symbol of Spring.

Anna Balakian sees the last stanza as "a battle between time and eternity, a determination (montre-bracelet) on the finite level of the mystery of the night and of love and of the recognition of the unity of happenings." ¹ It is a battle which time appears to win. The woman, like Cinderella, does not remain after midnight, and the strange image of the wall banging (like a door) in a tomb, shatters the illusion. The comparison with "une voile bise" (perhaps another modification of a set phrase, "toile bise") adds a further dreary touch, but also suggests the closing of the curtains on the scene at the end. Whereas the opening line, in the context of the letter, brought about a feeling of expectancy, when it is repeated at the end, it seems at first to express the poet's disillusionment.

Once more, however, the appeal of this poem is at least as much to the ears as to the eyes and the mind. The initial instructions, because they are given in crisp, short sentences, possess an intrinsic quality of breathlessness, and this reinforces the mood of expectancy their content generates. The longer sentence beginning "la lettre cachetée aux trois coins d'un poisson" then slows

the rhythm markedly and the very deliberate, reflective form of the comparison "comme une enseigne de dompteur" also has this effect. The triple appellation of the "heroine" serves to evoke in itself her stealthy, fay-like entrance, and the holding back, by means of the "enjambement", of the phrase "A un sachet de pitié" also suggests that her appearance on the scene is cautious, watchful, mysterious. The basic, dramatic nature of the poem is created as much by the disposition of the words on the page, by the syntax and by the sounds of the words, as by the themes and ideas. The points of suspension after "celui qui devait être", the poet's instructions to the reader and the listener ("Mais silence") are further devices Breton employs to maintain the expectancy and the mystery. The new series of "enjambements" (ll. 22-24) similarly keep up the suspense and the cloak-and-dagger atmosphere mentioned in the text: form and content are here in perfect unison. The climax is attained when the hallucinatory figure of the "rosée à tête de chatte" appears, after the explicit statement that "les illusions seraient perdues"; the rest of the poem, at least at the level of sound, is anticlimax. The impression of regular stanzas, of alexandrines, after the previous staccato rhythm, dispels the expectancy; the excitement has gone, the poetic events of the night seem to have come to an end. However, we now see that Breton's decision to close the poem with a repetition of the opening line has the effect of bringing back the mood of expectancy and may be a timely reminder that there will always be other nights, other mysteries, other poems.

Though *Au regard des divinités* has been praised by most critics, L.-G. Gros is more doubtful about its virtues:
"Si le plus composé de tous (les poèmes de Clair de Terre) et qui par là même est le plus souvent cité, la critique ayant au fond gardé la nostalgie des valeurs classiques, Au regard des divinités nous semble un peu sujet à caution comme tout morceau de bravoure (en dépit de la fameuse image, 'la rosée à tête de chatte', l'ensemble me donne l'impression d'un poème symboliste)."

There is perhaps some truth in these comments; it is probably the most traditional of the poems in Clair de Terre, in so far as it contains examples of "enjambement" and alexandrines, and appears to be more "composed" than other texts in the recueil. On the other hand, it does contain surrealist images and certain sequences at least appear to be the products of automatic writing, as far as it is possible to judge. In these respects it is far removed from the early Mallarméan poems.

"L'Aigrette"

"Si seulement il faisait du soleil cette nuit
Si dans le fond de l'Opéra deux seins miroitants et clairs
Composaient pour le mot amour la plus merveilleuse lettrine vivante
Si le pavé de bois s’entrouvrait sur la cime des montagnes
Si l’hermine regardait d’un air suppliant
Le prêtre à bandeaux rouges
Qui revient du bagne en comptant les voitures fermées
Si l’écho luxueux des rivières que je tourmente
Ne jetait que mon corps aux herbes de Paris
Que ne grêle-t-il à l’intérieur des magasins de bijouterie
Au moins le printemps ne me ferait plus peur
Si seulement j’étais une racine de l’arbre du ciel
Enfin le bien dans la canne à sucre de l’air
Si l’on faisait la courte échelle aux femmes
Que vois-tu belle silencieuse
Sous l’arc de triomphe du Carrousel
Si le plaisir dirigeait sous l’aspect d’une passante éternelle
Les Chambres n’étant plus sillonnées que par l’oeillade violette des promenoirs
Que ne donnerais-je pour qu’un bras de la Seine se glissât sous le matin?
Qui est de toute façon perdu
Je ne suis pas résigné non plus aux salles caressantes.

2. In the Poèmes edition the final word of this line is written "Matin" and presumably refers to the offices of the newspaper of that name.
Où sonne le téléphone des amendes du soir
En partant j'ai mis le feu à une mèche de cheveux qui est celle d'une bombe
Et la mèche de cheveux creuse un tunnel sous Paris
Si seulement mon train entrait dans ce tunnel". (CT 81-82)

The title, which is a homonym, of course, has no really obvious connection with the rest of the poem. It may have been inspired, consciously or subconsciously, by Mallarmé's Un Coup de Dés, where the word appears in the "Cycle de l'Art" in the phrase "La lucide et seigneuriale aigrette", a modification of the "plume" referred to on the previous page of Mallarmé's text. The significance of the "plume" has been explained by R.G. Cohn in the following terms:

"........l'instrument de l'artiste ou, par synecdoque, l'artiste lui-même." 1

The choice, if choice there be, by Breton of the title L'Aigrette for his poem may be a veiled allusion to automatic writing; the pen is the instrument used to record thought's dictation and therefore plays a major role in the actual writing of the poem.

L'Aigrette could be the exotic bird, or else this title could be interpreted as another image of a flash of light, for "l'aigrette" is also defined thus by Robert:

"Phénomène lumineux, accompagné d'un bruissement caractéristique, qui se produit à la surface d'un corps porté à un potentiel électrique élevé, dans un milieu gazeux. v. Étincelle."

This interpretation would lead straight into the opening line.

The poem is made up of a series of conditional clauses, expressing the wishes of the poet. In this way "l'artiste lui-même" could be seen as the poem's subject. Some of these wishes,

as in the opening lines, for example, are truly surreal. The basic idea of the first three lines is simple enough; everybody wishes at some time, but it is the nature of these wishes or conjectures which gives the poem its own particular beauty. The dream of the sun shining by night is a negation of an elementary physical property, save in the polar regions in midsummer; lines 2 and 3 evoke Breton's desire for the victory of love, in the strict sense in which he understands the word, the free and total union, spiritual and carnal, of a man and a woman, in a world where he sees it harassed on all sides.

The theme of entering a new world is the underlying idea of line 4. The world of reality, represented in this poem by the city of Paris, is just a jumping-off place for the excursions into the surreal. A similar idea is expressed in the wish in line 12. The excursion into the surreal is depicted there in terms of a movement upwards and outwards, in terms of an expansion of the possibilities afforded by the real world. The line, "si l'on faisait la courte échelle aux femmes", again contains the idea of an upward movement and, furthermore, the suggestion that it is Woman who holds the key to the surreal, even though in this example she is being given a leg up. (Once more Breton is exploiting a set expression, "faire la courte échelle à quelqu'un"). The "belle silencieuse" is being assisted, however, only because her power to act as a mediatrix between Man and the universe is already accepted; it is hoped that she will reveal to Man what she sees.

As the poem progresses, Woman assumes slightly different forms: the "passante éternelle", referred to in line 17, is perhaps
an incarnation of the theme of the Eternal Feminine.1 In any case the allusion to pleasure in the same line hints at Woman's erotic nature, and the presence in the poem of the Woman-figure leads to the series of slightly erotic images in the final part of the poem, (11. 18-25). The latent eroticism is greatly reduced, however, by the context, by the fusion of the animate and the inanimate, and by the fact that the phrase "un bras de la Seine" is merely a dead metaphor resuscitated. These final lines do have the additional interest of fusing the erotic and the revolutionary aspects of Surrealism, or at least of fusing discreet allusions to them.

Yet there is here a subtlety in the presentation of the surrealist images: in 11. 2-3 the "merveilleuse lettrine vivante" of the "seins miroitants et clairs" does not make the abstract "amour" merely concrete, it endows it with the essence of life; similarly the particular attraction of the embryonic personifications (11. 18-19) resides in the fact that the figures suggested are not just women but companions and lovers and even, in the case of 1. 21 ("un bras de la Seine"), a goddess of the river.

The poem does contain, however, other images which do not fit so easily into the general picture, providing more gratuitous elements side by side with the more thematic sequences. An example is provided by 11. 5-7 with the allusion to the stoat

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1. In the final lines of Faust II Goethe likewise uses the image of a physical ascension to convey this theme:

"Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan."

The subsidiary themes of the Eternal Feminine, the redemption of Man by love and the triumph of Woman through the ages, are essential aspects of Surrealist thought in general and of Breton's thought in particular, (cf. the chapter on Arcane 17). The theme of the ascension, of course, is present in the later title, Signe Ascendant.
(a common hermetic motif, like the weasel and the marten) and the priest "à bandeaux rouges". One thinks first of all in this image of a blindfold, in which case line 7 would be an instance of apparent contradiction, but the other meanings of "bandeau" (head-band, diadem) could make the line more immediately comprehensible.

Yet despite the strangeness of some of the wishes, the poem has a naturalness which manifests itself in the way that Breton suddenly interrupts the lyrical flow of images to interject:

"Que vois-tu belle silencieuse
Sous l'arc de triomphe du Carrousel".

Here he appears to be accepting the basic principle of automatic writing, that of obeying thought's dictation.

Like *Au regard des divinités*, *L'Aigrette* has a mysterious breathless quality and generates a mood of expectancy, but here it is the potentially rhetorical sequence of conditional clauses which is responsible for the lyricism, for the creation of an impression of the "dépassement spasmodique de l'expression contrôlée". The repeated use of conditional clauses makes it quite obvious that the rhythm and structure of the poem are based on a series of fresh surges of inspiration, which begin to seem almost relentless, like the waves of the ocean crashing against the shore. As soon as each image or group of images is exhausted, a new one comes along to take its place, maintaining the excitement. Once again the feeling of breathlessness is reinforced by the "enjambement" (e.g. ll. 2-3, 5-6), and this has the effect of suggesting that the poet, or the voice of the subconscious dictating to him, hesitates and quivers before uttering each new line, before revealing each novel image, so much so that the diction acquires an extra-terrestrial tone.

Alliteration, too, is instrumental in creating the lyrical quality -
and this is particularly noticeable in the first three lines -, as is the strange blend of staccato and legato, when each fresh surge is preceded by a slight pause and when the interjections and exclamations interrupt or suspend the basic syntactical pattern. It is as if the poem is left unfinished, a monument to the still combatting forces of the dynamic and the static, the potential and the actual, the latent and the manifest, i.e. an example of convulsive beauty in words.

A number of the images are based on, or suggest, the theme of sudden light in the darkness ("Si seulement il faisait du soleil cette nuit", "Si le pavé de bois s'entrouvrat sur la cime des montagnes", "En partant j'ai mis le feu à une mèche de cheveux....", the sparkling of the jewels inside the jewellers' shops); others allude to sight and vision ("Si l'hermine regardait d'un air suppli¬ant", "Que vois-tu belle silencieuse", "l'oéillade violette des promenoirs"); and both these series serve to bring out the revelatory, inspirational nature of the experience the poem evokes.

L'Aigrette is one of Breton's finest poems and certainly is one of the finest poems in Clair de Terre. Here the new and modern lyricism desired by Breton is achieved. This poem vindicates his faith in his new methods, even though it is the basically rhetorical device of repetition which gives L'Aigrette its power. Each image is a picturesque segment of the complete poem, sometimes cut off from the other images in theme, but linked to them all in colour and impact. This is the poem of a man growing ever wiser in the use of Surrealist techniques. This opinion is shared by L.-G. Gros, who quotes the first three lines and then comments:
"Ces vers et ceux qui suivent sont du très grand Breton, et apportent quelque chose qu'il a été le premier et sans doute le seul à apporter, je veux dire ces images transfigurant, dépassant l'expérience quotidienne, mais qui coïncident si bien avec elle qu'il ne s'agit plus d'un simple composé verbal et que nous pénétrons dans le plus insolite et le plus familier des mondes." 1

This latter fact probably gets to the heart of the success of this poem, for in fusing together so completely and so smoothly "le plus insolite et le plus familier des mondes" Breton really practises what he preaches; the desire to fuse dream and reality into a sort of absolute reality, a "surréalité", is here accomplished, at least within the possibly narrow bounds of the written form of poetry.

"Tournesol"

As was explained earlier (p.384), it is not proposed to examine this poem in detail but rather to comment on Breton's interpretation of it. Breton felt that it is one of the most significant of all his poems. It is quite attractive in itself, but it is unique because Breton has given a commentary on it, or has tried to demonstrate its prophetic nature, by showing in detail how the "events" it relates were destined to appear to come true more than a decade later. Breton's commentary on the poem and the description of the incidents it predicts occupy the whole of the fourth chapter of *L'Amour fou* (1937). 2 The poem has also been discussed in detail by Clifford Browder 3 and by Gérard Durozoi and Bernard Lecherbonnier. 4

The poem, written in May or June 1923, predicts with seemingly uncanny accuracy, to Breton's mind at least, what happened to him

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2. op.cit., pp.47-77.
on the evening and night of May 29th, 1934. In L'Amour fou (AF 63) Breton reveals that Tournesol is an "automatic" poem and one he had not liked hitherto.

In L'Amour fou Breton is able to explain the allusions of almost every phrase in the poem. Although there is little point in reproducing Breton's commentary here in its entirety, a couple of examples at least are necessary as illustrations of Breton's method of analysis and of the way in which certain of the phrases predict events of the so-called "nuit du tournesol" in 1934.

Towards the middle of the poem there are the lines:

"Le bal des innocents battait son plein
Les lampions prenaient feu lentement dans les marronniers".

In L'Amour fou Breton explains:

"Le bal des innocents: On approche, à n'en plus douter, de la Tour Saint-Jacques. Le charnier des Innocents, transformé plus tard en marché et que n'évoque plus concrètement que la fontaine centrale du square du même nom, avec les naïades de Jean Goujon - qui me font l'effet d'avoir présidé au plus bel enchantement de cette histoire - sert ici à introduire Nicolas Flamel qui y fit dresser à la fin du XIV® siècle la fameuse arcade à ses initiales....
Les lampions: C'est seulement des semaines après la rencontre que j'ai appris qu'au music-hall où paraissait ma compagne de cette première nuit, le directeur de l'établissement l'avait un jour appelée publiquement Quatorze Juillet et que ce surnom, à cet endroit, lui était resté. On a pu me voir, en l'approchant, associer la lumière des marronniers à ses cheveux."

Near the end of the poem Breton, writing about "des survenants", claims that

"... Les uns comme cette femme ont l'air de nager". (CT 86)

The particular appropriateness of the final phrase is revealed by Breton in the following terms:

"L'air de nager: Chose très remarquable, bien après que je me fusse fortifié dans la certitude que, sur tous les autres points, 'Tournesol' devait être tenu par moi pour un poème prophétique, j'avais beau tenter de réduire cette bizarre observation,
impossible de lui accorder la plus faible valeur d'indice. J'attirerai l'attention sur le fait que le vers auquel je me reporte m'avait, d'emblée, paru mal venu. Il faut dire qu'il avait eu tout de suite à pâtir du rapprochement qui s'était imposé à moi entre lui et un vers de Baudelaire et que, si j'admirais qu'on eût pu rapporter la démarche féminine à la danse, je jugeais beaucoup moins heureux de l'avoir rapportée à la natation. Je ne sais ce qui put me dérober si longtemps le contenu véritable, tout autre, le sens particulièrement direct de ces mots: le 'numéro' de music-hall dans lequel la jeune femme paraissait alors quotidiennement était un numéro de natation. 'L'air de nager', dans la mesure même où il s'est opposé pour moi à 'l'air de danser' d'une femme qui marche, semble même désigner ici l'air de danser sous l'eau que, comme moi, ceux de mes amis qui l'ont vue par la suite évoluer dans la piscine lui ont trouvé généralement." (AF 70-71)

There is but one phrase, the "flacon de sels" in line 4, which still baffled him when he wrote L'Amour fou. He sees that it is set in a context loaded with sexual allusions:

"Le désespoir roulait au ciel ses grands arums si beaux
Et dans le sac à main il y avait mon rêve ce flacon de sels".

Breton alone was in a position to analyse in such a way, and in such detail, his largely automatic poems. He alone possessed the background knowledge necessary for any such analysis, but he refrained from repeating this kind of commentary on his other poems, presumably because no such clear-cut revelatory or prophetic experience occurred again. This prophetic aspect is not, of course, the only criterion by which one can or should judge Tournesol.

The heroine of this poem is a "femme-fée". Her movements, with their "air de nager", have a fairy lightness; she is ethereal; in the shadows of the night she casts no shadow ("La dame sans ombre s'agenouilla sur le Pont au Change"). Although Breton explains his phrase "la tombée de l'été" as a consequence of the fact that the two more normal phrases "tombée du jour" and "tombée de la nuit" are synonyms and that "l'arrivée de la nuit est donc, à coup sûr, bien enclose dans cette image où elle se combine avec l'arrivée de l'été", (AF 67)
it does conjure up, too, the idea of a Midsummer Night with all its
magic, fairy connotations. Significantly, the poem is set in the
most ancient quarters of Paris: the medieval street-names and build-
dings (Rue Git-le-Coeur, the Pont au Change, the Halles, the
restaurant 'Le Chien qui fume'), haunted by ghosts of the past,
filled with legends and folklore, have their own associations with
magic and enchantment. They endow the modern "femme-fée" with
their own special and private aura.

Many years before Breton talks in terms of the "érotique-
voilé" (introduced in fact at the beginning of L'Amour fou), this
poem evokes the woman, who is one of its finest embodiments. The
theme is suggested by the motifs of the "seins" and the "crêpe" in
lines 17-19:

"Les pigeons voyageurs les baisers de secours
Se joignaient aux seins de la belle inconnue
Dardés sous le crêpe des significations parfaîtes". (CT 86)

The events of the night are, to Breton, a waking dream: the
conclusion he draws, nearly a decade later, that dreams and one's
activity during the waking hours are two "vases communicants" is
seen to be justified in this poem. The events evoked here have the
hallucinatory quality of the incidents of a dream; they are presented
in terms of surrealist images: fusions of the abstract and the
concrete ("Le désespoir roulait au ciel ses grands arums si beaux"),
visual "dépaysements" ("Une ferme prospérait en plein Paris"), word-
play ("des survenants qu'on sait plus dévoués que les revenants"),
aural hallucination ("..... le grillon.... /M'a jeté un coup d'œil
d'intelligence/ André Breton a-t-il dit passe").

Despite these arbitrary surrealist images, however, the poem
has a fairly coherent framework, as is seen by Breton's ability to
explain almost every line with reference to the events of one night in 1934. It possesses a judicious mixture of the real and the unreal, the fusion of which is at the core of the surreal.

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If one considers Les Champs magnétiques simply as a collection of automatic texts, one must regard Clair de Terre as the first recueil of Surrealist poems published by Breton. They therefore have considerable historical interest, in addition to the interest they possess in their own right as poems. Though Breton employs some of the techniques first tried out in Les Champs magnétiques, Clair de Terre marks the real beginning of his Surrealist poetry; and whereas the former work revealed the exciting potential of automatic writing, Clair de Terre provides the important test for Breton's new techniques and begins to answer the question as to whether valid poetry can be produced largely at the dictation of the subconscious mind.

Breton's opinion regarding the success of this venture can perhaps be judged by the fact that most of his subsequent poetry will be written in very much the same styles, though later in his career he writes a series of important longer poems.

One can discern, however, a gradually increasing degree of "composition" in Breton's poetry as he grows older, but this does not affect the basic form of his poems. Most of his subsequent poetry is written in the "vers libres" which are the medium of some of the more successful poems of Clair de Terre: Au regard des divinités, Plutôt la vie, L'Aigrette and Tournesol. Occasionally Breton reverts to the short prose-poem, notably in the collection Constellations, where the style is fairly reminiscent of the short
prose-poems of Clair de Terre: e.g. Cartes sur les dunes, Epervier incassable.

Therefore, subject to certain modifications which will be discussed in due course, Breton by 1923 had found the poetic style he adhered to for the rest of his life. This style is seen for the first time in Clair de Terre, and possibly this recueil is more important for this fact, the discovery of a style, than for the imagery and ideas of its poems, interesting though they may be, the images in particular.

To conclude this chapter devoted to Clair de Terre, we propose to cite and discuss the remarks made about these poems by a poet, who for a time was very close to Breton and who has always stressed the importance of Breton not only in the history of French poetry in our century but also the influence on his own life and writings, Alain Jouffroy.

Towards the end of his Introduction au génie d'André Breton, he makes the following observation:

"Lisez les poèmes de Breton, et vous lirez l'espace, le temps, le souffle et la pensée, dans leur discontinuité et dans leur continuité, vous vivrez les virages du temps mental, virages sans lesquels la vie ne serait plus que le plus court chemin, et le plus bête, de la naissance à la mort....... Les poèmes de Clair de Terre n'expriment rien, ne veulent rien exprimer. Un grand poète ne s'exprime pas; il parle, il écrit, et sa parole, son écriture, voilà la liberté devenue lionne, voilà le monde devenu lion, voilà l'histoire qui fait claquer toutes les portes et se pulvériser les barreaux."1

It is important that Jouffroy should stress the "discontinuité" as well as the "continuité" and also the "virages du temps mental", for Breton's preoccupation was with the discovery of the real nature of human thought-processes and its utilization in poetry.

The poems of Clair de Terre are inevitably different from poems composed in a more traditional and more deliberate manner, different from the poems of Mont de Piété, for example. It would be wrong to judge them solely according to the same criteria, important though traditional criteria may be; one must also bear in mind continually what Breton was striving to achieve in his Surrealist poems.

The best poems of Clair de Terre are fragile and delicate, ethereal and evanescent; but though there are occasional allusions to the important title-theme, it is perhaps not explored in quite sufficient depth. It will return more strongly, however, in some of Breton's later works, where the theme of light in the darkness will be associated explicitly with the themes of revolt, freedom and creation. The very intermittent appearances of the theme of illumination in the darkness calls to mind, however, the juxtaposition of concealment and revelation Carlyle in Sartor Resartus saw in symbols, and it is significant that Breton does refer to that book in his first Manifeste (M 34, note 1), where he is discussing his preference for the term "surréalisme" rather than "supernaturalisme". Viewed in the light of Breton's poetry of the 1930's and 1940's, most of the texts of Clair de Terre seem like sketches, studies, preparatory steps toward the Great Work. Even so, many of the early Surrealist poems possess a quivering, shimmering beauty, which more than compensates for any apparent incoherence. Though they operate on a very small canvas, they contain in essence many of the themes and qualities of Breton's later and greater poetic frescoes, which reveal his response both to private triumphs and tragedies and to the epic events on the world's stage.

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Before he takes stock of the benefits and drawbacks of automatic writing, and indeed in order to illustrate the ideas expressed in the Manifeste, Breton produces a further series of automatic texts, Poisson soluble, which were published by Simon Kra in 1924 in the same volume as the Manifeste.
CHAPTER FOUR

"POISSON SOLUBLE" (1924)

We have seen that Breton refers to the strange phrase he uses as the title of his new series of automatic texts towards the end of the first Manifeste (v. supra, p. 213, note 2). The significance of the title thus becomes fairly clear; Breton in this series of texts is again going to submit himself to the dictation of the Surrealist voice. What we must attempt to determine in this chapter is the degree to which Poisson soluble was an important contribution to the history of automatic writing rather than a mere continuation of Les Champs magnétiques. With this in mind we shall study its themes, style, imagery and one particular text, to look for developments or changes.

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Although the paramount importance of "le merveilleux" has already been mentioned on a number of occasions, it cannot be stressed too much. It is at the very heart of the Surrealist system and pervades in some form or another all the Surrealist themes, motifs and imagery.

The Manifeste pointed to the obvious links between "le merveilleux" and the dream-state, and these links are very apparent in Poisson soluble. Not only do certain texts have the air of récits de rêves, but there are also a number of specific references to dreams, with the result that one can talk justifiably about the theme of dreams in this collection. In the opening text there is the phrase, "Dans ses rêves il y a des noyers noirs", and the final paragraph of Text 18 clearly contains oneiric imagery.
"L'appât des songes stimule maintenant les musiques de ma tête. Ces deux femmes m'ont appartenu tout un jour que je finissais ténébreusement d'être jeune. Et me voici, prophète à la tempe plus pure que les miroirs, enchaîné par les lueurs de mon histoire, couvert d'amours glaçantes, en proie aux fantasmasgies de la baguette brisée et demandant que par pitié, d'un seul brillant final, on me ramène à la vie."

(M 89)

Apart from the specific reference to "songes", the allusion to "fantasmasgies", the possible impression of awakening in the final phrase and the hint of aural and visual "dépaysements" (auditory and visual hallucinations) evoke dream-like experiences.

The real key to the "merveilleux", however, is Woman. It is She, who opens the eyes of the poet to the wonders of the universe. Although the experiences and the visions evoked in these and other automatic texts may at times seem excessively private, experiences which cannot really be shared with or by the average reader, and though the texts may be difficult to read because of this, when the poet alludes to love and Woman, he at once emerges from his mental labyrinth. One of the reasons why some of Breton's later recueils, L'Air de l'Eau being the best example, appear to evoke more common or even universal experiences is that there Woman clearly plays the role of mediatrix between the poet and the world at large, not only at the level of the imagery, but also because the reader is able to relate them to circumstances in his or her own life.

Although Woman is frequently represented in Breton's writings by the figure of Mélusine, this is not quite the portrait painted in Poisson soluble, for here her more sensual side is more prominent.

The theme of Woman goes hand in hand with the theme of the "érotique-voilé", though Breton does not explicitly use this term until 1937.
Although Breton has hailed carnal love as the sole form of love,¹ the eroticism in his writings is almost invariably accompanied by a purity and an innocence, hence one of the reasons for the concept of the "érotique-voilé".

In Text 13, the eroticism is countered by a series of surrealistic images, which for once form an anti-climax, after the description of the movements of the heroine of the piece:

"Dans son lit, après avoir soigneusement rejeté les draps de coque d'œuf, elle plia sa jambe droite de manière à poser le talon droit sur le genou gauche et, la tête tournée du côté droit, elle s'apprêta à toucher du charbon ardent la pointe de ses seins autour de laquelle se produisirent les choses suivantes: une sorte de halo vert de la couleur du diamant se forma et dans le halo vinrent se piquer de ravissantes étoiles, puis des pailles donnèrent naissance à des épis dont les grains étaient pareils à ces paillettes des robes de danseuses." (M 60)

The eroticism subsides beneath the cluster of images of sparkling light, even though these still bring out the revelatory nature of the glimpse of the girl.

In Text 22 the motif of the veil plays an important role in the development of the narrative. (This is the text which contains the famous encounter with a naked woman in a wood.)² For once, however, even the veil is discarded, and Breton picks it up to treat it as a sort of fetish:

"Je portai à mes lèvres l'intérieur de l'étoffe qui était chaude et parfumée et, comme si j'avais attendu de la tunique mystérieuse des voluptés durables, je l'emportai chez moi dans le but de jouir de ses troublantes propriétés. Le rire de la femme la plus désirable chantait en moi - était-ce dans le voile, était-ce dans ma mémoire?" (M 95)

Strangely enough, the theme of love, which is usually inextricably connected by Breton with the theme of Woman, appears but

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1. "Amour, seul amour qui sois, amour charnel, j'adore, je n'ai jamais cessé d'adorer ton ombre vénéneuse, ton ombre mortelle." (AF 85)
2. v. supra, p. 352.
rarely in *Poisson soluble*. It occurs in a rather neutral fashion, in an image featuring a Surrealist "dépaysement", where the Statue of Liberty at the entrance to New York harbour is replaced by a Statue of Love.

The setting of most of *Poisson soluble*, as of the main body of Breton's work, remains Paris. Although it is Aragon who wrote *Le Paysan de Paris*, this title could apply with at least equal validity to Breton. He, too, scour[s] the streets of Paris in search of its untold and hidden wonders, in search of chance encounters, in search of love. Paris is the scene of many of the unusual episodes he describes.

In a study, *André Breton ou la Transparence*, which serves as a supplement to the 10/18 edition of *Arcane 17*, Michel Beaujour emphasizes the importance of Paris in Breton's automatic texts:

"À l'époque où s'écrit *Poisson soluble*, vingt ans avant *Arcane 17*, chaque séance d'écriture automatique entraîne Breton parmi les merveilles parisiennes. L'automatisme délimite un terroir urbain où les dimensions de l'inconscient coïncident avec celles de la ville de pierre, parcourue à chaque crépuscule en quête de ces passages par où s'épanche le surréel." (A 164)

The fruits of Breton's strolls around Paris are clear for all to see. He is able to evoke in a single sentence the vitality of his city, as he does in Text 18:

"Le paysage de Paris rossignol du monde variait de minute en minute et parmi les cires de ses coiffeurs s'élançait ses jolis arbres printaniers, pareils à l'inclinaison de l'âme sur l'horizon." (M 87-88)

In the infinite variety of scenes visual impressions are merged to create new images of the city. Like Baudelaire, he is particularly sensitive to the experience of dawn breaking over the city. Breton's vision of daybreak is, however, an entirely personal
one, and a reminder of the tragi-comic people of his neighbourhood:

"Ce langage ne me causait aucune inquiétude encore quand le jour se mit à pointer, sous la forme d'un petit saltimbanque dont la tête était bandée et qui me paraissait prêt à s'évanouir."

(M 88)

The acrobat thus becomes for Breton a private symbol of the dawn, but this time, because of the allusion to the blindfold, it is not the dazzling splendour the poet evokes but rather the frail and tentative first streak of light on the horizon.

**Faisson soluble** contains, too, some of Breton's other favourite motifs and locations: the "château", the park, the fountain; but everything is impregnated with the flavour of "le merveilleux": phantom figures tiptoe through the park, which in turn becomes a goddess of the night, extending her blonde hands over a magic fountain; and "Enfant-Flamme" guides Breton's steps like garlands; golden rain falls into the fire, black rain streams down the windowpanes; a golden greyhound feigns death in every room of a castle; a company of light horsemen lies in ambush at the bottom of a canal.

In an interesting analysis of the vocabulary of these texts in an essay entitled *Spectre du "Faisson soluble"*, Julien Gracq likewise brings out their fairy atmosphere and adds an important point concerning the depiction of Nature in Breton's poetry:

"......Breton se meut en imagination, et par grande préférence, dans une nature déjà en marche vers l'homme, ayant fait plus de la moitié du chemin à sa rencontre, et comme aspirant d'avance à lui plaire, à le réfléter et à le servir, une nature dégrossie, prête pour le dernier coup de baguette de la fée. La goutte de rosée, le champignon, la coque d'oeuf, l'écureuil, le fil de la vierge, l'arc-en-ciel, le coquillage, le chaton de noisetier, la capucine, la toile d'araignée: c'est très exactement au monde charmant, aux accessoires à transformation des contes de fées que nous ramènent ces objets de prédilection, comme eux saisissent à cet instant et sous cet aspect déjà parlant, où ils ne sont plus l'ombre et ne sont pas encore la proie, où ils s'apprivoisent, où l'homme va les comprendre, briser la
This vision of the natural world is the one found in all Breton's recueils, but in *Poisson soluble* it is perhaps not quite as evident as it is in *L'Air de l'Eau*. Moreover, there is almost always a latent exoticism in Breton's material and often, especially in his finest poems, an atmosphere of enchantment. The relationship between the human and the non-human, like that between dream and reality, seems to be a relationship of two "vases communicants".

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At the level of imagery, *Poisson soluble*, as is to be expected, contains examples of most of the common features and devices of Surrealist poetry. As far as images of a hallucinatory order are concerned, the aural variety reappears here when the veil of Text 22 gives forth a music "plus belle que celle de l'amour". The comparison is perhaps rather trite, but the transformation of the veil into a musical instrument is pleasing: there is the implication that the sounds emitted by the erotic or exotic veil not only are attractive but also smack of far-off lands. Visual surrealist imagery is, of course, always preponderant. One of the most satisfying texts of *Poisson soluble* is the seventeenth; the effect of surreality is sustained throughout; the ideas are more fully developed; there are classic instances of the "nonsense" humour one finds in Breton's poetry. The two men, who are the principal characters in this text, are both smoking enormous cigars, but the ash from the cigars is transformed immediately into two women, one

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1. in Eigeldinger, M., (ed.) *André Breton, Essais et Témoignages*, p.218.
blonde and one brunette. At the end of Text 10 there is a rather morbid tableau, which would again have made a fine subject for Dali or Magritte:

"L'intérieur des placards demeurait seul visible dans les maisons; dans les uns il y avait des jeunes filles mortes, dans d'autres s'enroulait sur elle-même une forme blanche pareille à un sac deux fois trop haut, dans d'autres encore une lampe de chair, mais vraiment de chair, s'allumait." (M 76)

There is an almost constant interchanging in the texts of Poisson soluble, and in Surrealist poetry in general, of the properties of animate creatures and inanimate objects. In the above tableau Breton insists that the lamp is a lamp made of flesh. Normally it is a case of inanimate objects being made animate, rather than vice versa: it is a particular type of personification. In the final text there is an interesting image which combines this feature with a fine example of "dépaysement":

"La fenêtre donnait sur un navire, lequel, couché dans la prairie, respirait régulièrement." (M 118)

The idea of the ship breathing can be explained without much difficulty, either by the steady swelling of its sails in the wind or, in the case of a steamship, by the escape of puffs of smoke from its funnels. Nevertheless, the image, as it stands, is an amusing example of the animation of the supposedly inanimate.

There is a more conventional example of personification in Text 29, where plants and rocks are endowed with human qualities and perform tasks done in the real world by humans:

"Les plantes, autour de lui (un homme) vaquaient à leurs occupations, les unes dans les manufactures de soie, les autres dans les étables traying les chèvres de l'ombre. Les rochers sifflaient. On ne pouvait plus détourner son regard des ordures du ciel." (M 108)

The role of the plants is changed from passive to active. The first
idea is perhaps suggested by the thought of silk-worms digesting leaves, the second by the goats munching at hay. Even if one attempts to find rational explanations for such images, one can never destroy completely the immediate Surrealist effect. Similarly rational explanations of the image implying a negation of some elementary physical property can never be completely acceptable. The world is literally turned upside down in the evocation of nightfall in Text 4:

"La nuit est venue, pareille à un saut de carpe à la surface d'une eau violette et les étranges lauriers s'entrelacent au ciel qui descends de la mer!" (M 65-66)

This image is made possible by the reflection of the sky in the water, but the effect of surprise is not removed by the discovery of a rational explanation.

The wish expressed in the opening lines of L'Aigrette (v. supra, p. 396) is finally granted in Text 23, where the action takes place in a Surrealist land of the midnight sun:

"Dans ses rayons de soleil il entrait plus d'ombre que dans l'ombre mais il ne brunit vraiment qu'au soleil de minuit." (M 96)

Breton's humour is never absent for long from his automatic texts. A very simple brand is featured in Text 27, which begins and ends with a tricky refrain, reminiscent of folk-songs or children's ditties:

"Il y avait une fois un dindon sur une digue" and "Le prêtre chantait dans la moule, la moule chantait dans le rocher, le rocher chantait dans la mer et la mer chantait dans la mer." (M 104 & 105)

Often the humour in Poisson soluble relies entirely on word-play. It can be created by homonymy, as in Text 23, where Breton exploits two of the meanings of the word "cor": (a) a horn, (b) time (of antlers):
"Les cerfs s'étourdissaient dans les clairières, surtout les cerfs blancs dont les cors sont d'étranges instruments de musique." (M 96)

It can have the form of a simple pun, as at the beginning of Text 5:

"Le camée Léon venait de prendre la parole." (M 66)

The word-play can arise from the use of a neologism, as in Text 7, where a reference to "parterres" leads Breton to coin a new word, "parciels", a new homophone for "partiel".

In Text 28 a series of images is created by playing around with the words "châtaignier", "châtaigne", "châtain", "araignée". (M 105-106)

1. Anna Balakian cites this allusion to a Chameleon as part of the evidence to support her claim that the most consistent single frame of reference in Poisson soluble is hermeticism: "For instance, for the hermeticist, Camée Léon is also the green lion, le lion vert, or anagrammatically, vitriol, which in another form becomes mercury or le vitriol vert — l'or y vit (gold is therein contained), a magical substance, the object of the philosophical search. And the multimeaningful lion is indeed Chameleon or in still another appellation, Proteus, the everchanging." (André Breton, p.66)

There are certainly a number of hermetic motifs in Poisson soluble. In addition to the magic fountain, the eagle, the Chameleon and Prometheus mentioned in this respect by Anna Balakian, one could cite the cathedral rose-window (the universal theme of the circle, the symbol of existence, enclosed within itself; like the "mandalas" of the Hindus and Tibetans and the zodiacal plans of the pre-Columbian Indians and of the Middle Ages), the conch (like any spiral shell a symbol of initiation) and the golden rain, which recalls the shower of gold caused by Vulcan as he split open Jupiter's head, from which emerged Pallas Athene, symbolising the appearance of the feminine part of man, the "anima".

However, on reading through the texts of Poisson soluble, one does not have the impression that these references to hermeticism are as frequent or as obvious as Anna Balakian suggests. One has to look hard for them.

There is also another possible explanation of the presence of the motif of the "camée Léon" in Text V. In the poem by Desnos, Idéal Maîtresse, which was published in Langage cuit in 1923, a pet chameleon, who is learning to talk, confuses various parts of speech, using adjectives and nouns as verbs, for example. In the manner of Desnos, Breton in his text envisages a new grammatical person, the fourth person, employed by the "camée Léon".
However, mention of such features gives little indication of the real nature and significance of *Poisson soluble*, which resides in Breton's discovery of the means to produce in prose a similar kind of lyricism to that of the breathlessly ethereal poems of *Clair de Terre*. Although Breton does not achieve this in every single text of *Poisson soluble* all the time, nevertheless there are some remarkably sustained passages of genuine prose-poetry. To some extent the lyricism is an almost inevitable consequence of the fairy atmosphere and the presentation of "le merveilleux" by which Breton sets so much store; to some extent it is produced by the surprise of the surrealist images we have mentioned; but its origins are even more fundamental: they reside in the skill with which Breton manipulates the language, a skill which makes him an alchemist with words. It is the secret of this verbal alchemy we must endeavour to discover; this is more important than the overt references to hermeticism Anna Balakian has pointed out. The most obvious way to discover this secret is to examine closely one of the texts, for example Text 19:

"Entre la source. La source a parcouru la ville à la recherche d'un peu d'ombre. Elle n'a pas trouvé ce qu'il lui fallait, elle se plaint tout en racontant ce qu'elle a vu: elle a vu le soleil des lampes, plus touchant que l'autre, il est vrai; elle a chanté un ou deux airs à la terrasse d'un café et on lui a jeté de lourdes fleurs jaunes et blanches; elle a ramené ses cheveux sur son visage mais leur parfum était si fort. Elle n'est que trop portée à s'endormir, est-il nécessaire qu'elle couche à la belle étoile parmi ses colliers d'insectes, ses bracelets de verre? La source rit doucement, elle n'a pas senti ma main se poser sur elle; elle se courbe insensiblement sous ma main, pensant aux oiseaux qui me veulent savoir d'elle que sa fraîcheur. Qu'elle prenne garde, je suis capable de l'entraîner bien ailleurs, là où il n'y a plus ni villes ni campagnes. Un beau mannequin présentera cet hiver aux élégantes la robe du Mirage et savez-vous qui fera triompher l'adorable création? Mais la source, bien sûr, la source que j'entraîne sans difficultés dans ces parages où mes idées reculent au-delà du possible, au-delà même des sables inorganiques où les Touarègs, d'origine moins obscure que moi, se contentent d'une vie
nomade parmi leurs femmes excessivement parées. La source, elle est tout ce qui passe de moi dans le tournoiement des feuilles qui veillent là-haut, au-dessus de mes idées mouvantes que le moindre courant d'air déplace, elle est l'arbre que la cogne attaque sans cesse, elle saigne dans le soleil et elle est le miroir de mes mots." (M 90)

This text consists almost in its entirety of ramifications of the basic opening image, presenting "la source" as a deliciously attractive young woman. Breton exploits the gender of the noun and the possibility of replacing it by the pronoun "elle" to augment the potential of the personification; the common conception of water as the feminine element is endowed in this image with a quality of freshness. The fragility of the "source" is suggested discreetly by her preference for the lamp-light over the too powerful, too consuming heat of the sun. The personification is made stronger by the imagery of singing, which again refreshes a fairly hackneyed idea, and above all by the reference to the hair. Breton is here reversing the traditional evocation of a woman's hair in terms of a cascade. Allusions to the surreal jewellery, to the gentle laughter, to the poet's hand caressing her and threatening to bear her away are further steps in the process of personification. Then, however, to forestall the possible danger of the text becoming facile, Breton widens its perspective: the allusion to the land, "là où il n'y a plus ni villes ni campagnes", is the obvious starting-point for the new series of desert-images, introduced by "la robe du Mirage", another attractive surrealist image, juxtaposing the abstract and the concrete, another potential personification, and developed in the allusion to the Tuaregs. Breton makes use of our uncertainty about the origins of this desert-race to allude, as he does in Nadja, to the question of
identity. There is perhaps a shift, a transfer, involving the sand, in which the stock "sables mouvants" is replaced by the unusual but equally relevant concept of "mes idées mouvantes". As the "source" returns in the text, not only made animate but also as "dépaysée" as the locomotive in the forest, she has acquired some of the mystery the Tuaregs embody, and is now perhaps assuming forms more in keeping with her metaphorical meaning, and the text closes with a trio of puzzling images: (a) "elle est l'arbre que la cognée attaque sans cesse"; (b) "elle saigne dans le soleil"; (c) "elle est le miroir de mes mots".

The obvious explanation of the first is that the spring is assailed from all directions, but the identification between it and the tree, though prepared for by the allusion to "le tournoiement des feuilles" and explicable by virtue of the fact that the former can be seen as one of the sources of life for the latter, is still curious and surprising, with its new note of violence; the idea of the axe-blow may be the origin of the second of the images, where paradoxically the bleeding (or, in a wider sense, the wasting away, the losing of life and vitality) may express the evaporation of the water in the heat of the sun; the final image may arise from a slight distortion of the conventional comparison between water (of a lake, a pond) and a mirror. The image of the spring-water may represent the particular nature of Breton's words and images (a continual, babbling torrent) and be an allusion to his style and to his automatic method of composition.

In addition to these three examples, the text is liberally sprinkled with other strange images: "le soleil des lampes", "ses colliers d'insectes", which rely more on "dépaysement" and
distortion of the normal, of the "real", and which have a strong visual appeal. Obviously the former is based on the simple fact that both the sun and lamps are sources of light, but the juxtaposition of the terms in the genitival metaphor creates a novel hybrid. The latter is more puzzling, but it could be explained with reference to the number, or the disposition, of the insects in or above the water. However, we find, as usual, that the images remain stronger, and more enduring in our mind, than the rational explanations.

Yet the shock-effect such images generate does not in itself account for the atmosphere of excitément Breton creates from the outset with the dramatic stage-direction type opening sentence, "Entre la source", and succeeds in maintaining by a judicious blend of legato and staccato sentences, similar to that encountered in L'Aigrette. Heightening and, rather unexpectedly, poeticizing the fundamentally straightforward prose-style are more conversational exclamations, interjections, questions, asides: "Qu'elle prenne garde, je suis capable de l'entrainer bien ailleurs", "est-il bien nécessaire qu'elle couche à la belle étoile", "et savez-vous qui fera triompher l'adorable création?" These interruptions bring about the "dépassement spasmodique de l'expression contrôlée". If they constitute the staccato elements, the legato counterparts are to be found in the alliteration, as in the final words, and in the orthodox syntax of the second sentence and the sonority of its opening assonance, "la source a parcouru".

Yet pervading the whole text is a feeling of excitement, and Breton's use of apparent climax is in part responsible for
La source rit doucement, elle n'a pas senti ma main se poser sur elle; elle se courbe insensiblement sous ma main".

These features, individually, may be little in themselves, but together, in this brief text, they combine to maintain the "merveilleux", ever bringing it new substance both at the stylistic and at the thematic levels: Breton again lets form and content conspire to create a fairyland atmosphere of expectancy, a décor where one always has the impression that something is about to happen.

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Perhaps Poisson soluble stands in approximately the same relationship to Les Champs magnétiques as, for example, L'Air de l'Eau to Clair de Terre. The poems of L'Air de l'Eau appear to be more finely chiselled than those of Clair de Terre. Similarly Poisson soluble marks a step forward from Les Champs magnétiques. Their basic structures are similar: they are both series of automatic texts; there are streams of images in both recueils, but the cascade in Poisson soluble dances lithely and gracefully over crystalline stones in a fairy grotto, whereas the torrent in Les Champs magnétiques rushes wildly through ever-changing terrains. The images, if not more controlled, appear to be channelled naturally into slightly more regular patterns. This latter process continues when Breton eventually produces his next recueils. Though employing the medium of prose Breton has, however, succeeded in evolving a more consistently lyrical brand of poetic diction; and this quality of consistency, and this sustaining of the excitement and the expectancy, account for the marked superiority of Poisson soluble over Les Champs magnétiques.
CHAPTER FIVE

"RALENTIR TRAVAUX" AND "L'IMMACULEE CONCEPTION"

After Clair de Terre and Poisson soluble there was a gap of several years before Breton's next recueil. The individual poem, L'Union libre, came out in 1931, though even then this was printed without the name of either the author or the publisher. Breton's next collection, Le Revolver à cheveux blancs, appeared in the following year, brought out by the Editions des Cahiers libres.

However, in 1930, he wrote in collaboration with René Char and Paul Eluard Ralentir Travaux and in collaboration just with the latter L'Immaculée Conception.

After 1924 Breton had to decide whether or not to pursue in the same form the experiments which had led to Les Champs magnétiques, Clair de Terre and Poisson soluble. There is no noticeable change of style or technique on Breton's part, though one can detect slight modifications in the two works of 1930 written in collaboration with Char and Eluard. The very fact of writing in collaboration required some adjustment of the individual manners of the three poets. The partnership of Breton and Eluard was inevitably somewhat different from the earlier partnership of Breton and Soupault. So, in this chapter the effect on Breton of these collaborations will be considered, in addition to its basic survey of the two works, their ideas, themes and contributions to the development of surrealist imagery.

"Ralentir Travaux" (1930)

Lucien Schéler, preparing the Pléiade edition of the complete works of Eluard, made a number of important discoveries
concerning the composition of Ralentir Travaux. They are based on the catalogue of the sale of the library of René Gaffé, who possessed both the manuscript and the number 1 copy on rice-paper of Ralentir Travaux. The catalogue explains:

"Chaque poème a été écrit en collaboration par les trois auteurs, ainsi qu'en témoin de ce manuscrit de premier jet abondamment corrigé; il ne nous livre pas que le secret de la collaboration de chacun des poètes, il nous fait assister par ses corrections à la genèse même de chaque poème." ¹

Thus one finds that in most of the thirty poems, each poet writes a couple of lines or so and then hands the pen, so to speak, to one of his colleagues, though all three do not contribute to every poem. The copy of the first edition of Ralentir Travaux in the Musée de Saint-Denis contains initials, entered by Eluard, indicating which poet wrote which lines. The fact that the poems were subjected to considerable correction reveals, of course, that the poets were not content to record faithfully the Surrealist voice, but accept instead the need for conscious arrangement and composition.

Each poet contributes his own preface. Breton's is interesting, in that it points to the semantic vagueness of even very common words, in this case "table":

"Tout le monde a vu une table mais quand nous disons une table le malheur est que cette table à ce moment pour M. Breton est une table de café, (car il boit), pour M. Char une table de jeu (car il ne joue pas), pour M. Eluard une table d'opération (car il est passé ce matin place de l'Opéra). Si l'un de ces messieurs dit ici: une table, vous voyez ce qui en résulte. Table rase une fois faite de ceux qui les écoutent prononcer le mot table, l'un après l'autre, la poésie suit son cours, comme le Tarn dans les ravissantes inondations du Sud-Ouest." (RT 9)

Breton is therefore illustrating a point he made in Les mots sans

¹. in Eluard, P., O.C. (Pléiade), t. 1. p.1410.
rides about the meaning of words, and furthermore, he cannot resist the temptation to play on words.

Char's preface is perhaps a little more hermetic, but its second half particularly is clearly relevant to the recueil as a whole:

"À la ronde, de petits fagots hâtivement construits mais sûrs et malléables guettent dans le ciel découvert l'apparition de la fumée, signal de leur fonctionnement. L'utilité collective fait taire les reproches et fondre les hésitations. Dans la tête étroite comme l'espace les coudes n'ont pas place, les mains sont à niveau, l'horizon est vertical et au-dessous de tout. C'est alors qu'on entend la parole en liberté mais au supplice.
Tout est gratuit." (RD 11)

In the poems themselves, Char's interventions are often more cryptic than those of Breton and Eluard.

Eluard's preface, which he uses later as the "prière d'insérer" for La rose publique, is famous for its final claim:

"Le poète est celui qui inspire plus que celui qui est inspiré." (RC 13)

This statement reverses the concept of inspiration Breton possesses, for whereas Breton talks in terms of inspiration, when he talks about the process of poetic composition, and regards therefore the poet as a man inspired, when he is actually composing, Eluard turns his attention more to the effect the poet has on the reader.

If we take the first five poems as examples, they illustrate clearly both the technique and the pattern of the texts in Ralentir Travaux. In the opening one, Au fer rouge, Char introduces the theme of the gaze, which serves as the tenor of the central simile of the poem, to which Breton supplies the vehicle, "comme une pluie d'éclipse," before continuing the somewhat surreal cosmic image:
"Il descendra lentement de son cadre solaire
Mes bras autour de son cou." (RT 15)

The pun on "cadran solaire" comes, significantly, from Breton. The title-image suggests the red-hot activity of the smithy, though, of course, it is a poem which is being forged by Breton and Char.

In these poems, all written in the same way, there is a constant interplay of ideas between the three poets and although they undoubtedly influence each other's thoughts, each is able to take a poem off at a tangent and give it fresh impetus.

In the second text, L'usage de la force (RT 16), the initial idea of Breton's, "Ne secoue pas ainsi tes cheveux", leads to quite different responses from the three poets. Breton goes on gratuitously:

"C'est tout de suite plein d'ouvriers";

Iluard's follow-up is much more practical, though not without a touch of humour:

".........ou bien celui qui part pour le Nord
Dequ se retrouvera dans le Sud."

Char, on the other hand, decides to twist the original idea:

"Mais apprends plutôt à rouler tes cheveux
Pour que les pierres y trouvent leur compte."

Iluard takes the initiative in Page blanche (RT 17-18), violating the blank page with an obvious comparison:

"Le marbre des palais est aujourd'hui plus dur que le soleil";

and in fact, Iluard acknowledges the banality of this line. Breton intervenes, after Iluard has stated the second proposition, throwing in a repetitive series of lines, which bring together ideas associated with blood and water respectively and these in turn suggest the opposition and then the union of the body and the soul.

All but the final line of Ainsi de suite (RT 19) comes from
the pen of Eluard and is very typical of his style, with its short, crisp lines, some standing in isolation, some in compact little blocks, around which reverberate multiple waves of associations:

"Ils sont fous
Ils sont morts
Ils ont la tête au fond du corps
Nous ne les connaissons pas
Elles sont folles
Elles sont mortes
Leur tête n'est plus en nous".

To which Char adds the elliptical final abstract-concrete image, "L'obsession bouteille vide".

L'Air se charge (RT 20-1) is a dialogue between Breton and Eluard. The two poets achieve a remarkable harmony, as they create a dynamic Surrealist tableau, one of the most successful poems in the recueil. The last six lines, evoking a rendez-vous of lovers, are an indication of the quality of this piece:

"Je serai cette fois celui que tu n'as pas connu
Et qui n'aime qu'à te surprendre (Eluard)
Je t'apparaitrai avec tes mains sur mes yeux
Et tu ne pourras rien prendre
L'amour s'étendra comme j'aime
Brouillard à couper au couteau". (Breton)

The two poets evoke love's power of transformation and its capacity to surprise, the playfulness of young couples and their serious vows, and the final image of the fog thick enough to cut with a knife expresses not only the all-enveloping, all-embracing, ever-growing aspect of love but also its latent violence.

These first few poems have shown how Ralentir Travaux operates. From now on, comments will be restricted to certain highlights of the collection and to discussion of the individual contributions of the three men, with the concentration on significant themes, motifs and images.
CHAR

In 1930 a number of critics might have been surprised to see the name of René Char appearing side by side with those of Breton and Eluard on the cover of Ralentir Travaux, for his poetry prior to that date was restricted to a work he destroyed, Les Cloches sur le coeur (1928), and Arsenal, of which only 26 copies were produced in the first edition in 1929 and only 40 in the second edition in the following year. In 1930, however, Char's name began to appear in the review Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution.

One is struck first of all in Ralentir Travaux by Char's style rather than by his subject-matter. Numerous critics have talked in terms of "aphorismes" when trying to evoke the particular quality of Char's poetry, but this is perhaps a misleading word, for it is chosen solely as a way of describing the conciseness of Char's language; his statements are not maxims. Indeed, in the fragmentary succinctness of Char's poetry there is something of the first style of Breton. One finds oneself referring constantly to ellipsis, as one does when writing about Mont de Piété. Char's work exemplifies the role played by suggestion in poetry: one single word or one single phrase written by this poet suffices to suggest to the reader a whole range of possible associations; Char goes for the essence of his subject and is content to state this essence. A number of the poems in Ralentir Travaux are rounded off by a terse, direct phrase by Char; his sole intervention in Toujours les mêmes (RT 28) is the final line, "Le jeu de sociétés"; he closes Isolée à raver (RT 34-5) with the single word "Originale"; Découverte de la terre (RT 44) ends with the succinct juxtaposition, "La belle inconnue-limite".
Certain of Tzara's comments in his "prière d'insérer" for Le marteau sans maître, probably Char's best collection of Surrealist poetry, could apply with equal justification to his contribution to Ralentir Travaux:

"A cette extrême limite où l'exprimé et l'exprimable s'affrontent dans une poussière de principes d'identités, René Char nous livre un merveilleux instrument d'exploration humaine, dont la manière de se servir, dépouillée des éléments personnels et hors de leur mouvement descriptif, réside dans le système cohérent de références qu'est la poésie en tant que sujet-objet de désir: je salute en cet outil l'inviolable pureté et la témérité d'un nouveau coefficient d'intégration dans la réalité secrète du monde, le décalque précis d'un souffle permanent, d'une constante image de soleil déposée sur les choses et sur la nuit comme la trappe d'un signalement occulte de ce qui, tout en existant, n'est perceptible qu'avec d'infinies précautions de voix nues." 1

In this sentence Tzara evokes splendidly the essence of Char's technique; as far as the dominant themes and motifs of Char's poetry are concerned, a number are to be found in the lines written by him from Ralentir Travaux.

The somewhat taciturn virility of the language, in which words are treated with the same loving care as diamonds, is reflected in the references to minerals, to stones:

"Pour que les pierres y trouvent leur compte" (RT 16) and
"Les pierres suivaient leur ombre douce-amère" (RT 26).

A variation is the allusion to ruins in Commencement et Fin (RT 34).

Despite the outward appearance of hardness, however, Char is an extremely sensitive poet. He has a heart, and this motif, significantly, is often present. René Ménard has written an interesting article, exploring this subject, Le coeur, la poésie, René Char.... 2 Although he realizes that this motif is of little

1. Quoted in the special number of Liberté (Hommage à René Char), Montréal: Juillet-Aout, 1968, p.75.
significance in the work of a number of great poets (Lautréamont, part of Rimbaud's poetry, Mallarmé, Claudel, many of the Surrealists) and although he accepts that there is a vast difference between "la Poésie" and "les effusions du coeur", he feels nevertheless that:

"Dans l'oeuvre d'un grand poète, le coeur est souvent présent."¹

Ménard sees that this is the case with Char, and in conclusion adds the very important fact:

"Le coeur n'est pas seulement présent dans l'oeuvre de Char lorsqu'il s'agit de l'amour. Vers les hommes, les bêtes, la nature il frais le chemin du poème."²

The importance of this motif reinforces the belief that Char penetrates to the essence of things, that he is profound, that he feels deeply, as in his lines of *Un sort rejeté* (RT 38):

"Tu serres la dernière cartouche
Dans une cave de salpêtre
Avec l'oreille de l'amour
Ton écho dans le coeur".

He begins *Façade* (RT 29) with the revealing admission:

"Je donne sur le cœur
Partout où ton ombre a pu rejoindre la mienne".

Ménard's article begins with the claim:

"Notre coeur est l'ultime réduit de notre liberté".³

In the poem *Autour de l'Amour* (RT 33) both Char and Breton need to relate the concept of love to that of freedom. Char's three lines are:

"Je t'enfournai dans le sable
Pour que la marée te délivre
La liberté pour l'ombre";

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². *id.* p.86.
³. *id.* p.82.
to which Breton responds:

"Je te ferai sécher au soleil
De tes cheveux où le phénix tombe dans une trappe
La liberté pour la proie".

However, for a poet reputed to be preoccupied with the theme of light, 1 Ralentir Travaux is full of references by Char to shadows (v. the lines quoted above from Façade, Autour de l'Amour, and L'Ecole buissonnière) (RT 26).

Though the awareness of a shadow may imply the presence of light, the shadow in the poem On donne le change (RT 39-40) goes so far as to snuff out the candles. For once perhaps in Char's work shade triumphs over light in the verbal chiaroscuro.

The influence of Surrealism is clearly apparent in the way in which Char in his turn creates Surrealist tableaux with some of his lines, as at the end of En retour (RT 23):

"Qu'ils chantent faux
C'est une bande de brigands
Les têtes ont quitté les épaules".

There is an underlying vein of humour in this example, but the humour is much stronger in the very surreal ending of the following poem, Le mauvais sujet (RT 25):

"Maintenant de la famille
Je suis la coqueluche du vingtième siècle".

(The two meanings of "coqueluche": 1° "darling", 2° "whooping cough" are both heard in this image).

Although Char does bring an individual touch to the collection, it is apparent from such passages that he is affected by the idea of his fellow-Surrealists.

1. Professor C.A. Hackett wrote for the special number of L'Arc devoted to Char an article entitled La lumière dans l'oeuvre de René Char.
To some extent Eluard acts as an intermediary between the two more extreme styles of Breton and Char. His limpid and pliant lines weld together the contributions of his two friends to create unified poems. In five of the nine poems to which each of the poets contributes one single section the central passage is supplied by Eluard; and *Ordre du Jour*, too, conforms to this basic pattern except for the fact that an extra line is added by Eluard at the end. This may suggest that Eluard is the most versatile, possibly the most gifted, but certainly the most experienced poet of the three. By 1930 he had a considerable body of poetry behind him, including the superb *recueil Capitale de la Douleur* and *L'Amour la Poésie.*

In these two collections one cannot help but notice a whole series of dualities, somewhat reminiscent of those in the poetry of Baudelaire, in which the poet considers, at times almost side by side, pairs of opposites: light and shade, joy and sorrow, love and solitude, all dependent on the presence or absence of the beloved.

Eluard's contributions to *Ralentir Travaux* are perhaps too fragmentary to give a true indication of this pattern. Nevertheless, the pattern is so fundamental to his poetry that traces of it are to be found in the book he writes jointly with Breton and Char.

The events of the years 1929-30 in Eluard's private life were decisive and helped foster the dualities in his poetry.¹

¹ His first wife, Gala, had met Salvador Dali at Cadaqués in 1929, and before long the two of them were to embark on a new life together. In the month of December of that year Eluard, while out walking with Char, had met the woman who was to become his second wife, Nusch.
Their effects are perceptible in *Ralentir Travaux*. The dark side of the glass is evident in the specific reference to absence at the end of the final poem, *Je m'écoute encore parler* (RT 59):

"Je m'en suis pris aussi à l'absence
Sous toutes ses formes
Et j'ai serré dans mes bras des apparitions sous le signe
De la cendre et d'amours plus nouveaux que le premier
Qui m'a fermé les yeux l'espoir la jalousie".

It lies behind the motif of tears which keeps returning:

"Le jour des larmes l'indifférence fait des siennes" (RT 22),

"Seulement l'ombre d'une larme l'enjeu du souvenir" (RT 31), (though one must admit that here Eluard merely repeats the idea with which Breton begins the poem),

"Un grand mystère comme un enfant perdu
Avec ces larmes sales qui voudraient être du sang" (RT 46);

and the accompaniment of these themes is the theme of silence.

The period of frustration and despair these themes mark alternates with days of happiness, reflected in the great Eluardian theme of fraternity, "les mains se serrent" (RT 50), the mention of "le rire" (RT 36) and above all by the return of love. It is seen in *L'Ecole buissonnière* (RT 26):

"L'amour le premier enseignait
Aux amants à bien se tenir".

*Ralentir Travaux* contains, in addition, fleeting allusions to other dominant themes and motifs of Eluard's poetry: the themes of "la pureté" and "la parole", the motifs of fire, eyes, mirrors, birds, clouds.

One very short piece is written by Eluard alone: the three lines of *L'Autre poème* (RT 37):

"Je déposerai mes épaules
Chaque pas soulève un malheur
Me perdre au large de mes tempes".
The poem drifts away into space before either Breton or Char can catch it and give it new life.

**BRETON**

Breton in *Ralentir Travaux* has not lost the secret of creating a bizarre Surrealist tableau in a single line, or even a single image. In *Découverte de la terre* (RT 44), after a passage which bears the hint of the myth of Prometheus stealing fire from the gods and creating man, Breton brings into the "picture" an invisible sledge drawn by a team of moles, an image which prefigures the scene in the first poem of *L'Air de l'Eau*, where the carriage is drawn by axolotls in blue shoes. (v. CT 157).

Perhaps the best example, however, of the creation of a Surrealist tableau by Breton in this collection is provided by the opening lines of *L'Enjeu inutile*:

"Le monde renversé serait charmant
Dans les yeux de l'anti-homme
Quel sablier que la terre
Quels vases communicants que la naissance et la mort".

(RT 56)

The initial idea is no doubt suggested by Breton's overriding desire in 1930 to overthrow the society in which he lives.¹ Suddenly he sees how this dream can be realized, in his poetry at least: in his imagination he envisages the earth as an hour-glass which can be turned upside down by a mere touch of one's fingers. Thinking of the hour-glass leads Breton immediately to a concept he had utilized towards the end of *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* and which he was to take for the title of his next major prose-work, the image of the "vases communicants". In this poem he sees birth and

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¹ cf. the Second Manifeste.
death as the twin retorts, linked, of course, by life. These lines, however, are strangely reminiscent of metaphysical poetry, though it is difficult to decide whether this is because of their concentration or because the linking of the hour-glass with the Earth is more a conceit than a metaphor. This latter point may provide an important clue to an understanding of the basic nature of many surrealist images: in their bringing together of "distant realities" they are modern versions or variations of the conceit. It is interesting that Helen Gardner, when she is explaining the difference between a conceit and a comparison, employs, like Breton in the first Manifeste, the image of a spark:

"A brief comparison can be a conceit if two things patently unlike, or which we should never think of together, are shown to be alike in a single point in such a way, or in such a context, that we feel their incongruity. Here a conceit is like a spark made by striking two stones together. After the flash the stones are just two stones." 1

Breton, of course, believed that the spark was possible only if two disparate things were brought together in a metaphor.

Regarding the dominant motifs of Breton's contributions to these poems, one discovers the return of zoological and botanical terms. One poem, begun significantly by Breton himself, is called Histoire naturelle (RT 47), and the lines written by Breton contain references to sea-horses, ferns and a strange hybrid, "l'agate-oeillet", 2 about which Breton remarks: "...... c'est par hasard qu'elle fait partie du règne minéral." The second element in the term, the flower, could just as easily have prevailed, if one had to classify this hybrid as either vegetable or

2. Breton's hybrid, "l'agate-oeillet", is a distortion in writing of the name of a particular variety of agate, the "agate oeillée".
mineral, but the purpose of the coupling is to undermine once more the division between the kingdoms.

Then the plant, the scarlet pimpernel, is integrated into a bizarre image merging the abstract and the concrete (RT 40):

"La caresse à bauche de mouron rouge."

The caress suggests the ideas of a kiss and lips and the colour of the flower evokes the exact shade of red.

The poem, Sur parole, (RT 52) contains an attractive and unusual sequence of images of love, including the metaphor, "c'est le corail qui sort de la mer", which revives beautifully and precisely the cliché of lips of coral. This reference to the theme of love leads inevitably to its twin theme of Woman, which never strays far from the centre of the Surrealist poets' preoccupations. Moreover, an embodiment of the theme of "l'éternel féminin" itself introduces the poem, Le Lierre (RT 53-4):

"L'éternelle femme sur un banc de square
La femme sans nom avec une pendule autour des bras
En guise de manchon".

The Daliesque image of the clock is but a prelude, however, to a partial metamorphosis of the woman into the cosmic figure of a "femme-éclair". This woman may act like a flash of lightning, but a little of the disappointment or even the despair or disillusion Breton experiences a few months later at the loss of his mistress X is discernible in Je m'écoute encore parler (RT 5809), in the lines:

"Je serre dans mes bras les femmes qui ne veulent être qu'à un autre
Celles qui dans l'amour entendent le vent passer sur les peupliers
Celles qui dans la haine sont plus élancées que les mantes religieuses". 1

1. The Surrealists were fascinated by the fact that the female praying mantis devours her mate after copulation.
The fascination certain signs or inscriptions have for Breton, and the possible sight of such a sign as they compose the poem *Ordre du Jour* (RT 42-3), may lie behind the Surrealist "dépaysement", in which the appearance of a passer-by is distorted: "son visage est remplacé par l'inscription Secours aux noyers". Otherwise the sign could be seen as an image of the distress on the man's face.

In the area of language Breton's contributions supply the simple word-play. In *En retour* (RT 22-3), he interprets quite literally the proverbial expression, "la semaine des quatre jeudis". After Eluard refers to "le jour des larmes", Breton takes the cue and responds as follows:

"C'est un des trois jours non spécifiés de la semaine des quatre jeudis
Les deux autres étant............"

and Eluard helps him out, "des peurs et celui des refus....."

In *L'Ecole buissonnière* (RT 26) Breton revives another cliché by referring to "un pas de loup".

He introduces a poem written during a journey by car between Char's home at L'Isle-sur-Sorgue and Avignon, *Toujours les mêmes* (RT 28), with images containing contradictions and distortions of reality:

"Les gens sont trop courageux
Les uns sont sous les lits les autres dans les armoires
Et ceux qui ont une bougie à la place de cervelle
Ne déplaisent pas à celles au coeur de chiffon".

These surrealist images could likewise be filed in an anthology of "humour rose".

A further indication of Breton's continuing preoccupation with images is provided by the reference to them within an image, in the pleasant little poem *Décors* (RT 50-1):
"On a fait venir les derniers fanatiques
Ils descendent au moyen de leurs lance-pierres les dernières
boules d'images
Qui traînent encore".

Thus Breton again modifies a stock phrase "boule de neige" and
uses it as the basis of a new image, before closing the poem with
an image, the impact of which is as great as Eluard's far more
famous "La terre est bleue comme une orange"; Breton very coolly
announces "Aux dernières nouvelles la terre aurait été pondue",
not only exploiting, like Eluard, the shape of the earth, but also
distorting it.

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Interesting though the experiment of Ralentir Travaux is,
the end-product remains a collection of fairly ordinary poems, not
as arbitrary as some automatic texts, but not devoid of some of
the most striking features of the poetry of the three individuals
who worked together to produce it.

The same year, 1930, saw, however, another attempt at
collaboration, this time by just Breton and Eluard, which was far
more experimental and quite different from anything else either
had done hitherto, of considerable interest as far as its imagery
is concerned. The result of this particular experiment is
L'Immaculée Conception.

"L'Immaculée Conception" (1930)

When this book appeared in a Japanese edition in 1935,
Breton and Eluard added a preface, Note à propos d'une collabora-
tion, which was published in the Cahiers d'Art, Nos. 5-6 (p.137).
There the two poets give some explanation of their aims in writing
L'Immaculée Conception and of the manner of their composition:
"À constater leurs différences, les hommes se veulent semblables. De cette seule volonté, tous les rapports humains prennent leur valeur. Être deux à détruire, à construire, à vivre, c'est déjà être tous, être l'autre à l'infini et non plus soi. Chaque brin de soleil supporte un flocon de neige, chaque main tendue un regard connu.

Un examen réfléchi, approfondi des possibilités de la pensée, de la pensée commune à tous, rend vide toute hiérarchie entre les hommes. Entre l'homme et la femme, elle serait la négation même de leur rôle propre.

Ce livre fut écrit en quinze jours, et encore n'y consacrâmes-nous que nos loisirs réels. La connaissance parfaite que nous avions l'un de l'autre nous a facilité ce travail. Mais elle nous incita surtout à organiser de telle façon qu'il s'en dégageât une philosophie poétique qui, sans jamais mettre le langage à la raison, conduise pourtant un jour à l'élaboration d'une véritable philosophie de la poésie."

The book's title may indicate that its conception, or more accurately, its composition, was to be accomplished without the intervention of reason (i.e. without the intervention of any conscious control).

In fact, the composition of L'Immaculée Conception reveals a development of the automatic writing which had produced Les Champs magnétiques and Poisson soluble, for the choice of the subject-matter (of the titles of the various sections of the book) was premeditated. Once the titles were settled, however, the two poets reverted to orthodox automatism.

The first part of the book, L'Homme, evokes stages in the life of man, from the moment of conception to the moment of death.

The second part, for which the book is most famous, Les Possessions, consists of a series of attempts to simulate mental disorders. The third section, Les Méditations, treats certain aspects of human existence and the final part, Le Jugement originel, is a list of Surrealist aphorisms.

A. "L'Homme"

The first text is intended to evoke the moment of conception, and in the opening sentence Breton succeeds in presenting both the ordinariness of the event and its eroticism, with the mention of the heaving of the woman's belly, but the curious metaphor identifying the latter with a stone in a waterfall brings out not only the obvious naturalness of the moment but its singularity for those involved, a singularity stressed by the phrases, "la seule visible", "la seule véritable". The text begins:

"Un jour compris entre deux autres et, comme d'habitude, pas de nuit sans étoile, la ventre long de la femme monte, c'est une pierre et la seule visible, la seule véritable, dans la cascade." (IC 9)

After the general creation of the atmosphere of the night on which the child is conceived, Eluard adds a serious reflection:

"L'homme ne se reproduit pas dans un grand éclat de rire. L'homme ne se reproduit pas. Il n'a jamais peuplé son lit que des yeux ardents de son amour." (IC 10)

This gives Breton the cue to observe that in the act of love and at the moment of conception the rag-picker is the equal of a king; but although this first part of the opening piece is clearly related to its title and theme, the remainder is more gratuitous, as the thoughts of the two poets are diverted to their surroundings.

The second text, La Vie intra-utérine, is freer still. It is at least as arbitrary as any orthodox and unpremeditated automatic text. Contrary to the implications of the title, Eluard commences with images of light:

"N'être rien. De toutes les façons qu'a le tournesol d'aimer la lumière, le regret est la plus belle ombre sur le cadran solaire." (IC 11)

Yet the allusion to the sunflower's movement towards the sunlight serves to suggest attractively an instinct for survival, or at least
a desire to see the light of day, to savour the outside world, on the part of the unborn child.

Breton appears to dispel this movement with a little word-play ("Os croisés, mots croisés"), some absurd statements ("Le poisson naît d'une épine, la guenon d'une noix"), and an allusion to Columbus. Surrealist tableaux featuring washerwomen and birds are then described. At last there is a sentence bearing on the title of the passage, as the unborn child feels the beating of its mother's heart:

"Les soupapes s'ouvrent et se ferment dans un cœur qui n'est pas le mien et qui est mon cœur, sont tout ce qui se chantera d'inutile sur une mesure à deux temps: je crie, nul ne m'entend, je rêve." (IC 12)

Allusions to a desert, to shadows, to silence, to bathing, temporarily keep the poets to their initial theme, but these give ground in turn to a fresh flux of more arbitrary images.

The third text, La naissance, combines serious reflections on the child's situation at the moment of birth with fairly realistic evocations of his first experiences of life in the outside world. Then the semblance of realism is forgotten; we encounter people looking at the child and seeking resemblances with its parents but they find instead more bizarre affinities:

"Le voisin soutient qu'il est fait à l'image du feu de bois, la voisine qu'on ne peut mieux le comparer qu'à l'air des aéroplanes et la fée dégénérée qui a élu domicile dans la cave inclinée à lui donner pour ancêtre le gypse en fer de lance qui a un pied sur l'oisiveté, l'autre sur le travail." (IC 14)

The principle of the juxtaposition of distant realities, the abstract and the concrete, the animate and the inanimate, runs through these images; but the allusion to wood-fire reminds the reader of the famous opening line of L'Union libre, "Ma femme à la chevelure
de feu de bois", and because of this a rational explanation of the opening comparison, if such is required, becomes feasible; and the allusion to "l'air des aéroplanes", "la fée dégénérée" and "le gypse en fer de lance" may evoke in turn the freedom, the delicacy, grace and mystery, and the pearly, lunar lustre of the new-born baby. And so the texts proceed through life unto death, combining allusions to the themes and titles of each section with far more grotesque notions and images.

The idea of using automatic writing on a premeditated basis comes closer to the Surrealists' desire to reconcile antinomies, in this case the real and the unreal, though in fact it is difficult to detect any marked difference in quality between these texts in L'Immaculée Conception and earlier automatic texts.

B. "Les Possessions"

Breton and Eluard felt that they were capable of simulating accurately the state of a number of mental disorders. By so doing, they hoped to resolve another of the old pairs of opposites mentioned by Breton in the Second Manifeste, as he repeats quite explicitly in the Entretiens:

"...... la préoccupation majeure (du chapitre intitulé Les Possessions) est de réduire l'antinomie de la raison et de la déraison, qui, parmi d'autres, a été une des ambitions permanentes du surréalisme." (E 161)

Of course, Breton and Eluard lay themselves open to criticism on the grounds that it is impossible for "normal" people to achieve, even for a short time, a close approximation to any of the mental disorders in question. An important article by Rolland de Renéville for the NRF (1st January, 1932) did make such a criticism. Though he did not doubt the sincerity of the experiment,
he did question its success:

"Mais je ne crois pas qu'il soit possible de passagèrement ressentir les états de conscience d'un paralytique général si l'on n'est soi-même atteint de cette maladie. Il y faudrait tout au moins une destruction mentale progressive qui ne permettrait plus à l'homme qui l'aurait pratiqué de retourner en arrière. Je me réjouis de pouvoir écrire que tel n'est pas le cas de Paul Eluard ni d'André Breton." ¹

Moreover, Rolland de Renéville perceives no great difference between the texts produced by the two poets in this way and those of the earlier sessions of automatic writing, but goes on to criticize Breton and Eluard for not resorting to mysticism which he claims would bring boundless insight. Breton, naturally, was appalled by such a suggestion. Nevertheless, Rolland de Renéville's basic criticism is quite valid, though one must recognize that Breton had made a serious study and had first-hand experience of patients suffering from the mental disorders he and Eluard attempt to simulate. His interest in the question of insanity, stemming from the periods he spent during the war in psychiatric centres, was reinforced by his acquaintance with Nadja and the discovery of her ultimate fate. Furthermore, in 1928 he and Aragon wrote Le Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie, in which they claim that hysteria was the great poetic discovery of the end of the nineteenth century and in which, too, they propose a new definition of hysteria:

"L'hystérie est un état plus ou moins irréductible se caractérisant par la subversion des rapports qui s'établissent entre le sujet et le monde moral duquel il croit pratiquement relever, en dehors de tout système délirant. Cet état mental est fondé sur le besoin d'une séduction réciproque, qui explique les miracles hâtivement acceptés de la suggestion (ou contre-suggestion) médicale. L'hystérie n'est pas un phénomène patho-

logique et peut, à tous égards, être considéré comme un moyen suprême d'expression." 1

In this text both hysteria and insanity are related explicitly to the questions of poetry and language. In return, Breton feels that the poet should investigate the questions of hysteria and insanity and ascertain whether he can bring to light fresh knowledge concerning them. It is on this note that Breton begins the introduction he writes to Les Possessions:

"Les auteurs se font un scrupule de garantir la loyauté absolue de l’entreprise qui consiste pour eux à soumettre, tant aux spécialistes qu’aux profanes, les cinq essais suivants....

Loïn de sacrifier par goût au pittoresque en adoptant tour à tour, de confiance, les divers langages tenus, à tort ou à raison, pour les plus inadéquats à leur objet, non contents d’en attendre même un réel effet de curiosité, ils espèrent, d’une part, prouver que l’esprit, dressé poétiquement chez l’homme normal, est capable de reproduire dans ses grands traits les manifestations verbales les plus paradoxales, les plus excentriques, qu’il est au pouvoir de cet esprit de se soumettre à volonté les principales idées délirantes sans qu’il y aille pour lui d’un trouble durable, sans que cela soit susceptible de compromettre en rien sa faculté d’équilibre." (IC 23-4)

Breton reinforces these ideas a little later by stressing the importance of the new exercise both for the liberation of the mind and for poetry:

"Sans préjudece des conquêtes qu’il (cet exercice) présage sous le rapport de la liberté la plus haute, nous le tenons, au point de vue de la poétique moderne, pour un remarquable critérium. C’est assez dire que nous en proposerions fort bien la généralisation et qu’à nos yeux l’‘essai de simulation’ de maladies qu’on enferme remplacerait avantageusement la ballade, le sonnet, l’épopée, le poème sans queue ni tête et autres genres caducs." (IC 25)

He is being wilfully provocative, of course, but there is, too, a serious side to his remarks.

In these five texts the authors use all their knowledge of

mental disorders to try to get under the skin, so to speak, of sufferers from them, to seek as faithful a simulation as possible.

The first text of this section is an attempt to simulate mental deficiency. Breton and Eluard bring out the feeling of self-importance which is sometimes noticed in the mentally deficient. The "subject" or "patient" reveals his views on a motley collection of topics. Most of his ideas are clichés; he is self-righteous, even pompous; he has designed a new kind of submarine; he has written to the President of the Republic demanding an audience. The text is, significantly, completely devoid of poetic imagery.

The second text, a simulation of acute mental derangement, is far more "poetic"; the subject utters a series of unrelated ideas, some of which are very bizarre and amusing. The whole effect is quite similar to that of the orthodox automatic text, which indeed it is. There are good examples of word-play, which remind the reader of the word-play of Les Champs magnétiques, or of Poisson soluble:

".....tu tiens un arrosoir, tu as une jambe coupée, ça fait deux jambes que j'enjambe au mois de janvier. En février je ramasse les fèves...." (IC 29)

The sound of one word or one syllable suggests another word. (The subject is oblivious or ignorant of the meaning of words). The subject makes no attempt to suppress any resulting nonsense; he places his faith in the words which pour forth; he allows the words to "make love":

"Je parie une vessie contre une lanterne à un croque-mort qu'il n'y a pas d'éternité. L'éternité c'est l'éther et c'est tout. J'ai fait mes études chez un avoué qui me disait: N'avouez jamais. Au conseil de révision j'ai été réformé pour la vision." (IC 30)
In the first of these sentences there is of course a modification of the idiomatic expression, "prendre des vessies pour des lanternes".

At their best, some of the sentences are real finds, as examples of Surrealist or just Gallic humour:

"Moi j'aime à être couché sur le ventre, à condition que ce ne soit pas toujours le mien, bien entendu." (ibid.)

The frontier between the absurd phrase and the verbal Surrealist tableau is not clearly delineated, however. Though the text lacks true metaphors, many of the absurd phrases only just fall short of being sparkling surrealist images.

The "subject" in this text, as in the previous one, suffers from delusions of his own grandeur: he refers to Bismarck, Clémentel, Gambetta, Mme Curie and Pasteur as if they are his personal friends.

It appears to be a fairly accurate simulation of this mental disorder, except for the fact that there is no element of tragedy present, because one knows all the time that the two people uttering and writing the remarks are perfectly sane and are only feigning madness.

The attempt to simulate the syphilitic condition of general paralysis takes the form of a passionate letter written by the subject to the woman he loves. At times one has the impression that Breton and Eluard have discovered the secret of the lyricism they had long been seeking, as they produce a stream of images, evoking an exotic idyll and singing of the beauty of Woman:

"Je n'avais pas assez des cent cinquante châteaux où nous allions nous aimer on m'en construira demain cent mille autres j'ai chassé des forêts de baobabs de tes yeux les paons les panthères et les oiseaux-lyres je les enfermerai dans mes châteaux forts et nous irons nous promener tous deux dans les
forêts d'Asie d'Europe d'Afrique d'Amérique qui entourent nos châteaux dans les forêts admirables de tes yeux qui sont habitués à ma splendeur." (IC 35)

The poetic quality of the text is heightened by the numerous references to precious stones and precious metals — diamonds, emeralds, gold, crystal, radium, pearls — and by the frequent mention of stars.

On the other hand, as the above quotation illustrates, the subject has little thought for punctuation. He uses full stops only when he decides, in a completely arbitrary manner, to begin a fresh paragraph. In the postscript the style becomes much more childish, though it still contains the odd touch of lyricism, as in the allusion at the end of the following quotation:

"Je voudrais un bottin pour la messe un bottin avec une corde à noeuds pour marquer les pages........ Ma bretelle gauche vient de casser je soulevais le monde comme une plume. Peux-tu me faire une commission achète un tank je veux te voir venir comme les fées." (IC 38)

Yet in the main body of the letter one cannot help feeling that it is no longer the imaginary subject who is writing but a poet, or rather two poets. Breton and Eluard are perhaps carried away by the topic and return to a more faithful simulation of the disorder only in the postscript. One is tempted to ask for an explanation of the fact that, although the subject is so weak at punctuation, his spelling is perfect, perhaps suggesting that at this level the poet is taking over from the subject, as it were.

The "essai de simulation du délire d'interprétation" comes very close to the new Surrealist technique invented by Salvador Dali, "l'activité paranoïaque-critique". Four years later, in a lecture he gives in Brussels, Breton discusses this important addition to the range of Surrealist techniques, referring to it as
"un instrument de tout premier ordre", which can be applied to painting, poetry, the cinema, the construction of Surrealist objects, fashion, sculpture, the history of art, and, if need be, to any kind of exegesis. Breton quotes Dalí's *La femme visible* of 1930 to illustrate firstly the artist's basic conviction:

"Je crois qu'est proche le moment où, par un processus de caractère paranoïaque et actif de la pensée il sera possible (simultanément à l'automatisme et aux autres états pensifs), de systématiser la confusion et de contribuer au discrédit total du monde de la réalité."

and secondly Dalí's description of the paranoic's attitude towards the world around him:

"Le paranoïa se sert du monde extérieur pour faire valoir l'idée obsédante, avec la troublante particularité de rendre valable la réalité de cette idée pour les autres. La réalité du monde extérieur sert comme illumination et preuve, et est mise au service de la réalité de notre esprit."

In 1934, in an article entitled *Intervention surréaliste* Dalí gives the following definitions, which relate his method absolutely explicitly to the fourth mental disorder Breton and Eluard attempt to simulate:

"Paranoïa: Délire d'interprétation comportant une structure systématique. Activité paranoïaque-critique: Méthode spontanée de 'connaissance irrationnelle' basée sur l'objectivation critique et systématique des associations et interprétations délirantes."

Although Breton in one of his later radio interviews relates the whole of *L'Immaculée Conception* to Dalí's "activité paranoïaque-critique" (§ 160), it is this particular section, the simulation of the paranoiac's delusion of interpretation, which has the

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1. In Breton, A., *Qu'est-ce que le surréalisme?*, p.25.
2. Ibid.
closest connection with it.

This section is of considerable interest for the poet, for it is in theory concerned with the very question of the metaphor. Like Hamlet's cloud, any object, for the Surrealist as for the paranoiac, can become any other object, and this is the dominant aspect in the "essai de simulation du délire d'interprétation". It contains a series of surrealist images and is exemplified by the remarkable third paragraph:

"Le bariolage de l'averse parle perroquet. Il couve le vent qui écoute avec des graines dans les yeux. La double paupière du soleil se lève et s'abaisse sur la vie. Les pattes des oiseaux sur le carreau du ciel sont ce que j'appelais naguère les étoiles. La terre elle-même dont on s'explique si mal la démarche tant qu'on demeure sous la voûte, la terre palmée de ses déserts est soumise aux lois de la migration." (IC 39-40)

Clifford Browder has observed that the dominant motif of this text is that of the bird: bird-images and allusions to birds prevail throughout.

A possible explanation is that the subject alludes near the beginning of the text to the Pont-au-Change, near which there is the special little market where cage-birds are sold. Also, because the bird is a common symbol of freedom, one could argue that this helps to illustrate the idea that the paranoiac and the Surrealist poet have total freedom of expression. Yet this would ignore the fact that there are in this text, particularly towards the end, references to bars and cages, which remind the reader that the paranoiac could well be confined to an asylum, stripped of his freedom. Breton is not content merely to accept stock symbolic connotations. The profusion of bird-images, from the mythological phoenix, Horus, Leda's swan, to the exotic "diamants de Sénégal", may imply that the "subject" sees himself as a cage-bird, and this
helps to explain some of the images in the third paragraph: the parrot-talk of the "bariolage de l'averse" evokes the basically pathetic language of the paranoiac; he has no egg to hatch, (possibly suggesting that he finds no fulfilment in his life); the rising and setting of the sun evoked in terms of a "double paupièere" is a reminder of the difference in structure of the eyelids of birds and mammals and of the absence in man of the nocturnal bird's nictitating membrane; from his cage-bird's-eye view of the world the "subject" sees not stars but merely their shape in the feet of other birds; by exploiting the two basic meanings of "palmé" the poets can give the earth an "ornithocentric" quality and explain its laws in terms of the migration of birds. Though these bird-images serve to bring out the pitiable predicament of the paranoiac, in a different context the attempt to represent the real sentiments of a bird could be a way of revealing the great visionary powers of the poets, but here it gives rise mainly to comedy. The whole text, however, could be seen to reveal the potential of this method poets can use in their search for original metaphors, though none of the major Surrealist poets have ever repeated the experiment.

The fifth kind of simulation is that of "dementia praecox" or schizophrenia. At the beginning of the text the "subject" rambles on in very disjointed prose, throwing in all sorts of facts and expressions, but the monologue gradually deteriorates into ever-increasing gibberish. The opening and closing sentences give an indication of this deterioration. The text begins:

"La femme que voici un bras sur sa tête rocalluse de pralines qui sortent d'ici sans qu'on y voie clair parce que c'est un peu plus de midi ici en sortant du rire dans les dents qui reculent à travers le palais des Danaïdes que je caresse de ma
langue sans penser que le jour de Dieu est arrivé musique
en tête des petites filles qui pleurent de la graine et
qu'on remarque sans les voir pleurer par la main des grâces
sur la fenêtre du quatrième à réséda du chat que la fronde
prit à revers et de jour de fête." (IC 42)

In this opening "sentence" the "subject" restricts himself to
recognized words, makes proper use of the subjunctive, throws in
a Classical allusion, even indulges in a little word-play by
exploiting the homonymy of "palais"; but afterwards he starts in¬
venting words and sounds, gradually integrating his neologisms
more and more into the discourse, until finally the invented words
take over completely:

"Oradar-gaïrog vrailim... u feaïva drer kurmaca ribag nic
javli." (IC 49)

So although the first part of this fifth text is not too unlike the
orthodox automatic text and indeed has some slight poetic appeal
and interest, as the "dementia praecox" becomes more acute, the
discourse relapses into mumbo-jumbo, which, for the Surrealists,
could have no poetic potential, since there is no longer any fusion
of reason and unreason. At the end the latter is the only element
present.¹ Although by that stage language is liberated completely

1. Of course, the Lettristes have claimed that such mumbo-jumbo can
stand as poetry. The language of François Dufrêne's Danse de
lutin, of which the first two stanzas are quoted below, bears
considerable resemblance to that of the final sentences of the
"Essai de simulation de la démence précoce", though it is put
into verse-form, and the rhythm, alliteration and assonance
play an important role:

I
Dolce; dolce.
Yaâse folce,
Dolce, dolce,
Yoli, deline

II
Yulce, Yulce,
Youdouli dulce,
Yulce, yulce,
Kzill odaline."

(In Rousselot, J., Les Nouveaux Poètes Français, Paris: Seghers,
1962, p.113.)
from the task of communication and the poet is employing words which are freed completely from any meaning by virtue of the simple fact that the words are not to be found in any dictionary of the French language, thereby seemingly accomplishing the aim Breton announced in *Les mots sans rides*, one has the impression that this is not really what Breton desired. His continued insistence on the need to resolve antinomies would suggest that he would settle for some intermediary stage in the process of freeing language from the need to communicate, perhaps not even as far removed from the level of pure communication as the stage reached in the two previous texts, the "essai de simulation de la paralysie générale" and the "essai de simulation du délire d'interprétation", which are of some poetic potential and interest, because of their humour, word-play and juxtaposition of "distant realities".

C. "Les Méditations"

The next section of the book is a collection of texts inspired by the following titles: *La force de l'habitude*, *La surprise*, *Il n'y a rien d'incompréhensible*, *Le sentiment de la nature*, *L'amour*, *L'idée du devenir*.

The first one is regarded by Browder as "a poetic essay on the emptiness of daily life".\(^1\) It is merely an orthodox Surrealist text, combining simple facts which are closely related to the given theme with more poetic, more fanciful phrases. The tone is set by the opening lines:

"La table est mise dans la salle à manger; les robinets distribuent l'eau claire, l'eau tendre, l'eau tempérée, l'eau parfumée. Le lit est aussi grand pour deux que pour un. Après le bourgeon va venir la feuille et après la feuille la fleur et après la pluie le beau temps."  \(^{(IC\,53)}\)

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1. André Breton, *Arbiter of Surrealism*, p.84.
Most of the various types of surrealist images are to be found in this text: images merging the abstract and the concrete, images based on "dépaysement" and on word-play, humorous images.

The very title of the second text, La surprise (of course, one of the major themes and qualities of Surrealism, as of Apollinaire's poetry), is sufficient excuse for the poets to run riot and produce a host of fine surrealist images:

"S'il l'hydre à tête de femmes se tenait bien dans une pose nonchalante aux terrasses des cafés, il faut avouer que, par contre, en regardant tous les soirs sous les meubles, on n'a guère réussi à échanger quelques mots qu'avec des bonshommes de poussière. On a pu voir en écrivant sa propre tête à travers le porte-plume, entendre le bruit du chemin de fer en secouant des pavots, toucher du doigt l'étoile de sa pierre tombale, on n'est pas parvenu à garder dans la main un poignard d'eau, ne fut-ce que pour égorger son sosie en gouttes d'eau." (IC 57)

Possibly one of the two poets remembers Apollinaire's allusion to the Lernaean hydra in La victoire, but this image, as the allusion is to "l'hydre à tête de femmes", may simply be suggested by the sight of a number of women sitting in a café, with only their heads and shoulders visible behind the mass of tables. The image of the "bonshommes de poussière", though very pejorative, is nonetheless loaded with suggestion, evoking clearly the contrast between the dreariness of the men and the part-monstrous, part-fabulous attraction of the women. Furthermore, the subsidiary contrast between the adverbial phrases of place, "sous les meubles" and "aux terrasses des cafés", brings out the qualities of the latter as locations where "something might happen", where there could be a fascinating, life-changing encounter. Then, at the end of the extract, the pen-holder acts as a mirror, reflecting images, and possibly explains the reference to one's double in the final words where there appears to be an elaboration of the old saying,
"Il n'y a rien d'incompréhensible, though still a very poetic text, remains close to its central thread. Its main feature is introduced right at the start:

"Quelle attraction a donc réuni au fond de ce gouffre, à mille mètres au-dessous du niveau de la mer, quelques-uns des plus grands criminels de notre temps?" (IC 60)

The stars are then assembled and presented to the reader, but their names, though mysterious, have a stylized quality:

"Dans le calme des nuits la Brinvilliers resuscite ses poisons perdus avec cette grâce réflétée qui lui permet une interprétation juste et vraie de la pensée arsénicale. Vacher évoque la beauté des prostituées amoureuses, Haarmann mange, Soleilland joue, Troppmann rit, tout un terrain vague dans les yeux." (IC 61)

The central character turns out to be Soleilland, who is somewhat reminiscent of Lautréamont's hero, handsome and almost superhuman, "un jeune homme célèbre dans les profondeurs de la vie et qui connaît la gloire parce qu'il n'a pas connu le coeur des autres." (IC 63) In the portrayal of this character there are hints of the "occultation" of Surrealism Breton demands in the Second Manifeste, published in the same year, for Soleilland, whose very name is symbolical, knows the secrets of the arcana.

Il n'y a rien d'incompréhensible is indeed extremely coherent for a Surrealist text and could well form the basis for a Surrealist film scenario, though it lacks action and appears to be little more than an introduction.

Le sentiment de la nature is a more fantastic Surrealist "essay", by and large related to its title-theme, but very liberally sprinkled with typical surrealist imagery:

"Sous les arbres, à pleines mains, l'odeur de linge brûlé des vieux rosiers garnit les caves de l'automne. Le coeur de la dame du lac a été perforé par un lézard. Il est dans
l'aurore jusqu'au coeur. Il y a sous roche un tel mouvement d'étoiles grandes et terribles que la vie est en lambeaux. Et l'écho répond: Ici, il y a un cadavre. Peu à peu, le cadavre se farde...." (IC 65)

In this brief extract one finds visual and olfactory hallucinations, fusion of the abstract and the concrete, negation of an elementary physical property in the resuscitation of a corpse, and the exploitation and literal interpretation of the idiomatic locution: "Il y a quelque chose sous roche", no doubt a consequence of the previous reference to "un lézard". Moreover, the words attributed to the echo make one see behind them the nymph of mythology, and this helps to endow the text with a pleasing extra dimension.

Its title provokes Eluard to introduce the character "l'ennemi de la nature", but Breton quickly jettisons him, and towards the end Breton gives a strange Surrealist recipe:

"Après le sang vient le noir de la gloire: vous prenez un livre blanc, vous le nettoyez, vous le plongez feuille à feuille quelques minutes dans un mélange pâteux formé de 500 grammes de fumier de mouton, une pincée de sel de cuisine, un verre de vinaigre auquel vous ajoutez 200 grammes de poudre de baies de sureau, et vous signez." (IC 69-70)

This recipe, however, suggests not the figure of a chef but a sorcerer or an alchemist of old, and this helps the reader to see the imagery it contains as a kind of verbal alchemy, an interpretation possibly reinforced by the allusion to the signature at the end.

_L'Amour_ is perhaps the most interesting text in _Les Méditations_, for after its initial reflection on love, the reciprocal love of a man and a woman, the sole form of love Breton acknowledges, the two authors compile a humorous and poetic list of the postures of love, after the fashion of the _Kama-Sutra_. Number 12 is a typical example:

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"Lorsque la femme, reposant sur le dos, lève les cuisses verticalement, c'est l'oiseau-lyre." (IC 73)

L'idée du devenir is once again a fairly orthodox automatic text, though it does begin and end with allusions to its title-theme.

D. "Le Jugement original"

This final section of the book consists of a series of Surrealist "aphorisms", reminiscent in their form of the kind of sentence produced by the "jeu du cadavre exquis" and of the 152 proverbes (mis au goût du jour) written in collaboration in 1925 by Eluard and Père. A number of them rely on apparent contradiction, others on simple word-play, others give snippets of rather gratuitous advice.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

The most important part of L'Immaculée Conception remains, however, the attempt to simulate the kind of discourse uttered by sufferers from certain mental disorders. The simulation of the paranoiac condition, delusion of interpretation, is of considerable interest for the poet, for it raises the fundamental question of the metaphor and offers a method of obtaining new metaphors, or so it seems. The texts produced by Breton and Eluard by means of the simulation of both this form of insanity and also the condition of general paralysis, with its extremely lyrical quality, appear to have some poetic potential, but the two men never repeat this experiment. Presumably they felt that they had made their point.

Lucien Schéler, in his preface to the Pléiade edition of the complete works of Eluard, claims:
"C'est ainsi que dans L'Immaculée Conception s'exaltèrent les floraisons et les anamorphoses d'états d'âme provoqués, d'inconscients perturbés dont le caractère d'autenticité permet à d'aucuns de conclure qu'entre un individu normal (ou considéré comme tel) et un individu anormal (ou considéré comme tel) n'existait aucune différence essentielle puisque les deux expérimentateurs étaient, du moins en apparence, parvenus à temporairement s'identifier à des insensés."

He admits on the other hand that Breton in Point du Jour opposed such a deduction in the following terms:

"Quant à éprouver chemin faisant les états de conscience correspondants, nous n'y prétendions pas. L'intérêt principal de l'expérience tenait au fait qu'interrogés nous eussions sans doute pu fournir, partant des textes ainsi obtenus, des éclaircissements originaux sur le mécanisme de certaines altérations graphiques qu'on y relève et dont la psychiatrie, toujours hypnotisée par le contenu manifeste des élucubrations de malades, n'a guère entrepris jusqu'à ce jour que le classement." (PJ 97)

Breton is at pains to stress the scientific aspect of the experiment he and Eluard conducted. Nonetheless, he cannot hide its importance for poetry; he believed that the poet can make a special contribution to the study of certain mental illnesses.  

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Though the texts of Les Possessions have their scientific aspect, both L'Immaculée Conception and Ralentir Travaux prepare Breton for the writing of further series of poems in the early 1930's. He could not fail to profit from the experience of writing alongside Char and Eluard, the latter in particular. Furthermore, the predetermining of titles in L'Immaculée Conception and the considerable revision or correction of the poems of Ralentir Travaux influence Breton in the next poems he writes by himself. He has

1. op.cit., t. 1, p. xxxix.
2. Since the publication of Nadja in 1928 Breton had been waging a private war on professional psychiatrists over what he regarded as the inadequacy of some of their methods of treating the mentally ill.
by 1930 begun to question the use certain of his associates had made of automatic writing and was himself prepared to employ it a little more judiciously than he had done hitherto. As soon as Breton reverts to automatic writing, the flood of arbitrary, surrealist images returns. The surrealist image was still regarded by Breton as the basis of his poetics and continued to occupy the dominant position in his next poems. Yet despite this, one begins to feel more and more that Breton was exploring by means of those images the process of analogy, by exploiting, albeit in a very personal fashion, unusual analogies of qualities, and was attempting also to create new forms of symbolism, to weave new symbolic meanings from certain words, both commonplace and specialized.
CHAPTER SIX

"L'UNION LIBRE", "LE REVOLVER A CHEVEUX BLANCS"."VIOLETTE NOZIERES"

This chapter covers what one might regard as the next phase in Breton's evolution as a poet and it is the nature of this evolution we intend to examine in each of the three sections. The poems in question are the ones published in the form of a recueil or as brochures in the period from 1931 to 1933, and although L'Air de l'Eau came out in the following year, we are not considering it with these earlier works, because its source of inspiration, mood and subject-matter are quite different.

"L'UNION libre" (1931)

L'UNION libre is widely regarded as one of Breton's finest poems; it is referred to as a "litanie" by L.-G. Gros, who sees it as the triumph of the arbitrary image, whilst Clifford Browder describes it as a "love litany".

It is written, like most of the poems of Le Revolver à cheveux blancs, in the period between the end of Breton's first marriage and his encounter with Jacqueline Lamba. Despite the continual reference to "ma femme" in L'UNION libre, the title of the poem suggests that it was not inspired by Breton's first wife, Simone. In her detailed study of the poem, Christine Martineau-Genieys claims that the inspiration was Suzanne Musard. Anna Pontes contemporains (2e série), p. 18 ff. André Breton, Arbitre of Surrealism, p.159. Autour des images et de l'érotique surréalistes: "L'Union libre". Etude et synthèse, in Réflexions et Recherches de Nouvelle critique, Nice: Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Nice (Coll. 'Les Belles Lettres'), No.8, 2e trimestre, 1969, pp.171-186. In his Révolutionnaires sans Révolution (Paris: Edns Robert Laffont, 1972, passim) André Thirion refers to the woman with whom Breton lived at that time either as Suzanne I or as Suzanne Berl.
Balakian, however, mentions another interesting view of *L'Union libre*:

"... the poem could refer to the essence of woman, in a universalized sense, as indeed both Jacqueline and Elisa say that Breton told them it was. To Elisa, his third wife, he said that when he wrote 'L'Union libre', he was as heart-free as he had ever been in his life, and that is why he could crystallize his notion of love, identifying it not with an abstract ideal of woman but making a synthesis of her power and her beauty. In the second context as the eternal Eve, *ma femme* has an intimacy and power of generalization that are impossible to translate into another language, and gives the title 'L'Union libre' a much broader meaning as the free association of images indicates." ¹

Basically *L'Union libre* is an inventory, a "blason" of parts of the woman's body, even though Christine Martineau-Genieys points out, quite correctly, that there are two persons present in the poem; but from this rather hackneyed starting-point Breton creates little groups of images, now startling and gratuitous, now transparent and frank. The constant movement from the arbitrary to the obvious is well illustrated by the first three lines, which are a microcosm of the whole poem:

"*Ma femme à la chevelure de feu de bois*
*Aux pensées d'éclair de chaleur*
*A la taille de sablier". ¹⁰⁹

The unusual images of the woodfire hair, with its pleasant olfactory connotations, as well as the visual, tactile and symbolic ones perceived by Martineau-Genieys, and the heat-flash thoughts are counterbalanced by the dead metaphor of line 3. The cliché, "taille de sablier", is quickly reinforced, however, by the fine visual image of the next line,  

"*Ma femme à la taille de loutre entre les dents du tigre".

The litheness of the slim figure and also the ecstatic pain of

¹. Balakian, A., *André Breton*, pp.139-140.
woman in the act of physical love are admirably suggested by the image of the otter, caught in a tiger's mouth. Yet even in the cliché, the "taille de sablier", there is the possibility that its implicit allusion to the passing of time is really relevant here, making Breton aware of the temporary nature of the relationship and giving the image a new poignancy.

The poet's eyes and mind are then diverted to the woman's mouth, her teeth, her tongue:

"Ma femme à la langue d'hostie poignardée
A la langue de poupée qui ouvre et ferme les yeux
A la langue de pierre incroyable". (ibid.)

The image of the stabbed host calls to mind Nadja's comments on a kiss Breton gave her:

"C'est, m'explique-t-elle, que ce baiser la laisse sous l'impression de quelque chose de sacré, où ses dents 'tenaient lieu d'hostie'." (N 107)

Breton himself presumably remembers these words, as he seeks to evoke Suzanne's kisses.

In the poem Breton moves on to the woman's eyelashes, her eyebrows, her temples and the sparkling image her bared shoulders suggest:

"Ma femme aux épaules de champagne
Et de fontaine à têtes de dauphins sous la glace". (CT 93)

Her matchstick wrists, her fingers of chance and the ace of hearts, her fingers of new-mown hay, her arm-pits of marten and beechnut and Midsummer Night, of privet and wentletrap nests, her sluice-gate arms of meerschaum and of the mixture of wheat and the mill form the next sequence; then her legs, her calves and her feet. Breton's gaze sweeps upwards again to her neck, her throat, her breasts:
"Ma femme au cou d'orge imperlé
Ma femme à la gorge de Val d'or
De rendez-vous dans le lit même du torrent
Aux seins de nuit
Ma femme aux seins de taupinière marine
Ma femme aux seins de creuset du rubis
Aux seins de spectre de la rose sous la rosée". (CT 94)

The principle at work here is the juxtaposition of distant realities, the form of the images is the genitival metaphor; yet such considerations are forgotten, as the images immediately take on a naturalness and a rightness. Though Christine Martineau-Genieys sees "une rythmique de la caresse" (op. cit., p.176), there is in this last sequence a clue to the real secret of the poem's rhythmic structure and the verbal alchemy: as the man and woman engage in their love-play, so do the words of the poem make love in the way Breton had advocated in Les mots sans rides; the sounds of "au cou d'orge imperlé" undergo a slight metamorphosis to become "à la gorge de Val d'or", those of "aux seins de creuset du rubis" blend almost imperceptibly into "aux seins de spectre de la rose sous la rosée", and in their subtle transitions Breton succeeds in painting discreetly the clear carnation of his lover's skin.

A similar process is at work in the next line, where the phrase, "au ventre de dépliement", opens out fittingly and is completed by the words "d'éventail des jours". A further example is found a few lines later, in the bonds of sound between "de pierre roulée" and "de craie mouillée", which recalls the "aphorisms" of Rose Sélavy. An attraction, almost magnetic in its force, seems to explain the presence of the word "dos" in line 49, "Ma femme aux fesses de dos de cygne", where still re-echoes the earlier "Ma femme au dos d'oiseau" (l. 39).

Having evoked her belly, her back, the nape of her neck,
her hips, her smooth bottom, Breton moves on to the penultimate sequence, which is curiously lacking in eroticism:

"Au sexe de glaieul
Ma femme au sexe de placer et d'ornithorynque
Ma femme au sexe d'algue et de bonbons anciens
Ma femme au sexe de miroir". (CT 94-95)

Christine Martineau-Genieys insists on the blasphematory nature of the image of the gladiolus she refers to as "une sorte de lys rouge", but it is perhaps the shape of the flower rather than the colour (not always red) that Breton is thinking of here, and in any case this image makes one almost as aware of the male as of the female. The image of the mirror, though it at first serves to evoke the quality of smoothness, directs Breton back to the organs of sight, implicitly present from the outset, but now at last evoked explicitly; the eyes, as we have seen, are usually the first things which attract Breton in a woman. The first image in this sequence is simple, prosaic even; but it is succeeded by others of ever-increasing marvels, culminating in the remarkable combination of the four elements in the final line:

"Ma femme aux yeux pleins de larmes
Aux yeux de panoplie violette et d'aiguille aimantée
Ma femme aux yeux de savane
Ma femme aux yeux d'eau pour boire en prison
Ma femme aux yeux de bois toujours sous la hache
Aux yeux de niveau d'eau d'air de terre et de feu". (CT 95)

Woman is the mediatrix between Man and the universe; through her the Surrealist poet becomes aware of the world around him. In turn, as in this poem, Breton integrates the woman he loves with the elements of the universe, with the earth's minerals and plants, with the birds of the air, with the creatures of the sea, with land-animals.
Anna Balakian explains how she thinks one must approach this poem:

"The reader of the poem must remember Breton's concept of the analogy: the parts of the metaphor that seem so distant from each other actually lose their antinomy when we think of them from the point of view not of form, but of function, which is the basis of the association. The poem does not present a photographic picture of the woman but conveys the power she exercises on the poet........ 1

Yet the reader instinctively visualizes the images, as is always the case with Surrealist poetry; he sees the otter in the tiger's teeth, but he sees much more than that. He sees a new vision of woman, he appreciates a new reaction to her beauty. He forgets for a while the manifest tenor of the images and thinks instead of the multiple and fresh associations the vehicles suggest: the fragrant, gentle wisps of smoke rising in silence from the woodfire and evoking the softness and the sweetness of a woman's hair; the savannah eyes lead to thoughts of far-off lands where men and women can roam free like the wild beasts stalking through the grass. Love is the source of manifold sensations, each new affair brings new experiences to all men; and it is this that Breton wishes to express; the purpose of his images is to capture or suggest these multiple sensations and experiences, the banal and the stupendous, the gentle and the savage, the fresh and the familiar, the eternal and the momentary. Hence he takes his motifs from myriad domains: astronomy, zoology, geography, botany, geology, chemistry; the home, school and shops; swallows' nests, stars of the greatest magnitude, elder pith, white peacock feathers, moist chalk, marine molehills and drinking Java-sparrows. Love seems all-embracing, connected with everything, pervading the four ele-

1. Balakian, A., André Breton, p.140.
ments; and woman makes it so. The universe takes on form in relation to Her and is defined in terms of Her, as She is defined in terms of the universe in this poem.

Although Anna Balakian mentions that the eyes are for the occultists the visible evidence of the ignited nature of the human organism, discusses Breton's use of the preposition de in this poem with reference to the ancient alchemic notion of "one in the other" or the rebus, and sees that the enumeration of the four elements in the last line gives us the key to the alchemic nature of the poem, it is rather strange, given her preoccupation with discovering hermetic motifs in Breton's writings, that she does not cite the other instances of their presence in L'Union libre. The title itself could indicate that Breton has in mind the alchemists' notion of the free union of two autonomous principles; moreover, the allusion to the profanation of the host in the evocation of the tongue, to the bunches of keys in the sequence devoted to the feet, to the crucible, to quicksilver, the use of symbolic words, "écume de mer", found in early alchemical and chemical texts, all indicate that this poem has this extra layer of hermeticism. The free union of man and woman is depicted against the backdrop of the principle of "free union" found in occultist doctrines.

As far as the form of the imagery is concerned, in addition to the use of the preposition "de" to link the tenor and vehicle in

1. Perhaps Anna Balakian should have pointed out that the four elements constitute the alchemist's "Quaternary".
the metaphors, Breton employs throughout the poem the Homeric epithet, as all the above quotations from *L'Union libre* clearly reveal. This gives the poem an expansive, leisured tonality which makes one feel that the couple have all the time in the world just for each other, all the time in the world to explore each other, to make constantly fresh discoveries, which the surprise juxtapositions with the epithets express. The images are different from the ones where the two terms are connected by means of the preposition "à", which Breton discusses in *L'Amour fou* with reference to Raymond Roussel (cf. supra, pp. 264-265). In *L'Union Libre* it is not a question of linking "n'importe quel substantif" to "n'importe quel autre", but rather of introducing the different parts of the woman's body prior to their evocation in the images proper.

*L'Union libre* is a great and beautiful poem, combining the wonders of automatism with more judiciously selected images - or perhaps superb transparent images thrown up by the subconscious voice. The coherence of a text such as *Il n'y a rien d'incompréhensible* in *L'Immaculée Conception* is retained for a major poem. *L'Union libre* has a firm structure - there is a fairly rational progression in the order of the groups of images - but to this is added the more arbitrary component, the images themselves. It is a poem which illustrates how the bizarre, exotic or wonderful fruits of the surreal can be grafted on to the sturdier stock of reason.

For a while this lesson appears to be forgotten by Breton, for a number of the new poems in *Le revolver à cheveux blancs* are more reminiscent of those of *Clair de Terre*, but this is not
really surprising, for some, in fact, were written in the 1920's. Nonetheless, the new recueil does contain some interesting developments, especially in the field of imagery.

"Le revolver à cheveux blancs" (1932)

At first sight Le revolver à cheveux blancs confirms the belief that Breton by the time he wrote the important poems of Clair de Terre had discovered the basic technique and style he was to employ for the rest of his career, and most of the images appear to fall into one or more of the various categories Breton listed in the first Manifeste. On closer examination, however, one finds that although the initial impression is by and large a correct one, the new poems of Le revolver à cheveux blancs reveal an evolution in Breton's poetics. This section seeks to bring out this evolution and to relate it to developments in Breton's life and prose-writings since the middle of the 1920's.

Le revolver à cheveux blancs begins with a very important prologue, entitled Il n'y aura une fois, which opens with the statement:

"Imagination n'est pas don mais par excellence objet de conquête." (CT 99)

This remark heralds a new phrase in Breton's poetics, if not in his way of life. Though ever since the end of the First World War he had made himself completely "disponible" in his habits, always prepared for the chance encounter, for new adventures, there is now the implication that he must do likewise in his poetics: inspiration must be supported by the poet creating situations conducive to its flowering. This concept is expressed implicitly by means of concrete examples in Il y aura une fois.
First of all, however, Breton quotes a question asked by Huysmans in *En rade*: 1

"Où, dans quel temps, sous quelles latitudes, dans quels parages pouvait bien se lever ce palais immense, avec ses coupoles étalées dans la rue, ses colonnes phalliques, ses piliers émergeant d’un pavé miroitant et dur?" (CT 99)

Having examined this question, Breton reaffirms the faith he places in the imagination, ending the section on the prophetic note, "L'imaginaire est ce qui tend à devenir réel." (CT 100)

Marc Eigeldinger discusses this definition in his important essay, *L'Art de brûler la chandelle par les deux bouts:*

"Le réel absolu, au sens où l'entend le surréalisme, ne saurait se confondre avec le donné matériel et le modèle extérieur, objets de l'esthétique naturaliste, il s'identifie avec le possible. La fonction de l'imaginaire consiste à donner de réalité les apparences, à approfondir le réel, à pénétrer intuitivement au cœur du possible, afin de rendre compte des révélations implicites qu'il contient." 2

In a footnote he shows how Breton and Baudelaire are in accord on this subject, for both poets recognize the primacy of the imagination over the other faculties, and on the specific point Eigeldinger makes, he quotes the *Salon de 1859* which defines thus the role of the imagination:

"L'imaginaire est la reine du vrai, et le possible est une des provinces du vrai. Elle est positivement apparenté avec l'infini."  3

Breton in the next part of *Il y aura une fois* proceeds to follow his own advice. He reveals his wish to buy a property in the vicinity of Paris and gives a brief description of his dream-

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1. Huysmans was one of the writers Breton discovered while still at school, thanks to his teacher, Albert Keim (v. Breton, A., *Poésie et autres*, p.10).
3. ibid., note 2.
house. It turns out to be another of the châteaux which appear so frequently in his works. The idea of "dépaysement" is mentioned specifically, when Breton states his preference for the post-house style. He proposes to install in the house a number of girls and young women, chosen either for their beauty or for "l'étrangeté de leur esprit", or to take part in spiritualist séances. Rather surprisingly, perhaps, Breton imposes a ban on love-making within the confines of the park. (Possibly it is just promiscuity Breton wishes to oppose here).

At last he divulges his true motive for desiring such a property:

"Je répète qu'en écrivant ces lignes, je fais momentanément abstraction de tout autre point de vue que le point de vue poétique, ce qui ne veut pas dire que j'accepte le moins du monde de passer pour me débattre dans l'utopie. Je me borne à indiquer une source de mouvements curieux, en grande partie imprévisibles, source qui, si l'on consentait une première fois à suivre sa pente - et je gage qu'on l'acceptera - serait, à ébranler des monts et des monts d'ennui, la promesse d'un magnifique torrent." (CT 104-105)

Breton is urging the poet to take the plunge and venture into the rich and unexplored domains of the imagination, as he himself takes the plunge:

"S'il osait s'aventurer, seul ou presque, sur les terres foudroyées du hasard? Si l'esprit désembrumé de ces contes qui, enfants, faisaient nos délices tout en commençant dans nos coeurs à creuser la déception, cet homme se risquait à arracher sa proie de mystère au passé? Si ce poète voulait pénétrer lui-même dans l'Antre? S'il'était, lui, vraiment résolu à n'ouvrir la bouche que pour dire: 'Il y aura une fois.....'?" (CT 105)

With the use and the help of the imagination the poet will be able to enter a new wonderland, as rich in treasures and marvels as any in children's fairy-tales. It is on this note that Breton introduces the poems of Le revolver à cheveux blancs; if he has truly
practised what he preaches, these poems should set the seal on the triumph of the imagination. The fact that Le revolver à cheveux blancs is the sole recueil to possess a preface of this particular kind should be sufficient indication of the importance of Il y aura une fois. The château, like Huysman's palace, like Facteur Cheval's Palais Idéal, which is the subject of one of the poems, is a symbol of desire, an image of the triumph of the poet's imagination. When one recalls that Le revolver à cheveux blancs was the first recueil published by Breton after the Second Manifeste and that there he linked explicitly the triumph of the imagination with the philosopher's stone (cf. supra, p.156), one can perhaps deduce that these new poems are further experiments in verbal alchemy and even that this is perhaps the collection's underlying theme. Words will be alloyed together like base metals and perhaps an ounce or two of the pure gold of lyricism will be extracted and refined.

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The intriguing title of this recueil is itself a fine example of a visual surrealist image, if it is interpreted literally. It may be an allusion to a fired gun, with the wisps of smoke suggesting white hair. If so, this title may evoke a suicide attempt, or else Breton's famous example of the simplest Surrealist act, taking a loaded revolver out into the street and firing indiscriminately into the crowd. Roger Garaudy, trying to explain this image, implies that Breton was haunted by a couple of memories:

"Évoquant les applications du surréalisme à l'action, Breton, hanté sans doute par le souvenir de Jarry pour qui le maniement du revolver était le jeu favori, et plus encore par le souvenir
de Jacques Vaché et de son irruption au théâtre, l'arme au poing, le soir de la générale des Mamelles de Tirésias, formule cet autre axiome......" 1

The most interesting and probably the most accurate explanation of Breton's new title is the one given by Anna Balakian:

"It could easily be dismissed as a marvelously successful case of automatic writing, and it may indeed have come to Breton spontaneously. On the other hand, his friends mention that he chose his titles very carefully and significantly. Revolver could refer to the pure Surrealist act mentioned in the Second Manifeste - the work of intense protest. Cheveux blancs could refer to the White Work in the evolution of the Great Work. The emblem of the White Work was the crescent moon, and its light was likened in its shimmering to white hair; the 'white' stage of the Great Work represented the work of youth, imperfect but more available than the subsequent stages of the Great Work. Thus in a sense, Breton's title could be said to combine protest and magic, and the half-open door of revelation." 2

If one judges from the internal evidence afforded by Le revolver à cheveux blancs, however, the idea of a suicide attempt does not appear to be altogether misplaced, for the predominant overt theme of the recueil seems, in fact, to be death.

The recueil proper opens on an ominous note, with a poem clearly inspired by the theme of death, which is mentioned even in its title, Le mort rose, but the last journey, the journey unto death, with which the poem starts, is accomplished within a very surreal cadre: the ship will be guided by winged octopuses. Mary Ann Caws here puts the emphasis on the theme of the journey and reads the "pievures ailées" as an echo of Le Bateau ivre, 3 which she hears reverberating in the allusion to a letter "de petites dimensions" in the poem Dernière levée. This latter point is

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2. André Breton, p.132.
somewhat unconvincing, however. The winged octopuses could perhaps be seen as embodiments of death, apocalyptic beasts, particularly as the figurative meaning of "pieuvre" is "personne insatiable dans ses exigences, qui ne lâche jamais sa proie" (Robert); or else their role as guides may be explained by a possible connection in form between the tentacles of the octopuses and the points of a compass.

The opening tableau is followed by further images of death and oblivion: the unique vigil after which one feels the black and white sun rise into one's hair, comets striking down forests, the dissolution into indivisible love. The poet envisions the moments immediately prior to death, his last thoughts, the last things he notices:

"Avant qu'il fasse complètement nuit tu observeras
La grande pause de l'argent
Sur un pêcher en fleur apparaîtront les mains
Qui écrivirent ces vers et qui seront des fuseaux d'argent
Elles aussi et aussi des hirondelles d'argent sur le métier de la pluie". (CT 106)

These superb images, in which the colour silver predominates, evoke perhaps the dazzling flashes of insight the poet expects to experience in the halfway house 'twixt life and death. The image of the spinning-frame calls to mind the myth of the Fates spinning and finally snapping the thread of man's life, but delicate and intricate ramifications of this image give ground before a series of cosmic images:

"Tu verras l'horizon s'entrouvrir et c'en sera fini tout à coup du baiser de l'espace
Mais la peur n'existera déjà plus et les carreaux du ciel et de la mer
Voleront au vent plus fort que nous." (CT 106-107)

The verb "entrouvrir", employed previously in L'Aigrette, helps to evoke the theme of new and sudden revelation and is a modifi-
cation of the stock idea of "suddenly lifting the veil." In the poet's vision elements are fused together, distinctions between them become meaningless.

The poet thinks of the effect his death would have on his beloved and imagines her reactions, the quivering of her voice, when she hears the sad news. He knows, however, that their love will soon be forgotten:

"Mais les noms des amants seront oubliés
Comme l'adonide goutte de sang
Dans la lumière folle
Demain tu mentiras à ta propre jeunesse
A ta grande jeunesse luciole". (CT 107)

The name of the flower, a variety of anemone, recalls the legend, told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, of Venus making a deep red blossom spring up from the blood of Adonis; and, of course, it reinforces the theme of death.

At the end of the poem Breton feels that he will return after death to haunt his lover's dreams. There is a hint that she could even join him; in the final lines there is the possible implication that she could put an end to her life:

"Et dans le train fait de tortues de glace
Tu n'auras pas à tirer le signal d'alarme
Tu arriveras seule sur cette plage perdue
Où une étoile descendra sur tes bagages de sable". (CT 108)

This poem captures the tone, though not the form, of Baudelaire's beautiful sonnet, written to the same subject, *La mort des amants*. Breton's treatment of the theme is much more complex and much more subtle, relying on pure suggestion rather than on explicit statement, and built around splendidly original images and associations. The beauty of the poem becomes a triumph over death and a triumph over the despair which gave rise to thoughts of death, so that one is tempted to recall Baudelaire's famous concept
of "l'alchimie de la douleur".

The next poem, Non-lieu, is set in a kind of limbo, where the poet resides after death; significantly, the bird he sees there is an ibis. The name of a cabaret Breton claims to have entered on the previous day is likewise significant, for it was called "A la rage de Dieu". Yet the poem pulsates with life and movement, as in the persuasive lines 13-15:

"Prenez ces roses qui grimpent au puits des miroirs
Prenez les battements de tous les cils
Prenez jusqu'aux fils qui soutiennent les pas des danseurs
de corde et des gouttes d'eau". (CT 109)

We are in the presence of a convulsive beauty, where the natural embraces the man-made (l. 13) and the dynamic is suspended in mid-air (l. 15); and the device of repetition brings not just the effect of persuasion but also that of lyricism. Elsewhere in this poem, women drive chariots across meadows; "les roues du rêve charment les splendides ornières/qui se lèvent très haut sur les coquilles de leurs robes"; through a window Breton watches men in cocked hats walk by; and the lyricism is sustained by the alliterative "Pareils aux pluies que j'aimais". The balance, referred to explicitly in a number of ways, becomes a stylistic feature in the repeated line "Art des jours art des nuits" and in the last two lines,

"Jamais le ciel toujours le silence
Jamais la liberté que pour la liberté".

Still exploring the theme of death, the title of the prose-poem Le verbe être is presumably inspired by Hamlet's famous soliloquy, as he weighs up the respective merits of living and dying, and tries to choose between them. The leitmotif of this poem is the obsessive phrase, which keeps recurring, "Je connais le
désespoir dans ses grandes lignes." Breton in this poem attempts to define despair; he does so first of all in a negative way:

"Le désespoir n'a pas d'ailes, il ne se tient pas nécessairement à une table desservie sur une terrasse, le soir, au bord de la mer." (CT 119)

When he comes to his more positive evocations of despair, they are, as one might expect by now, somewhat arbitrary:

"Une forme très petite, délimitée par des bijoux de cheveux. C'est le désespoir. Un collier de perles pour lequel on ne saurait trouver de fermoir et dont l'existence ne tient pas même à un fil, voilà le désespoir." (ibid.)

Life has gone off the rails; Breton seeks a solution and cannot find one; solitude reigns. Yet, as was often the case in Breton's life, despair, boredom and solitude can lead to surprising discoveries; and the stranger images of this poem exemplify this phenomenon. Though the individual images may be sometimes hermetic, the constant repetition of the dominant phrase makes Breton produce a sustained and fairly coherent poem. The repetitive nature of the poem is counterbalanced, however, by the characteristic twist Breton gives to the leitmotif at the end:

"Dans ses grandes lignes le désespoir n'a pas d'importance. C'est une corvée d'arbres qui va encore faire une forêt, c'est une corvée d'étoiles qui va encore faire un jour de moins qui va encore faire une vie." (CT 120)

The mood is reminiscent of Plutôt la vie. Breton decides to accept the drudgery after crying out dramatically for help. Yet the "corvées" are of trees and stars, symbols of life and beauty. The crisis passes, if only temporarily.

La Forêt dans la hache (CT 123-124), though ambiguous, seems to be written from a point in time after death. It is not even clear who has died. All the remarks relating to the question are rather contradictory. The poem begins with the observation:
"On vient de mourir mais je suis vivant et cependant je n'ai plus d'âme."

One thinks it may be love which has died; but several lines later Breton adds rather enigmatically:

"On vient de mourir, - ni toi ni moi ni eux exactement mais nous tous, sauf moi qui survis de plusieurs façons: j'ai encore froid, par exemple."

The poem totters delicately at the watershed of the absurd and the profound. Breton continues to puzzle the reader by references to the separation from his body firstly of his soul, secondly of his shadow. Even his body is substantially transformed and becomes completely transparent:

"Je n'ai plus qu'un corps transparent à l'intérieur duquel des colombes transparentes se jettent sur un poignard transparent tenu par une main transparente."

The theme of transparency bathes the lines in light and purity; from these negations of elementary physical properties "le merveilleux" is born, and the marriage of absurdity and lyricism noted in L'Immaculée Conception is likewise the source of vitality here. Once again the initial note of death gives ground before images of life renewed, and the poem ends significantly with an expression of this death/life movement: "Cette femme tient un bouquet d'immortelles de la forme de mon sang."

The theme of death is still the main bond between some of the remaining poems in the recueil. Les attitudes spectrales (CT 114-116) begins with the clear statement,

"Je n'attache aucune importance à la vie",

and then Breton amuses himself by playing around with this line, thereby obtaining lines 2 and 3:

"Je n'épingle pas le moindre papillon de vie à l'importance Je n'importe pas à la vie".
The suicide theme returns in *Rideau rideau* (CT 132-133), which is constructed around the framework of allusions to the theatre, as its title suggests. The opening line of the poem implies that each scene it depicts may reflect a different season or a different aspect of Breton's life:

"Les théâtres vagabonds des saisons qui auront joué ma vie."

Breton's function in the play, however, appears to be nothing more than to provide the catcalls from his box, specially fitted out as a dark cell, from behind whose bars he watches the play. At the end of the first act the heroine, naked to the waist, commits suicide. The catcalls recall the noisy demonstrations in theatres where Surrealists and Dadaists "performed" or interrupted performances of rival groups.

The next act in this poem is the descent of mist onto the stage; Breton shouts and breaks a pitcher; he tries to cut his wrist (once more the suicide theme!); he sees himself lost in strange countries. Suddenly a character appears on the stage, wearing a mask of Breton himself.

The final part of the poem is dominated by the theme of freedom, but actually ends with a vision of Breton's death:

"Liberté de chasser devant moi les apparences réelles
Le sous-sol était merveilleux sur un mur blanc apparaissait
en pointillé de feu ma silhouette percée au cœur d'une balle."

The thought of suicide, this time by poison, returns, too, at the end of *Dernière levée* (CT 144). This preoccupation with death may be a largely subconscious preoccupation, for the poems have an oneiric air and are probably the products of automatic writing, but nevertheless the presence of allusions to death in this *recueil* cannot be denied. *Le revolver à cheveux blancs* was published, of
course, in the same year as *Les Vases communicants*, and so it comes as no surprise to discover that it is pervaded with the same feeling of despair and gloom one notices in the prose-work. Yet there are numerous indications that death, here perhaps the poetic symbol of the poet's despair, is but a starting point. Out of the despair, out of life's seeming drabness Breton can distil great lyric runs.

The simultaneous composition of *Les Vases communicants* is possibly responsible in part for the oneiric sequences in *Le revolver à cheveux blancs*, though, as we have seen, dream-material seems to be a constant feature of collections of Surrealist poems. The descent of mist on to the stage in *Rideau rideau* recalls the blurred effect of certain dreams and that section of the poem has the air of a dream-narration. The presence in this poem of the figure of an observer may serve to embody the concept of visionary perception, or that of the interpretation of dreams. Furthermore, internal evidence in *Vigilance* suggests that this, too, is probably an oneiric poem:

"A ce moment sur la pointe des pieds dans mon sommeil
Je me dirige vers la chambre où je suis étendu
Et j'y mets le feu". (CT 137)

The surrealist images which follow are therefore possibly dream-images: pieces of furniture transformed into animals, lions in whose manes chairs are consumed - the appearance of a lion's mane presumably suggests a fire, as it did in the famous example which gave rise to the "jeu de l'un dans l'autre" (cf. supra, p.180) - , the remains of the poet's body pecked at by fiery ibises, a lace shell in the form of a breast.

The inspiration of the penultimate poem, *Une branche d'ortie entre par la fenêtre*, may likewise be oneiric, although the poem
could alternatively be an orthodox product of automatic writing or even a simple "transposition d'art". Really, it is futile to attempt to distinguish between dream and imagination at this level, but it is possible to see the theme of dreams and oneiric images as part and parcel of the imagination theme suggested by the preface. Even the theme of love could here be seen in this light.

Breton's search for a new love at this troubled period of his life is the obvious explanation of certain of the erotic images to be found in this recueil, but although Un homme et une femme absolument blanche (CT 128-9) is inspired by the sight of some prostitutes, it is only at the end of the poem that there is a series of erotic images:

"Je vois leurs seins qui mettent une pointe de soleil dans la nuit profonde
Et dont le temps de s'abaisser et de s'élever est la seule mesure exacte de la vie
Je vois leurs seins qui sont des étoiles sur des vagues
Leurs seins dans lesquels pleure à jamais l'invisible lait bleu".

The arbitrary surrealist images, as in the case of the apparent contradiction in the last line, minimize the latent eroticism, just as in Magritte's La magie noire the nude figure loses much of her sexual appeal, despite her shapely contours, because of her one surreal feature, the absence of eyes. In Breton's poem the thrill the breasts create is expressed in the fine image of the break of day or even of the midnight sun and in the second cosmic image of the stars over the waves.

There is perhaps the hint of the veiled erotic at the end of a splendid evocation of sunrise near the start of Le Sphinx vertébral (CT 134):

l. cf. Les Vases communicants.
"Ce matin proue de soleil comme tu t'engloutis dans les superbes chants exhalés à l'ancienne derrière les rideaux par les guetteuses nues";

and the opening image of "the prow of the sun" also suggests very discreetly and implicitly a female figure.

The sleek white-bellied dogfish in Vigilance (CT 136), because they are incorporated into "le dernier frisson des draps/A l'heure de l'amour et des paupières bleues", become erotic images, symbolising the sexual rapaciousness of women in love and recalling the episode in Les Chants de Maldoror where the hero mates with a female shark.

The poem Sans connaissance (CT 139-142) is built around the theme of an attempt at abduction; and almost immediately after the initial statement of this theme Breton creates an appropriate atmosphere with an erotic observation:

"Je vois des seins comme si elle était nue
On dirait des mouchoirs séchant sur un rosier".

The image is at once arbitrary and apt, combining the idea of whiteness with the stock sexual symbolism of the rose.

Yet the statement of these manifest themes - death, suicide, dreams, love - gives little indication of the real nature of Le revolver à cheveux blancs, with the consequence that one is forced to seek elsewhere how the imagination-theme operates; one must consider the principle of metamorphosis at work in the imagery, and certain stylistic devices and features.

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If one turns first of all to the imagery, Breton, himself, in his article on Péret in the Anthologie de l'humour noir (cf. supra, p.168) links together the emancipation of language and the imagination
with verbal alchemy and the concept of metamorphosis:

"Tout est délivré, tout poétiquement est sauvé par la remise en vigueur d’un principe généralisé de mutation, de métamorphose." *(HN 506)*

Already instances of metamorphosis have been noted in *La Forêt dans la hache* *(CT 123-4)* and in *Vigilance* *(CT 137-8)*. Perhaps the most interesting examples, however, occur in the closing poem, which forms a curious tribute to Lautréamont, *Le grand secours meurtrier* *(CT 147-8)*, which contains the only mention of the name of the Surrealists' great idol one finds in Breton's poems.

One assumes that the theatre fire-hydrant (*"grand secours"*) of the title is to be identified with the strange statue of Lautréamont which is the central motif of the poem:

"La statue de Lautréamont  
Au socle de cachets de quinine  
En rase campagne  
L'auteur des Poésies est couché à plat ventre  
Et près de lui l'héloderme suspect". *(CT 147)*

The fire-hydrant is the kind of object Breton in the 1930's is prepared to elevate to the rank of an "objet surréaliste".¹

The very position of the statue, prostrate, is a deviation from normality. The presence of a lizard, the heloderm, near the statue is another example of Breton introducing into his poetry exotic zoological motifs. The heloderm is more or less a surreal beast in its own right, but Breton makes it yet more surreal by distorting its left ear, which becomes a glass box.

Suspended in the air above is a further surreal motif:

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1. An important section of *L'Amour fou* is, as we have seen, an account of the wanderings of Breton and Giacometti around Paris in search of strange objects which, if placed in unusual surroundings, acquire completely fresh values and, if the artist so desires, can be regarded as ready-made "objets d'art".
"Le ballon bleu ciel en forme de tête de Turo". (ibid.)

Apart from the fact that this image contains another example of Breton's exploitation of a literal interpretation of a set locution, "tête de Turo", it is interesting, too, for the way in which the ball and the head are coalesced to form one object; this is a device employed by Surrealist artists and poets alike; they blend together completely different objects to create a single Surrealist object. So this technique takes one step further the basic idea of the surrealist image, for the archetypal surrealist image, as formulated by Breton in the first Manifest, simply juxtaposes two "distant realities", whereas the device illustrated in the above metamorphosis-image actually fuses the two phenomena into one. Anna Balakian has devoted an article to the question of Metaphor and Metamorphosis in André Breton's poetics,¹ where she picks out a few technical procedures which the poet employs to suggest the metamorphosis latent in imagery:

"There is a renewal of the correspondence technique: we find that instead of the concrete becoming abstract, the abstract is crystallized into the concrete. Disguise is another device much in use, the lifting of which produces poetic revelation."

(op.cit., p.36)

The basic difference between metaphor and metamorphosis, however, is that the former is a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable, whereas the latter is the action or process of changing in form, shape or substance. In certain images, largely because of their particular form, the reader is more aware of the element of metamorphosis: in the above example the use of the words "en forme de" rather than the third person singular of

¹. v. Introduction, p.8.
the verb "être" is responsible for this.

Then Breton reintroduces the principal motif of the poem. The statue either undergoes a complete metamorphosis or else takes on a more precise form, that of a swan. The basis of this new motif, "le cygne de Montévidéo", is of course, the stock French synonym of the word "poète".¹

In the poem Breton begins to interpret the word "cygne" quite literally:

"Le cygne de Montévidéo dont les ailes sont déployées et toujours prêtes à battre
Lorsqu'il s'agit d'attirer de l'horizon les autres cygnes
Ouvre sur le faux univers deux yeux de couleurs différentes
L'un de sulfate de fer sur la treille des cils l'autre de boue diamantée". ¹

The surreal effect is reinforced by these two lines, which are followed by an image implying the fusion of the natural and the man-made, the idea of dressing the wounds of a machine:

"Il voit le grand hexagone à entonnoir dans lequel se crispneront bientôt les machines
Que l'homme s'acharne à couvrir de pansements".

Many of the metamorphoses are made possible by the fact that animal, vegetable, mineral and even abstract, are no longer separated one from the other and, of course, a basic object of the alchemists of old was to study the division of matter into the animal, vegetable and mineral. One transformation has already been noticed in La Forêt dans la hache; later in the same poem the body undergoes a second metamorphosis:

"Mais j'ai un corps pour ne plus m'en défaire, pour forcer les reptiles à m'admirer. Des mains sanglantes, des yeux de gui, une bouche de feuille morte et de verre (les feuilles mortes bougent sous le verre; elles ne sont pas aussi rouges

¹. cf. "le cygne de Mantoue" = Virgil. Lautréamont was born in Montevideo. (also cf. "the Swan of Avon" in English).
qu'on le pense, quand l'indifférence expose ses méthodes voraces), des mains pour te cueillir, thym minuscule de mes rêves, romarin de mon extrême pâleur." (CT 124)

This hallucinatory metamorphosis-image illustrates splendidly the principle Breton formulated in Le Surréalisme et la Peinture (v. supra, pp.137-138). In this example, however, Breton does not even content himself with exploiting similarities, as was the case with the "phyllie", but follows his basic desire of bringing together "distant realities": "une bouche" and "une feuille morte", for instance.

Though the thyme and the rosemary may evoke a delicate fragrance, attempts to substitute an abstract quality for the concrete, visual force of the "bouche de feuille morte et de verre" are destined to fight a losing battle and indeed the appeal of such images does lie in the shock they generate.

A similar kind of fusion is encountered in Sur la route qui monte et descend (CT 111-113), which is dominated by the motif of a flame. For part of the time it seems to be set against water-images, but this elemental opposition is ended dramatically in the final line with the surreal fusion of the elements in a neat and striking chiasmus:

"Flamme d'eau guide-moi jusqu'à la mer de feu".

Earlier the flame appears to be consuming a piece of paper, perhaps a poem, perhaps a picture. As it comes to various motifs and objects, the poet begins to evoke them; some of the descriptions are full of surrealist images - images of apparent contradiction, of the negation of elementary physical properties, of "dépaysement", as in the interesting scene:
"Une statue est agenouillée sur la mer mais
Ce n'est plus la mer
Les phares se dressent maintenant dans la ville
Ils barrent la route aux blocs merveilleux de glace et de chair
Qui précipitent dans l'arène leurs inombrables chars". (CT 111)

The changes, the metamorphoses may in part be explained by the switchback nature of the road in the title, which could be understood as an image of the poet's kaleidoscopic vision and perspective; the poet may instinctively have called a broad expanse of water "la mer" before realizing, for example, that it is a lake; but it is far more difficult to find a rational solution to the problem of the identity of the "blocs merveilleux de glace et de chair." This image has a Cubist quality and is also reminiscent of the pristine child-like vision of Rimbaud's Après le déluge, where there is another sudden movement to polar regions.

The negation of elementary physical properties and "dépaysement" are the main features of a humorous sequence, which conforms to the basic requirement of the surrealist image, in the poem entitled Dernière levée, (CT 143-4) built around the motif of a letter Breton is expecting. It opens with the amusing idea:

"La lettre que j'attends voyage incognito dans une enveloppe".

The humour is pursued in a series of images beginning with a development of stock circumlocutions of the idea of "never":

"Quand elle me parviendra le soleil sera froid
Il y aura des épaves sur la place Blanche
Parmi lesquelles se distinguera mon courage
Pareil à un treuil d'écureuils".

Yet the humorous aspect is counterbalanced to some extent by the quality of the diction which helps to give the lines a strangely prophetic, visionary air. The internal rhyme in "treuil d'écureuils" is here lyrical rather than precious, possibly because it is used in an unexpected comparison with "courage". The squirrels,
because they are small, bring out the poignancy of some courageous stands.

Apart from the new concept of "convulsive beauty" (cf. supra, pp.241-243), the manifestations of which in Le revolver à cheveux blanches will be discussed presently, like the links between these poems and L'Amour fou, this recueil illustrates once more the principal features encountered in Breton's previous Surrealist writings. At the level of the imagery the arbitrary type still prevails: Le Sphinx vertébral (CT 134), for example, consists largely of a stream of such images, creating grotesque Surrealist objects: a tailor's dummy dripping blood, living columns of marble and vetiver. Furthermore, Breton's delight in word-play continues undiminished. In Non-lieu there is an apparently puerile internal rhyme:

"Mais les femmes-marins qui glissent derrière les vitres
Sont trop heureuses pour être peureuses"; (CT 110)

but as with the "treuil d'écureuils" Breton creates a trembling balance between the two words and between their two meanings.

In Les attitudes spectrales (CT 114-16) there is another modification of a proverb: the set locution, "Il ne faut jamais dire: Fontaine, je ne boirai pas de ton eau", is the basis for Breton's line, "Enfin les fontaines comprendraient qu'il ne faut pas dire Fontaine". In Toutes les écolières ensemble (CT 125) Breton's love of punning is given an opportunity to come to the surface once more in what is possibly a reference to a schoolgirl error:

"Après une dictée où Le cœur m'en dit
S'écrivait peut-être Le cœur mendie".

In such examples it is quite clear that Breton just lets the words "make love", but it is quite possible that the principle of "les mots font l'amour" runs through this whole collection. The
poems may not mean anything; they may simply evoke moods or display the potential, the freedom and the triumph of the imagination. It may be that Breton by this time has fully realized how the language of poetry, freed of the need to communicate ideas, operates. "Le soleil blanc et noir" (CT 106) may be a contradiction in terms, yet the two adjectives seem to attract each other in the manner of unlike poles and they cancel each other out to leave the image of ultra-pure light. Similarly, "une banquise aux dents de flamme" (CT 115) is ostensibly another association of opposites, indeed of different elements, yet the image of the "teeth of flame" lends an even greater sharpness and destructive potential to the ice-floe. Breton is fascinated by certain words and phrases, frequently new additions to the vocabulary of poetry, occasionally by ideas they suggest: the fragile convulsive beauty of "larmes bataviques" (CT 135), of "les glaces de Venise" (CT 112) and of "l'arbre de corail" (CT 127); the strange juxtaposition in "Le Sphinx vertébral" (CT 134); the image of "Les pépites de lumière" (CT 115), which combines the themes of gold and light; the association of fire and water, human and animal, in the lines from Sur la route qui monte et descend (CT 112):

"Et cette chevelure qui ne s'attarde point à se défaire
Flotte sur l'air méduse c'est la flamme",

which leads into allusions to a cross and a tomb and then to a strange image which possibly evokes the Holy Ghost: "la flamme aux ailes de colombe". Names of birds, flowers, trees, precious stones, ideas associated with the four elements are blended together in the delicate cascade of words, in the process of transmutation. If this is not, in fact, the Alchemy of the Verb, it is nonetheless a
marvellous representation of the concept.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

The manifest themes and the basic types of images have, of course, been found many a time in Breton's earlier poems, automatic texts and dream-narrations. Where Le revolver à cheveux blancs does differ, however, from Breton's previous writings is in the more frequent use he makes there of images of "convulsive beauty", to use the term coined provocatively at the end of Nadja and which he explains in detail in L'Amour fou. Three images which can be placed in this category have just been noted, but in the poem Facteur Cheval, which will be discussed in greater detail in due course, the very motif Breton cites to illustrate the concept of "convulsive beauty", the railway engine in a forest, is discovered:

"Tu t'en souviens tu te levais alors tu descendais du train
Sans un regard pour la locomotive en proie aux immense racines barométriques
Qui se plaint dans la forêt vierge de toutes ses chaudières meutries". (CT 130)

The image in this poem, like the château in the preface, could be, to some extent, the fulfilment of one of Breton's longstanding desires, notwithstanding the fact that L'Amour fou was published five years after Le revolver à cheveux blancs. Moreover, it illustrates the way in which the Surrealists are able to fuse together natural and man-made objects without the slightest trouble. Significantly, Victor Crastre sees this image as a "symbole d'un 'modernisme' mort".¹

The abandonment of the statue "en rase campagne" in Le grand secours meurtrier could be regarded as a further instance of "la beauté convulsive", provided that one considers its potential for movement,

¹. André Breton, p.98.
a potential realized after its transformation into a swan. Furthermore, the question of convulsive beauty is related by Breton in *L'Amour fou* to the imagery of Lautréamont, for there Breton claims that the best examples of "la poésie convulsive", which he considers to be a poetic equivalent of such a conception of beauty, are found in the famous "beau comme" images of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. So, in the poem, *Le grand secours meurtrier*, one is not greatly surprised to read an allusion to this point:

"J'ai accès près de lui en qualité de convulsionnaire". (CT 148)

Though the word "convulsionnaire" usually refers to one of the "convulsionnaires de Saint-Médard", the Jansenist convulsionaries, it acquires a private and special significance for Breton, for he appears to associate it with the concept of "convulsive beauty" by allowing the non-semantic bonds between the words to take over.

The poem ends with a further sequence of images which illustrate Breton's conception of this kind of beauty:

"Les femmes ravissantes qui m'introduisent dans le wagon de roses
Où un hamac qu'elles ont pris soin de me faire de leurs chevelures m'est réservé
De toute éternité
Me recommandent avant de partir de ne pas prendre froid dans la lecture du journal
Il paraît que la statue près de laquelle le chien sent de mes terminaisons nerveuses
Arrive à destination est accordée chaque nuit comme un piano". (CT 148)

The "wagon", the symbol of movement and the man-made, is upholstered with roses, the symbol of nature; the hammock (conventionally man-made) is here made with hair (the natural); the statue is surrounded, if not overgrown, by couch-grass, albeit the "couch-grass" of Breton's nerve-endings, an image inspired by the basic similarity of form.
Thus the opening pages of _L'Amour fou_, where Breton discusses his new concept, convulsive beauty, serve, to some extent, as an important commentary on this new variety of surrealist image Breton features in _Le revolver à cheveux blancs_. In fact, as will be seen, too, in the next chapter of this thesis, devoted to _L'Air de l'Eau_, one of the significant aspects of _L'Amour fou_ is the light it sheds on Breton's _recueils_ of the 1930's, in addition to the light it has already been seen to shed on the poem _Tournesol_ from _Clair de Terre_.

_L'Amour fou_ expounds in prose certain of the ideas, images and allusions of Breton's poems. This theory is supported by the opening lines of _Vigilance_:

"A Paris la tour Saint-Jacques chancelante Pareille à un tournesol
Du front vient quelquefois heurter la Seine et son ombre glisse imperceptiblement parmi les remorqueurs". (CT 137)

Breton in fact quotes the first two lines of _Vigilance_ in _L'Amour fou_ (AF 55), as he gives an account of the attraction the Tour Saint-Jacques has for him. The account comes from Breton's description of the evening when he met Jacqueline:

"Vous aviez beau savoir que j'aimais cette tour, je revois encore à ce moment toute une existence violente s'organiser autour d'elle pour nous comprendre, pour contenir l'éperdu dans son galop nuageux autour de nous." (ibid.)

At this juncture Breton quotes his own poem, before proceeding to explain the deeper reason behind the spell the tower casts on him:

"J'ai compris depuis que ce balancement de la tour était surtout le mien entre les deux sens en français du mot _tournesol_, qui désigne à la fois cette espèce d'hélianthè, connue aussi sous le nom de grand soleil et le réactif utilisé en chimie, le plus souvent sous la forme d'un papier bleu qui rougit au contact des acides. Toujours est-il que le rapprochement ainsi opéré rend un compte satisfaisant de l'idée complexe que je me fais de la tour, tant de sa sombre magnificence assez comparable à celle de la fleur qui se dresse généralement comme elle, très seule, sur un coin de terre plus ou moins ingrat que des circonstances assez troubles
qui ont présidé à son édification et auxquelles on sait que
le rêve millénaire de la transmutation des métaux est
étroitement lié," (AF 56)

The phrase in line 4 of Vigilance, "à la pointe des pieds",
had also been employed in the second line of Tournesol:

"La voyageuse qui traversa les Halles à la tombée de l'été
Marchait sur la pointe des pieds". (CT 85)

The opening lines of Vigilance, therefore, like the more famous
poem of Clair de Terre, appear to prophesy the "nuit du tournesol"
when Breton met the woman who was to become his second wife.

Suddenly, in Le grand secours meurtrier, one comes across a
further link between the opening pages of L'Amour fou and Le revol-
ver à cheveux blancs, for the phrase at the end of line 15,

"Il ravive de sa bougie de radium les fonds du creuset humain",

is taken up again by Breton in the prose-text:

"C'est là, tout au fond du creuset humain, en cette région
paradoxale où la fusion de deux êtres qui se sont réellement
choisis restitue à toutes choses les couleurs perdues du
temps des anciens soleils, où pourtant aussi la solitude fait
rage par une de ces fantaisies de la nature qui, autour des
cratères de l'Alaska, veut que la neige demeure sous la cendre,
c'est là qu'il y a des années j'ai demandé qu'on allât chercher
la beauté nouvelle, la beauté 'envisagée exclusivement à des
fins passionnelles'." (AF 11)

Moreover, the concept of fusion (fusion of elements, fusion of the
natural and the man-made), which is so important for Surrealism,
is seen in L'Amour fou as the precise source of the quality of sur-
prise which supplies the basic driving-force of most surrealist
images:

"La surprise doit être recherchée pour elle-même, incondition-
nellement. Elle n'existe que dans l'intrication en un seul
objet du naturel et du surnaturel." (AF 97).1

1. There are no religious connotations in Breton's understanding of
the term "surnaturel" here: naturel/surnaturel = réel/surréal.
The element of surprise is found also in certain stylistic features. Though most of the poems of Le revolver à cheveux blancs are written in Breton's characteristic "vers libres", one or two contain some slightly unusual stylistic touches. Toutes les éco-libres ensemble (CT 125) is not one of Breton's most remarkable pieces, but what is rather strange about it are the "enjambements" which have no obvious merit in the context, as can be seen from the example in the opening lines:

"Souvent tu dis marquant la terre du talon comme éclot dans un buisson l'églantine Sauvage qui n'a l'air faite que de rosée".

The chief interest of Sans connaissance resides in its curious syntax: there are sudden breaks when Breton interrupts the normal, logical order of phrases, as at the end:

"Pas assez vite pour que l'homme Son signalement la concierge n'a pas osé arrêter ce visiteur inhabituel mais poli Il était d'autre part très bien de sa personne Ne s'éloigna en allumant une cigarette Plus douce que la douleur d'aimer et d'être aimé". (CT 141-142)

At the beginning of the poem there is a similar example of "collage verbal". Breton inserts in the middle of the sentence a completely separate exclamation:

"On n'a pas oublié
La singulière tentative d'enlèvement
Tiens une étoile pourtant il fait encore grand jour
De cette jeune fille de quatorze ans". (CT 139)

Sarane Alexandrian gives the name of "entrecroisement" to this technique, and explains that it is the result of a blending of

"...... deux courants de pensée, l'un se rapportant à un événement qu'on raconte, l'autre à une sous-réflexion qui la commente." 1

1. André Breton par lui-même, p.45.
The latter stream, however, hardly amounts to a "commentary", at least not in the normal sense of the word.

Yet it is rare for a Surrealist poet to infringe in this way the normal laws of syntax, as was suggested in Chapter II. In exchange for the disruption, if not exactly the loss, of syntax, however, there is the gain of what Donald Davie, influenced by Susanne Langer, calls in the title of the second chapter of Articulate Energy "syntax as music", perhaps not really "music" in Breton's poem, but at least the feeling of an immediacy of perception and sensation. Possibly Breton is trying once more, as he did at the end of Mont de Piété, to apply the "collage" technique to poetry. Another explanation is that he may be reviving the technique, employed by Apollinaire in his "poèmes-conversations", of inserting in the basic text snatches of conversation or overheard remarks. The third possible explanation is that Breton is still placing his faith in the accurate recording of subconscious thought by means of automatic writing. This overt disruption of the syntax is a device Breton rarely employs in his subsequent collections, however.

With the preface and its imaginary château still very much in mind, we propose now to have a closer look at the poem in Le revolver à cheveux blancs which pursues this symbolism, Facteur Cheval, for although the title refers to its architect and builder, the poem is rather an evocation of his "palace".
"Nous les oiseaux que tu chantes toujours du haut de ces belvédères
Et qui chaque nuit ne faisons qu'une branche fleurie de tes épaules aux bras de ta broquette bien-aimée
Qui nous arrachons plus vifs que des étincelles à ton poignet
Nous sommes les soupirs de la statue de verre qui se soulève sur le coude quand l'homme dort
Et que des brèches brillantes s'ouvrent dans son lit
Brèches par lesquelles on peut apercevoir des cerfs aux bois de corail dans une clairière
Et des femmes nues tout au fond d'une mine
Tu t'en souviens tu te levais alors tu descendais du train
Sans un regard pour la locomotive en proie aux immenses racines barométriques
Qui se plaint dans la forêt vierge de toutes ses chaudières meurtrisées
Ses cheminées fumant de jacinthes et mue par des serpents bleus
Nous te précédions alors nous les plantes sujettes à métamorphoses
Qui chaque nuit nous faisons des signes que l'homme peut surprendre
Tandis que sa maison s'écroule et qu'il s'étonne devant les emboitements singuliers
Que recherche son lit avec le corridor et l'escalier
L'escalier se ramifie indéfiniment
Il mène à une porte de meule il s'élargit tout à coup sur une place publique
Il est fait de dos de cygnes une aile ouverte pour la rampe
Il tourne sur lui-même comme s'il allait se mordre
Mais non il se contente sur nos pas d'ouvrir toutes ses marches comme des tiroirs
Tiroirs de pain tiroirs de vin tiroirs de savon tiroirs de glaces tiroirs d'escaliers
Tiroirs de chair à la poignée de cheveux
A cette heure où des milliers de canards de Vaucanson se lissent les plumes
Sans se retourner tu saisissais la truelle dont on fait les seins
Nous tu sourions tu nous tenais par la taille
Et nous prenions les attitudes de ton plaisir
Immobiles sous nos paupières pour toujours comme la femme aime voir l'homme
Après avoir fait l'amour".

Photographs reproduced in Poésie & autre indicate that Breton made at least two visits to the famous Palais Idéal built by Cheval in Hauterives. Over a long period of years Cheval collected thousands of stones he discovered on his daily rounds as a postman and cemented them together in the evenings to form a strange baroque construction.
Breton makes a number of allusions in his prose-works both to Facteur Cheval and to his "palace". In a text written in December 1933 Breton comments thus:

"Facteur Cheval, qui demeure le maître incontesté de l'architecture et de la sculpture médiévales......" (PJ 176)

The choice of this epithet is significant; Breton appears to read into the construction intentions of which Cheval himself might have been quite ignorant. In Situation surréaliste de l'objet, Breton mentions "le Palais Idéal" after quoting a very interesting observation made by Dali in 1930:

".........aucun effort collectif n'est arrivé à créer un monde de rêves aussi pur et aussi troublant que ces bâtiments modern' style, lesquels, en marge de l'architecture, constituent, à eux seuls, de vraies réalisations de désirs solidifiés, où le plus violent et cruel automatisme trahit douloureusement la haine de la réalité et le besoin de refuge dans un monde idéal, à la manière de ce qui se passe dans une nécrose d'enfance." (M 276)

Naturally, the Palais Idéal forms a good subject for a Surrealist poem. Its fanciful character can be captured and transmitted perfectly by Breton's imagery.

The poem opens with literally a bird's-eye view of the palace, as Breton imagines the birds addressing Cheval (ll. 1-3). The characteristic Surrealist idea of fusion is very strong in these opening lines: not only does the plumage of the birds remind the poet of flowers, so much so that the birds are almost transformed into blossom, but also the birds seem to blend both with Cheval's arms and with his wheelbarrow, for which he created, according to Breton, the only "angle habitable" in the palace. (ibid.) Breton, by speaking of the "bras de ta brouette bien-aimée", continues the process of personification thus begun by Cheval, and thereby continues his undermining of the frontiers between animal, vegetable and mineral.
This sequence is followed by a second "view" (ll. 4-7). This is presumably oneiric imagery, but it is also a case of the imagination of the poet carrying him away and letting him endow the surreal glass statue with movement. If it is a vision seen in a dream by Breton (or even, in Breton's imagination, by Cheval himself), it illustrates the theory expressed in *Les Vases communicants* concerning the interpretation of dreams, that they are based on events which have occurred a short while previously in one's waking hours and are the fulfilment of a desire, in this instance Breton's visit to the Palais Idéal or Cheval's evenings spent at work on its construction. The "statue de verre" is yet another example of transparency, another negation of an elementary physical property even.

The reference to the "bois de corail" prefigures a passage near the beginning of *L'Amour fou*, where, after Breton has explained the reasons behind the great attraction crystals have for him, he discusses, in relation to reality, corals:

"Si le lieu même où la 'figure' — au sens hégélien de mécanisme matériel de l'individualité — par-delà le magnétisme atteint sa réalité est par excellence le cristal, le lieu où elle perd idéalement cette réalité toute-puissante est à mes yeux les coraux, pour peu que je les réintègre comme il se doit à la vie, dans l'éclatant miriécisme de la mer. La vie, dans la constance de son processus de formation et de destruction, ne me semble pour l'œil humain être concrètement mieux enclose qu'entre les haies de mésanges bleues de l'aragonite et le pont de trésors de la 'grande barrière' australienne". (AF 15)

In the line containing the image of the "bois de corail" Breton exploits the homonymy of the word "bois": in the context of the "cerfs" one thinks also of the stags' antlers, but when there is immediately afterwards a reference to "une clairière", the more obvious meaning ("wood") returns.

At one level of analysis these lines in the second sequence feature images merging the abstract and the concrete ("Nous sommes
les soupirs"), fusions and "dépaysemants", but there is also a slight touch of eroticism.

The poem continues with the famous image of "convulsive beauty" (ll. 8-11) (cf. supra, p.489)

The plants in the garden then take over; they, too, at night (perhaps just in dreams) undergo a metamorphosis (ll. 12-13), as is stated explicitly. They, too, are humanized, for they can make signs. This passage leads in turn to a description of a surreal stairway (ll. 11-16). The stairway is merged into a swan, or at least its shape recalls a swan's back and half-unfolded wings; but even if the stairway merely has the shape of a swan, the very mention of the bird in such a context is sufficient for the mental image of the swan to be formed.

The first mention of "tiroirs" (l. 20) provokes a series of increasingly surreal varieties (ll. 21-22), and these lines make one think of a number of Dali's paintings where chests of drawers are principal motifs: Vénus de Milo aux tiroirs, La cité des tiroirs, for example. The purely visual image which initiates this sequence - the transformation of the steps of the stairway into drawers - sets in motion further visual images in which the drawers themselves are transformed, or at least made of unusual materials, before the sequence turns full circle and ends with "tiroirs d'escaliers": the images return to their source.

Line 23 contains a surrealist image of time:

"A cette heure où des milliers de canards de Vaucanson se lissent les plumes".  

1. The most famous robot made by the French engineer, Vaucanson, was a duck; there is no natural species of duck called "un canard de Vaucanson".
The somewhat hallucinatory line 24 blends Cheval at work with his trowel and the image of a woman. There is now a progression from the inanimate to the animate, as the end of the poem seems to move away from the palace and garden to focus on the woman and her lover. The feeling of delight engendered by the Palais Idéal is completed and evoked by the allusions to the act of love with which the poem ends (ll. 25-28). The erotic images perhaps suggest the satisfaction of Cheval, after the completion of his task, and of Breton at the sight of this monument to desire.

Once more, however, attempts at rational interpretation and attempts to categorize the images in Breton's terms fail to bring out the qualities of the poetic diction. Breton succeeds in endowing the "vers libres" with a rhythm which operates as much at the level of groups of lines as within the line. The groups are by no means equal in length or regular in their recurrence: at the beginning of the poem the first three lines constitute the first surge, to be followed by a group of two lines and one of six lines. There is some consistency, however, in the fact that whenever a line begins with the pronoun "Nous", a fresh surge commences. Within the lines subtle changes of pace occur, at times because of the presence of exclamatory phrases, e.g. "Tu t'en souviens" (l. 8), "Mais non" (l. 20), at times because of an amplification, e.g. "Nous te précédiions alors nous les plantes sujettes à métamorphoses" (l. 12), at times because of enumerations (ll. 17-20, 21-22); and the poem ends with an appropriately gentle afterthought or anticlimax, which is reflected in the separate disposition of the final words, "Après avoir fait l'amour". Certain phrases in the poem have an enthusiastically alliterative quality, e.g. ll. 5-6;
the alliteration in line 23 creates a suitably legato effect ("À cette heure où des milliers de canards de Vaucanson se lissent les plumes"); and it is by such subtle touches that Breton achieves the harmonious marriage of form and content.

Though *Facteur Cheval* is full of interesting, novel and vivid images, which match the intriguing *Palais Idéal* the postman built, images which conform to many of the basic requirements of the surrealist image and which illustrate certain of the categories of surrealist images listed by Breton in the first *Manifeste*, it is a poem which contains one central thread from which it does not stray very far. The poem has a unity which in no way detracts from the impact and surprise of the images and which in fact helps perhaps to set off the images. As was seen in *L'Union libre*, this combination of a firm framework and myriad sparkling images makes for a successful poem, one which does not relapse into banality nor wander into unintelligibility. The *Palais Idéal* makes a splendid symbol of the triumph of man's imagination which appears to be the main theme of *Facteur Cheval* and which probably is the main theme of the whole *recueil*.

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Despite a superficial similarity with the poems of *Clair de Terre*, *Le revolver à cheveux blancs* does reveal an evolution in Breton's poetics. There are some indications that he is prepared to write his poems to a set theme, in the same way that he and Eluard produced automatic texts for *L'Immaculé Conception*, having decided in advance what the themes and titles of the texts would be. This does not mean that the arbitrary, surrealist images, which had dominated Breton's conception of poetry since 1919, are now
abandoned. On the contrary, they are still employed in abundance, but are interspersed with images which are closely related to the major themes and motifs of the poems, if they themselves are not related to them. Moreover, there seems to be a relationship, at the level of certain themes and motifs, between Le revolver à cheveux blancs and the later prose-work, L'Amour fou, one consequence of which is a slight shift of emphasis from the prime Surrealist ideal of "le merveilleux" to the more dynamic concept, "la beauté convulsive". Many of the images in the poems of Le revolver à cheveux blancs are clearly illustrations of this new Surrealist principle.

If the themes of the recueil are not new, the images have lost none of their freshness and delicacy, and it is the imagery which conveys best and most appropriately the imagination-theme. Because all things are possible in the domain of imagery, the imagination of the poet can conquer all; because words are allowed to "make love", the alchemy of the verb is no longer a mere pipe-dream for Breton.

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Between the publication of this 1932 collection of poems and the following recueil, L'Air de l'Eau (1934), one single poem by Breton was published, Violette Nozières. As this poem is perhaps closer to Le revolver à cheveux blancs than to L'Air de l'Eau, it is appropriate to examine it at this juncture.

"Violette Nozières" (1933)

Breton's poem was one of eight in a booklet, published in Brussels, which bears the same title. The background to the poem
has been explained by Gérard Legrand:

"Les surréalistes prennent fait et cause pour Violette Nozières, accusée d'avoir empoisonné son père qui abusait d'elle....."  

Once more Breton is writing a poem to a predetermined theme, but Violette Nozières is by far the longest poem he wrote in the period between the wars, and it prefigures in this respect the long poems Breton wrote in the 1940's.

In the opening section Breton evokes the purgatory-like existence of his heroine and the great gulf which now separates her from her family and her former friends:

"Tu ne ressembles plus à personne de vivant ni de mort
Mythologique jusqu'au bout des ongles
Ta prison est la bouée à laquelle ils s'efforcent d'atteindre dans leur sommeil
Tous y reviennent elle les brûle". (CT 151)

Breton proceeds to evoke, albeit in a very fanciful fashion, Violette's schooldays, her home-life, her parents. The images he employs blend the ordinary with the unexpected, as in the following sequence:

"La belle écolière du lycée Fénélon qui élevait des chauves-souris dans son pupitre
Le perce-neige du tableau noir
Regagne le logis familial où s'ouvre
Une fenêtre morale dans la nuit". (ibid.)

Although the idea of rearing bats in a desk is bizarre, the image of the snowdrop is pleasant and suggests the girl's basic purity and freshness, preparing the way for the allusion to the opening of a "moral window". Set against the white snowdrop are the blackboard and the symbolic night.

Her father drove the President's train, her mother was a respectable French woman, but Breton reads deeply into the signifi-

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1. In Breton, A., Poésie & Autre, p.115.
cance of the man's choice of his daughter's Christian name:

"L'histoire dira
Que M. Nozières était un homme prévoyant
Non seulement parce qu'il avait économisé cent soixante-cinq mille francs
Mais surtout parce qu'il avait choisi pour sa fille un prénom dans la première partie duquel on peut démêler psychanalytiquement son programme". (CT 152)

This is followed by a discreet allusion to the father's crime and to the way in which it was found out, by Violette's confiding to a lover. In a touching passage near the end of the poem, Breton turns his thoughts to love, thinking of the problems it creates as well as the problems it solves:

"Pourtant un jeune homme t'attendait énigmatique à une terrasse de café
Ce jeune homme qui au Quartier Latin vendait paraît-il entre-temps L'Action française
Cesse d'être mon ennemi puisque tu l'aimais
Vous auriez pu vivre ensemble bien qu'il soit si difficile de vivre avec son amour". (CT 154)

Violette Nozières is perhaps, too, an important attack on the concept of the family.

The poem contains surrealist images, but they are kept under control and serve the theme rather than divert attention from it:

"Tendre l'arc maudit de l'ascendance et de la descendance", "Mots couverts comme une agonie sur la mousse", "Tonnelle belle comme une cratère", "Devant ton sexe ailé comme une fleur des Catacombes".

Yet perhaps the poem's finest image is contained in its evocation of the women of Paris:

"Ce que tu fuyais
Tu ne pouvais le perdre que dans les bras du hasard
Qui rend si flottantes les fins d'après-midi de Paris autour des femmes aux yeux de cristal fou
Livrées au grand désir anonyme
Auquel fait merveilleusement uniquement Silencieusement écho
Pour nous le nom que ton père t'a donné et ravi". (CT 153)
Love, desire, chance are thrown together superbly to encircle the quintessential phrase, the "femmes aux yeux de cristal fou", perhaps the clearest portrait of Breton's ideal of Woman, the climax of a splendid long line the power of which is accentuated by the contrast with the swooning gentleness of the one which follows and the series of long adverbs, which reverberate ever more quietly and evoke the echo they delay in the text.

The poem *Violette Nozières* does raise the question of the "poème de circonstance". Breton's new tendency to settle in advance the title or theme of a poem, despite the continued practice of automatic writing, possibly accentuates the temptation to produce "occasional poetry". Whatever Breton's disciples may say, *Violette Nozières* is, to some extent, an "occasional poem". The reason why the question was so crucial in 1933 was that the rupture of Aragon with the Surrealist movement had become inevitable after Breton in *Misère de la Poésie* had described Aragon's controversial poem *Front rouge* as a "poème de circonstance".1

1. Although Breton took sides with Aragon when the latter was indicted by the "juge d'instruction" for the "excitation de militaires à la désobéissance et provocation au meurtre, dans un but de propagande anarchiste", this does not mean that he approved of *Front rouge*. Hence the main point of *Misère de la Poésie*:

"Front rouge marque-t-il un changement d'orientation très net dont le cours va-t-il en être trouble, modifié? A supposer, en effet, que la formule en soit neuve, exploitable, assez générale (...) un tel poème serait pour nous faire apercevoir comme très proche le lieu de résolution qui met aux prises la pensée consciente de l'homme et son expression lyrique (...). Il nous inviterait à rompre, sans plus tarder, avec le langage indirect qui en poésie jusqu'à ce jour a été le nôtre. Il nous fixerait un programme d'agitation immédiate auquel, en vers comme en prose, nous ne pourrions sans lâchété nous soustraire. Je serai, mes amis comme moi seraient trop heureux d'en accepter l'augure si certaines considérations historiques n'étaient pour nous faire abandonner de si grands espoirs". (In Sadoul, G., *Aragon*, Paris: Seghers [Coll. 'Poètes d'aujourd'hui'], 1967, p.15) Breton sees no future for such poetry, he cannot recommend it as an example to (continued on p.505)
One might argue that to some degree all poems are "occasion- al", but Breton appears to draw the line between a poem inspired by some simple and everyday event, incident or feeling (e.g. a love affair or the wrongful imprisonment of a girl) and a poem which refers explicitly to contemporary political matters and to a direct incitement to political action. This distinction is probably valid, and if so, Violette Nozières and L'Union libre would not be, in Breton's eyes, "poèmes de circonstance", the latter certainly not.

That Breton can write a poem such as Violette Nozières in 1933 remains, however, an indication that his poetry had undergone a considerable evolution since the discovery of automatic writing in 1919. He no longer obeys completely the dictates of the subconscious; on the contrary, he is now seeking to ally the products of subconscious thought with subjects decided by the conscious mind, thus achieving yet another fusion of erstwhile opposites. His poetry continues to operate on this basis in the following years, exploiting the latent symbolism words and objects possess, and exploring in intricate patterns the almost infinite possibilities of analogy.

(note 1, p.504 continued:)
follow and so he concludes by dismissing it with the damning phrase: "....force m'est donc, considérant aussi le tour de ce poème, sa référence continuelle à des accidents particuliers, aux circons- tances de la vie publique, me rappelant enfin qu'il a été écrit lors du séjour d'Aragon en U.R.S.S. de le tenir non pour une solution acceptable du problème poétique tel qu'il se pose de nos jours, mais comme un exercice à part aussi captivant que l'on voudra, mais sans lendemain parce que poétiquement régressif, autrement dit pour un poème de circonstance." (id. p.16). Coming to Aragon's defence, Sadoul implies that Breton's L'Union libre is likewise a "poème de circonstance": "Le plus beau poème d'un grand écrivain, L'Union libre d'André Breton, me paraît bien avoir été déterminé par les choses du moment actuel puisqu'il est un très fidèle portrait de femme." (id., p.17). As we have seen already, even this final point is rather doubtful.
In this respect *L'Union libre* and *Violette Nozières* stand at a greater distance from the texts of *Les Champs magnétiques* and *Clair de Terre* than the poems of *Le revolver à cheveux blancs*. The evolution in Breton's poetics would appear more regular if *L'Union libre* had been published after *Le revolver à cheveux blancs* and had served as a prelude to the poems of *L'Air de l'Eau*, for although in the latter recueil the theme of a "free union" is absent, the themes of love and the magic power of Woman are dominant. Nonetheless, Breton's return to the writing of poems at the beginning of the 1930's does see some significant changes in his approach to the task, when it is compared in detail with the one adopted for the texts of the early 1920's, despite the superficial impression of great similarity of form and subject between the poems of the two periods. Further developments are to be detected, however, in Breton's next recueil, *L'Air de l'Eau*. 
CHAPTER SEVEN

"L' AIR DE L'EAU" (1934)

This new recueil is inspired by Breton's new bride, Jacqueline, by the new, magical and almost ethereal experience of love she brings him. Breton met Jacqueline on the night of May 29th, 1934, the so-called "nuit du Tournesol", described in great detail in the fourth chapter of L'Amour fou. In the following August they were married (AF 77).

It can be appreciated from these initial remarks that L'Air de l'Eau and L'Amour fou should have a lot in common; both are the result of the new love which had entered Breton's life; and they were written at more or less the same period. Furthermore, it will be seen that there are a considerable number of similarities in detail between the two works, so much so that one is tempted to regard L'Amour fou as a prose-chronicle of the events evoked more impressionistically and more hermetically in the poems of L'Air de l'Eau. This will be one of the areas this chapter will explore, but we also set out to examine the important themes of this recueil, particularly the new strain of exoticism, as well as the images and allusions Breton employs here.

Jacqueline herself has explained to Anna Balakian the circumstances of the writing of L'Air de l'Eau:

"L'Air de l'Eau was written very shortly after my meeting with André in about one week, which he spent in the outskirts of Paris, at the edge of a little river. I don't remember the name of the place, but he knew it well and loved it, and knew that it was propitious to him.... This poem is entirely about me, or

1. Although L'Amour fou was not published until 1937, clear internal evidence reveals that the opening chapters were written in the Spring of 1934.
better about us; he went off by himself, circumstances having prevented me from following him at that moment. I think, however, that it is clearer to say that he preferred being alone to write it just as he stopped suddenly in our walk across Paris the night of the 'Tournesol', detaching himself as if better to note what was true.... After having written L'Air de l'Eau he came back and read it to me, making a commentary of it, explaining each sentence. But later I have heard him say that he had all sorts of reservations about analysis of what did not become immediately evident in his own poems, as one cannot autoanalyse oneself completely. It must also be remembered that automatic writing was over for him at that period, and although always spontaneously born, each sentence was worked over, endlessly, as a thing that is foreseen and at the same time outlived." 1

Breton's predilection for interesting titles is evident once more in this recueil. Philippe Audoin claims that it was taken from "l'antique théorie de la circulation élémentaire". 2 However, the homonym "air" creates at the outset multiple resonances.

If one considers first of all the elemental meaning of the word "air" ("air", "atmosphere"), one finds in the title a surreal juxtaposition of elements, which recalls the occultists' notion of the marriage of elements and also Breton's interest in astrology, which had led him to the earlier title of Poisson soluble. 3 The "air" of the title can be interpreted also as meaning "tune", "melody", in which case the poems of the collection become Surrealist verbal "water music". As water is generally considered to be the feminine element, it is appropriate that the recueil inspired by Breton's new bride and dominated by images of Woman should

1. In Balakian, A., André Breton, p.143.
3. Breton was born on February 18th, 1896 and regarded himself as a Piscean. Although many astrologers regard as Piscians people born between February 19th and March 20th, these dates are somewhat fluid. If, however, one regards Breton as being born under Aquarius (January 20th to February 18th) and combines the elements associated with these two signs of the Zodiac, Air (Aquarius) and Water (Pisces), the choice of these two elements in the title L'Air de l'Eau would be explained by virtue of the fact that Breton's birthdate comes at the transition from Aquarius to Pisces.
contain in its title the mention of water.

Similarly, the third meaning of the word "air" ("appearance", "look") is not totally irrelevant to an analysis of the title, for the phrase from the poem Tournesol, "l'air de nager", is discussed by Breton in L'Amour fou and related explicitly to Jacqueline. (cf. supra, pp.403-404)

The importance of the theme of Water in Breton's work has been discussed by Alquié with reference to Bachelard:

"'Tout ce que le coeur désire peut toujours se réduire à la figure de l'eau', a dit Claudel. Et Gaston Bachelard, qui cite cette phrase, remarque que Claudel rêve de trouver au sein de la Terre 'une véritable eau essentielle, une eau substantiellement religieuse. Ce lac souterrain rêvé par le poète visionnaire donnera ainsi un ciel souterrain.' Il n'est pas douteux que chez Breton, le monde de l'eau ne soit aussi, à bien des égards, l'objet d'un espoir fondamental. Non que l'eau soit liée (comme, selon Bachelard, c'est souvent le cas) à la purification. Elle l'est plutôt à la fluidité du désir, et oppose au monde d'une matière solide dont les objets se peuvent construire en machines, un monde parent de notre enfance, où ne règnent point les contraignantes lois de la raison...." 1

Thus water now becomes a symbol of the imagination and desire, but these implicit themes of Le revolver À cheveux blancs are clearly "embodied" in L'Air de l'Eau by the theme of love.

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Desire pervades the entire collection. It is in this recueil above all that Breton writes poems of love which can be compared to the love-poetry of Desnos and Eluard. Whereas the inspiration of Breton's first wife, Simone, is rarely perceived in his poems, here Jacqueline becomes the archetypal Muse, comparable to the Beatrice of Dante or the Gala of Dali.

As in both Les Vases communicants and L'Amour fou, Breton in

L'Air de l'Eau is occasionally preoccupied with the problem of creating the right social, economic and moral conditions for love. In the poem which is a tribute to the Marquis de Sade Breton acknowledges not only the importance Sade attaches to desire but also his love of freedom and, conversely, his awareness of the need for a greater freedom in love:

"Il n'a cessé de jeter les ordres mystérieux
Qui ouvrent une brèche dans la nuit morale
C'est par cette brèche que je vois
Les grandes ombres craquantes la vieille écorce minée
Se dissoudre
Pour me permettre de t'aimer
Comme le premier homme aima la première femme
En toute liberté
Cette liberté
Pour laquelle le feu même s'est fait homme". (CT 165)

One is reminded at the beginning of this extract with the allusion to "une brèche dans la nuit morale" - a further image of revelation and enlightenment in the darkness - of the opening of Violette Nozières, but it is perhaps the second half of the quotation which is both more important and more striking in its simplicity. According to Breton, the Promethean spirit of Sade must not be extinguished, but rather the flame must be fanned. Breton is encouraged by certain anecdotes he has read. In L'Humanité he had seen a moving article about the greater freedom women were beginning to enjoy in Créat and proceeds to incorporate this into the material of his poem:

"Je lisais tout à l'heure dans l'Humanité
Qu'en Créat
Dans une contrée où toutes les jolies filles il y a vingt ans
Étaient vendues aux beys
La femme ayant acquis maintenant le droit de disposer d'elle-même
On avait pu voir
Un jeune homme apporter à une jeune fille un petit bouquet". (CT 176)

Earlier in the same poem, Et mouvement encore......, Breton
recalls a story he had once read in a travel-book about the love of a shipwrecked sailor and a native girl, a story he repeats a decade or so later in Martinique charmeuse de serpents. In the poem from L'Air de l'Eau this simple theme of communication through love is conveyed thus:

"Je pense à un très ancien livre de voyages
Où l'on conte qu'un marin abandonné dans l'une de ces îles
S'était épris si éperdument d'une indigène
Et s'en était fait si éperdument aimer
Qu'ils parvenaient à échanger sur toutes choses des impressions parfois très subtiles
Au moyen d'un langage unique de caresses". (CT 175)

It is this subtlety of nuances that Breton recreates, paradoxically in one sense, naturally in another, in words.

Breton goes on to claim that Jacqueline has the same effect on him; he feels that the kind of love shared by the sailor and the native girl can still exist, even nowadays:

"Mais les événements modernes ne sont pas forcément dépouillés de tout sens original et final
Et la rencontre
Elective vraiment comme elle peut l'être
De l'homme et de la femme
Toi que je découvre et qui restes pour moi toujours à découvrir....
Met en branle une série de phénomènes très réels
Qui concourent à la formation d'un monde distinct
De nature à faire honte à ce que nous apercevriions
À son défaut
De celui-ci". (CT 175-6)

Love is portrayed in its dynamic qualities of constant discovery, perpetual "devenir": the repetition of the verb "découvrir" and the length of the line in the middle of this extract in which it occurs stress this point. The value of this elective love is emphasized in L'Amour fou and justified by reference to both Engels and Freud. Et mouvement encore.... is an important poem, for it expresses the confidence Breton places in love; love is here envisaged as an agent for social reform; according to Breton, the world
can be improved through love.

Despite the interest of these fairly abstract aspects of love, the particular merit of *L'Air de l'Eau* resides more in its evocation of Jacqueline and of Breton's love for her. Much has been written and said about the role of the "femme-fée" in Surrealist literature; but Jacqueline, in the eyes of Breton, is seen more precisely as a modern undine. The word "ondine" occurs but once in *L'Air de l'Eau*, in the poem *Il allait être cinq heures du matin*..... It is nevertheless the major motif of the recueil, for it is strongly supported by allusions and anecdotes in *L'Amour fou* and by suggestions of sirens and naiads in the poems.

The explanation of the phrase from *Tournesol*, "l'air de nager", reveals the reason why Breton should consider Jacqueline as the embodiment of the concept of water as the feminine element: she was a member of an aquatic show, in which she performed an underwater dance routine.

As her pose changes, however, the "ondine" is transformed into a mermaid or a siren. One cannot help thinking of the Lorelei, made famous by Heine, Brentano and Apollinaire, as one reads the following lines from *Je rêve je te vois*.......:

"Tu es assise sur le haut tabouret de corail
Devant ton miroir toujours à son premier quartier
Deux doigts sur l'aile d'eau du peigne
Et en même temps
Tu reviens de voyage tu t'attardes la dernière dans la grotte
Ruisselante d'éclairs". (CT 161)

Breton's private Lorelei, sitting at her dressing-table, combing her cascading hair, leaves him spellbound, in a daze, in a dream. In her image, reflected in each of the mirrors, Breton sees the legendary enchantress superimposed on herself; he then sees her
in varied postures, sleeping and waking, naked and clothed, before bringing the poem to a thrilling climax:

"Tes bras au centre desquels tourne le cristal de la rose des vents
Ma fontaine vivante de Sivas". (CT 162)

Fused with the water, embodying the magnetism implicit in the reference to the compass, she lures Breton to her, as the Lorelei and the water-nymphs in the legends exercised their fatal attraction over sailors, fishermen and valiant knights.

Although it is Jacqueline herself who has suggested to Breton the idea of an undine or a Lorelei, he refers also, in *Et mouvement encore*..., to the luring of sailors by sirens:

"Les premiers navigateurs à la recherche moins de pays
Que de leur propre cause
Voguent éternellement dans la voix des sirènes". (CT 176)

Whereas the legendary habitat of the "ondine" is in or near a lake, stream or river, the bathroom and the bedroom are the customary settings in *L'Air de l'Eau*. As Jacqueline gets out of her bed, her legs unfurl the sheets around her like the wings of a swan. ("Ils vont tes membres déployant.....", CT 174). Likewise the phrase "Et tout l'adorable déshabillé de l'eau" (CT 163) suggests the "mystère érotique" the Surrealists, and others, associate with the "salle de bains". As Maxime Alexandre points out,

"Ce qui est incontestable, c'est que l'élément liquide, rivières, lacs, mers, bains publics ou privés, se trouve toujours entouré de représentations érotiques encourageantes pour l'imagination." 1

The painting by Paul Delvaux, *Les Nymphes des Eaux* (1938), though it places the naiads in the context of tempestuous seas flooding city-streets, brings out clearly water's latent eroticism, since the

1. *Mémoires d'un surréaliste*, p.43.
naked female figures are nubile embodiments of sexual desire.

(v. SP 82)

Of course, the association of water with the erotic further reinforces the conception of water as the feminine element, though one is left to conjecture which came first.

The latent eroticism of the bathroom and bedroom scenes evoked in L'Air de l'Eau forms part of the "érotique-voilé" mentioned at the end of chapter I of L'Amour fou as one of the criteria of "la beauté convulsive" (v. supra, p.244); but one or two other erotic themes and motifs are found in these poems. The recueil opens with a poem, Monde dans un baiser, which is, in part, the evocation of sensations created by a kiss. Au beau demi-jour... ends with the tender yet sensual kiss Breton gives to his new love:

"J'eus le temps de poser mes lèvres
Sur tes cuisses de verre". (CT 169)

In the final poem, as Breton imagines himself watching from his window Jacqueline returning home, he thinks of the stockinged legs in the shop-window further down the street:

"Il y a dans une vitrine rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette
Deux belles jambes croisées prises dans de hauts bas
Qui s'évasent au centre d'un grand trêfle blanc". (CT 181)

In 1934 Jindrich Styrsky produced a picture, entitled quite simply Collage, which likewise displays this motif, though there the eroticism is stronger, for the crossed legs clasp tightly between them an elaborate knife. (v. SP 209). This is the kind of motif found in Aragon's Le Paysan de Paris, illustrating the erotic aspect of "le merveilleux moderne". Yet basically the erotic touches in L'Air de l'Eau possess a veil of purity, which is rarely and only fleetingly removed.
When Breton begins a poem (CT 166) with the line, "J'ai devant moi la fée du sel", one thinks that at last he is introducing into L'Air de l'Eau a more conventional Surrealist "femme-fée" rather than the undine or the Lorelei, but the "fée du sel", too, is a water-fairy; her lamb-embroidered dress sweeps right down to the sea and she shines in the sunlight "comme un lustre d'eau vive".

So great is the power of this modern undine that she is able to endow the earth itself with some of the properties of her element:

"Mais la terre était pleine de reflets plus profonds que ceux de l'eau". (CT 168)

There results a fusion of the sea and a wood. The wood is described in terms of the sea, and sea-creatures surround the undine and her lover:

"Et toi couchée sur l'effroyable mer de pierres 
Tu tournais
Nue
Dans un grand soleil de feu d'artifice
Je te voyais descendre lentement des radiolaries
Les coquilles même de l'oursin j'y étais". (CT 168-169)

Although the water-nymph and siren figures in L'Air de l'Eau are evidently inspired by Jacqueline, the explicit association between her and an undine is made in L'Amour fou. The first reference there to the "ondine" comes, however, before the "Nuit du Tournesol" and has apparently no connection with Jacqueline: it is the expression in the incident of the waitress. (v. supra, p.250)

Later in the book, however, in a lyrical declaration of love inspired by the Eden-like setting of the Orotava Garden in Tenerife, Breton addresses his wife as "Ondine":

"Mais toi, toi qui m'accompagnes, Ondine, toi dont j'ai pressenti sans en avoir jamais rencontré de semblables les yeux d'aubier, je t'aime à la barbe de Barbe-Bleue et par
le diamant de l'air des Canaries qui fait un seul bouquet de tout ce qui croît jalousement seul en tel ou tel point de la surface de la terre. Je t'aime jusqu'à me perdre dans l'illusion qu'une fenêtre est pratiquée dans un pétale du datura trop opaque ou trop transparent, que je suis seul ici sous l'arbre et qu'à un signal qui se fait merveilleusement attendre je vais aller te rejoindre dans la fleur fascinante et fatale." (AF 86)

"Ondine" would seem to have become Breton's pet-name for Jacqueline. At times, the glorification of Woman in L'Air de l'Eau goes almost as far as canonization: Breton sees Her surrounded by a nimbus, fused in light:

"Tu es d'abord tout entière fondu dans le brillant". (CT 180)

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Given the importance of the bedroom and the bathroom scenes in the poems of L'Air de l'Eau, it is to be expected that a number of them should be set in the night: L'aigle sexuel exulte....... (CT 163-164), Toujours pour la première fois (CT 180-1), or at the break of day.

In fact, the moment of dawn is the magic hour for Breton, marking the passage from night to day, from dream to reality, from darkness to light.

The first lines of two of the most significant poems of L'Air de l'Eau simply refer to the break of day: Au beau demi-jour de 1934.......(CT 168-9) and Il allait être cinq heures du matin....... (CT 172-3). Allusions to the dawn are dotted, however, around the remaining texts:

"Au petit matin dans les luzernes illustres" (CT 157),

"Ce matin encore ces draps se sont levés ont fait voile avec toi d'un lit prismatique" (CT 174),

"C'est un champ de jasmins que j'ai contemplé à l'aube sur une route aux environs de Grasse" (CT 180).
In just these three examples, however, one sees how Breton brings variety to the moment, as to the poems, by using different temporal expressions, and this suggests that Breton perceives the break of day not just in abstract terms but as a source of constant wonder and delight, varying with the seasons, the settings and the weather.

Though the poems are set by and large in Paris, in the nuptial bedroom and bathroom, with the occasional reference to place-names in Paris (the Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette in Breton's own quarter, métro-stations, the Hospice de la Maternité near where Jacqueline lived before their marriage), they possess an aura which is sometimes more reminiscent of a fairy-world or a wonderland. Their atmosphere is that of a Midsummer Night's Dream, for which the presence of the "ondine" is primarily responsible. In the poem, "A ta place, je me méfieraïs du chevalier de paille.....", there is even a reference to an enchanted copse, which is the arena of further marvels:

"Dans le taillis enchanté
Où le chasseur épaule un fusil à crosse de faisan
Ces feuilles qui sont la monnaie de Danaé
Lorsqu'il m'est donné de t'approcher à ne plus te voir
D'étendre en toi ce lieu jaune ravagé
Le plus éclatant de ton oeil
Où les arbres volent
Où les bâtiments commencent à être secoués d'une gaieté de mauvais aloi
Où les jeux du cirque se poursuivent avec un luxe effréné dans la rue". (CT 178)

After this copse where the leaves of the trees fall like golden rain, *Au beau demi-jour.....* evokes a wood, at the edge of which stands a tree with cigarette-paper leaves, but the whole setting has a quivering, fragile delicacy. The magic is created by the imminent arrival of Jacqueline and reflects the poet's feeling
of anticipation.

She is merged with the woodland flowers, just as the forest was merged with the sea. The magic feeling is further enhanced by the line,

"Tous les prestiges se hâtaient à ma rencontre". (CT 168)

Yet there is never anything sinister in this sorcery: the imagery of magic has a remarkable purity. The reader's impression that this poem is becoming a Surrealist Midsummer Night's Dream is strengthened by the arrival of the squirrel in the next line, especially as there appears to be a close connection, for Breton, between the squirrel and his new love, for the image of the squirrel occurred to him the first time he saw Jacqueline, even before he spoke to her:

"Contre toute apparence, je me demandais si je n'avais pas été aperçu pour qu'on m'entraînât ainsi dans le plus merveilleux chemin des écoliers. Il finit tout de même par me mener quelque part, à une station quelconque de véhicules. Un pas de plus, de moins et, fort étonné, le visage que j'avais follement craint de ne jamais revoir se trouvait tourné vers moi de si près que son sourire à cette seconde me laisse aujourd'hui le souvenir d'un écureuil tenant une noisette verte." (AF 52-53)

Jacqueline's slim, petite, delicate figure has the quick, lithe grace of a squirrel, just as the woman evoked in L'Union libre suggested to Breton the image of an otter. Furthermore, the final chapter of L'Amour fou is written in the form of a letter addressed to their daughter, who is given the fanciful pet-name, Eousette de Noireuil, which is a transformation of the original description of Jacqueline as an "écureuil tenant une noisette verte".

As Au beau demi-jour....... progresses, the fairyland atmosphere grows yet more intense:
"Le ciel entre les feuilles luisait hagard et dur comme une libellule
J'allais fermer les yeux
Quand les deux pans du bois qui s'étaient brusquement écartés s'abattirent
Sans bruit
Comme les deux feuilles centrales d'un muguet immense
D'une fleur capable de contenir toute la nuit
J'étais où tu me vois
Dans le parfum sonné à toute volée". (CT 169)

The size of the lily-of-the-valley has the effect of transforming the protagonists into dainty, Lilliputian figures; the brief line "sans bruit" evokes not just the silence but also the suspense.

The same air of "fée" pervades Le poisson-télescope....

The poet and his love are again admitted into a surreal Disneyland;

"J'habite au coeur d'un de ces chardons
Où tes cheveux sont des poignées de portes sous-marines
Des anses à saisir les trésors
Nous pouvons aller et venir dans les pièces frissonnantes
Sans craindre errer dans la forêt de jets d'eau". (CT 159)

Breton evokes a microcosm, in the literal or etymological sense, if not the normal modern sense, of the word; his eyes are not focussed on the horizon, yet the images still rely on the analogies the poet perceives between man and nature; his glimpses of the way in which the softness of thistledown reminds him of the silky quality of the beloved's hair, which in turn suggests the trailing grace of seaweed in water or the coral portals of some submarine Palais Idéal, parted or opened to reveal, if only for a moment, the promise of treasure-troves; it is imagery of constant interchange, of constant movement, of constant osmosis.

The theme of dreams, is, of course, present in the very idea of a Midsummer Night's Dream atmosphere, and the particular appropriateness of the moment of dawn, which is so frequently the time of day at which these poems are set, has been seen to be related to
the transition from dream to reality.

The Lorelei image is, to some extent, an oneiric image, as the title, or rather the first line of the poem in which it occurs, Je rêve je te vois..., indicates. Moreover, although the opening poem Monde dans un baiser...... is in part the evocation of sensations created by a kiss, it seems to contain also oneiric sequences. The introduction to the following hallucinatory tableau indicates that its source may well be a dream:

"Tout devient opaque je vois passer le carrosse de la nuit
Traîné par les axolotls à souliers bleus
Entrée scintillante de la voie de fait qui mène au tombeau
Pavé de paupières avec leurs cils". (CT 157)

The constant switches in this text, as in other poems of L'Air de l'Eau, could be pointers to the oneiric origin of certain extracts. In Monde dans un baiser...... there appears to be a movement to and fro between circus scenes and American Indian scenes: "le joueur à baguettes de coudrier", "les axolotls à souliers bleus", "des aigrettes", "une écuyère debout sur un cheval", "la tente décorée de bisons bleus".

Nonetheless, the central figure in the dreams and daydreams of L'Air de l'Eau, as in the poems evoking sequences of the waking hours, remains Jacqueline.

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Certain of the motifs in Monde dans un baiser...... point, however, to a new development in Breton's poetry, as far as their subject-matter is concerned: the exoticism which will dominate some of Breton's works of the 1940's (e.g. Xanophiles, Martinique charmeuse de serpents) is quietly starting to make its appearance. It is as if Jacqueline is bringing Breton out of himself and opening
his eyes onto the world; she is really beginning to act as a mediatrix between the poet and the universe.

The curious thing is that *L'Air de l'Eau* was written before the two major journeys overseas made by the Bretons in the 1930's, to the Canary Isles (1935) and to Mexico (1938), though Jacqueline has suggested that Breton may have been thinking of the projected trip to the Canaries when he was composing *L'Air de l'Eau*.¹

*Monde dans un baiser*..... seems to prefigure Breton's subsequent visits to North and Central America. Apart from the allusions to Red Indians and their wigwams, many of the zoological and botanical motifs are exotic: "singes-lions", "axolotls", "aigrettes", "bisons bleus", "le gigantesque scolopendre". The flight of a flock of egrets, reputed to be one of the most spectacular, one of the most colourful sights Nature has to offer, is followed by the image in the second poem of a thousand birds of paradise suddenly taking wing. The most brilliant spectacles of Nature are therefore evoked by the beauty of Jacqueline.

In the final sequence of *Je rêve je te vois*..... the figure of Jacqueline, reflected and multiplied, probably by the dressing-table mirrors, suggests a series of Oriental impressions (CT 162). Breton thinks of "le seul papillon vert qui hante les sommets de l'Asie". Jacqueline's arms remind the poet in turn of a snake sinuously swaying to the strains of an unseen charmer and then of the fountains of Sivas.²

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2. The image of the manifold arms, coupled with the allusion to Asia, calls to mind statues of the god Shiva, who likewise is often depicted surrounded by serpents. Also Shiva's wife is usually portrayed with numerous arms. There may be at the end of this poem a subconscious connection between Shiva and the Turkish town of Sivas — though the image of the fountains presents an attractive picture of Jacqueline's slender, graceful arms.
In Yeux zinzolins..... Jacqueline is described as a "petite Babylonienne". She herself has an exotic air about her, as is evinced by Breton's initial description of her in L'Amour fou:

"Cette jeune femme qui venait d'entrer était comme entourée d'une vapeur - vêtue d'un feu? - Tout se décolorait, se glaçait auprès de ce teint rêvé sur un accord parfait de rouillé et de vert: l'ancienne Egypte, une petite fougère incroyable rampant au mur intérieur d'un très vieux puits, le plus vaste, le plus profond et le plus noir de tous ceux sur lesquels je me suis penché, à Villeneuve-les-Avignon, dans les ruines d'une ville splendide du XIVe siècle français aujourd'hui abandonnée aux bohémiens." (AF 50)

The most sustained exoticism in the recueil occurs, however, in Et mouvement encore.... and On me dit que là-bas..... In the former (the first of Breton's poems to be set in part in the South Sea Islands he comes to admire so much), in addition to the two anecdotes mentioned earlier in this chapter (v. supra, pp.510-511), Breton speaks of a nostalgia for a Golden Age. In L'Amour fou the Orotava Garden likewise leads Breton to thoughts of a lost Eden (AF 86-89). The title of the film L'Age d'Or, made in 1930 by Buñuel and Dalí, had, of course, suggested the same theme. In L'Amour fou the concept of a Golden Age is linked explicitly with the idea of the complete love which can exist between a man and a woman and both are related to the theme of transmutation:

"Dans un tel amour existe bien en puissance un véritable âge d'or en rupture complète avec l'âge de boue que traverse l'Europe et d'une richesse inépuisable en possibilités futures." (AF 88)

Implicitly L'Air de l'Eau suggests the same idea, for its love-poems evoke not just a wonderland but also a paradise. On me dit que là-bas..... has a veritable Garden of Eden location which, just as Monde dans un baiser..... prefigures Breton's visits to North and Central America, points to his trip to the Canaries with
Jacqueline and Benjamin Pêret. The black beaches referred to in the poems are presumably the beaches of Puerto de la Cruz, the image of the "immense pic fumant de neige" bears an extremely close resemblance to the great Pico del Teide which dominates the island of Tenerife, and the yellow birds now associated with the name of the group of islands are evoked in a superb image, "sous un second soleil de serins sauvages". In this poem, as in the chapter of L'Amour fou inspired by the Canaries, Breton thinks in terms of a "paradis perdu". Yet the distant country Breton describes in On me dit que là-bas...... seems to draw all its light from the life of the woman Breton is addressing:

"Quel est donc ce pays lointain
Qui semble tirer toute sa lumière de ta vie
Il tremble bien réel à la pointe de tes cils
Doux à ta carnation comme un linge immatériel
Frais sorti de la malle entrouverte des âges". (CT 179)

From this new Pandora's box not only hope but also beauty emerges to oppose the ills of mankind.

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Besides the exotic zoological motifs referred to already, L'Air de l'Eau, like Breton's other recueils, is full of very specialized vocabulary - animal, vegetable and mineral. This creates an effect of preciosity, which heightens the fairyland atmosphere. Despite the allusions to bison, wanderoo, squirrels, stoats, to egrets, birds of paradise, canaries, to fish, reptiles and insects, this recueil is marked above all by a dominance of botanical motifs: "coreopsis", "luzernes", "chardons", "menthe poivrée", "belladone", "prunellier", "nielle", "muguet", to name but a few. Apart from the attraction of some of these names themselves, the frequency of allusions to flowers and trees emphasizes
continually the fact that the most significant cadre of L'Air de l'Eau is the enchanted wood, which, as Roger Cardinal rightly points out, is Romanticism's legacy to Surrealism. 1 The elfin figures wander at will between the flowers. Their world is similar to that of the young hare in the opening sequence of Rimbaud's poem Après le déluge:

"...... Un lièvre s'arrête dans les sainfoins et les clochettes mouvantes et dit sa prière à l'arc-en-ciel à travers la toile de l'araignée. Oh! les pierres précieuses qui se cachaient, - les fleurs qui regardaient déjà."

Whereas in Rimbaud's poem the initial innocence is quickly dispelled and replaced by disillusion, in Breton's recueil the charm is not broken.

Strangely enough, the enchanted wood is not so common in Surrealist painting, where the seashore, the desert and the luxuriant jungle are perhaps more frequent settings. The forest has been featured in the work of Oscar Dominguez and André Masson, but the atmosphere of the woodland scenes in L'Air de l'Eau is perhaps best captured by a Surrealist artist in the nearly contemporary canvas of Max Ernst, La nature à l'aurore (1937) (v. SP 158). Significantly it is with the Rhineland woods that Breton associates Max Ernst:

"Ce n'est pas en vain que Max Ernst passe pour être né à Cologne sur une des bouches du serpent liquide qui se plait comme nulle autre à attiser l'épée, le Rhin dans quoi se peignent les ensorcelantes filles aux blonds cheveux sans fin quand nous avons vingt ans......" (SP 159)

A few pages later in the same text Breton adds further interesting observations:

"C'est là que se place sa grande retraite dans la forêt. Ermité? Oui et plus assiégé qu'aucun saint et pris avec la femme dans un seul écrin de chair. Le soleil ne sait que

Though these words, written in 1942, are Breton's way of evoking the world of Max Ernst, it should already be obvious that they apply equally well to the poetic universe of _L'Air de l'Eau_, alluding as they do to the "serpent liquide" that is the Rhine, to "en-sorcelantes filles aux blonds cheveux", to the union of man and woman "dans un seul écrin de chair", to the "oiseau-lyre en proie à l'amour", to the "fougères", to the "sensitive" (about whose properties Breton writes in _L'Amour fou_) and to the supreme importance of desire.

Just as the features noticed first of all in Rimbaud's postdiluvian world were flowers and precious stones, so in _L'Air de l'Eau_ the flowers and trees are accompanied by images of precious stones, minerals and crystals: Iceland Spar, eye-agate, emeralds, coral, "le cuivre de Vénus". They, too, create an effect of preciousness, but, what is more important, some of them illustrate the new principle of "la beauté convulsive", extolled by Breton in the opening chapter of _L'Amour fou_. There one discovers that crystals and precious stones are aesthetically pleasing to Breton and are therefore ideally suited to the conveying of the delight Breton feels in the presence of his beloved. In the image of the "miroir toujours à son premier quartier" in the poem beginning _Je rêve je te vois...._ (CT 161) and the idea of superimposed reflections there is the suggestion of a resemblance between the mirror and crystal. In _L'Amour fou_ the mirror is envisaged as a device...
which reflects the state of one's love (cf. supra, p. 255).

The interest of this image resides not in its hackneyed basic idea, but in the fact that Breton conceives of a whole network of mirrors which brings out the manifold facets of his relationship with Jacqueline; and Breton's refusal to be content with the obvious image leads him to modify it in a different way near the end of the book where he employs the "mirror of love" idea to analyse the reasons behind a temporary discord between lovers:

".....le miroir de l'amour entre deux êtres est-il sujet à se brouiller du fait de circonstances totalement étrangères à l'amour et à se découvrir d'un seul coup à l'expiration de ces circonstances? Oui." (AF 126)

The clouding of the mirror has the effect of destroying the mutual gaze, the mutual bond between the lovers, of taking away the experience of revelation.

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Though Breton is a poet who believes in "l'amour absolu" shared by a man and a woman, though L'Air de l'Eau is his major collection of love-poems, despite the touches of eroticism in this recueil, the most important anatomical motifs are still the eyes and hands (or arms). Yet there are a number of allusions to the woman's nakedness:

"Tu es nue la balle de sureau rebondit encore" (CT 161),

"Tu tournaïs/Nue/Dans un grand soleil de feu d'artifice". (CT 168)

In general, however, this nakedness is more a sign of innocence, as was the nakedness of Adam and Eve in their Garden of Eden, though in the poem, Au beau demi-jour de 1934......, the sight of his beloved's nakedness does spur Breton on to plant a kiss on her "cuisses de verre".
Jacqueline's hair, described at their first meeting as "de pluie claire sur des marronniers en fleur", (AF 51) is the tenor of a couple of the arbitrary metaphors in Le poisson-télescope...... cited earlier (cf. supra, p.519):

"............... un de ces chardons
Où tes cheveux sont des poignées de portes sous-marines
Des anses à saisir les trésors". (CT 159)

These images perhaps serve to illustrate the point that Jacqueline's tresses are keys to the "surreal" wonderland, whether it be seen in terms of a submarine castle or a fantastic treasure-trove. If, as Breton claims, the automatic image is possessed of convulsive beauty, these images may evoke the splendour of raindrops glistening on a chestnut-blossom, which, although equally arbitrary, is a far more pleasant way of describing the attraction of a woman's hair.

Her flesh inspires a superb series of images which close the same poem:

"Ta chair arrosée de l'envol de mille oiseaux de paradis
Est une haute flamme couchée dans la neige
La neige de t'avoir trouvée
La descente de lit de loup blanc à perte de vue". (CT 160)

The elemental fusion possibly evokes the existence side by side in Jacqueline of passion and purity, of emotion and reserve. The flight of the birds of paradise suggests magnificently her ethereal qualities and her iridescent beauty.

The faraway land which is the setting of On me dit que là-bas... is seen to quiver at the tips of Jacqueline's eye-lashes, as if it is seen only through her eyes, as if it is she who guides Breton to the spectacular sights of Nature. If Breton is becoming a great Nature-poet, it is because his own eyes are opened by the eyes of his new love, the "yeux zinzolins de la petite Babyloniennne trop blanche", which open one of the finest poems of this fine recueil. The striking adjective of colour is particularly appropriate, since
the reddish-purple dye was obtained from sesame, and because of this we are reminded of the tale of Ali Baba, where the magic words, "Sesame ouvre-toi", opened the gates of the treasure-cave.

The poem, however, is inspired not only by Jacqueline's eyes, but also by her hands:

"Quand s'ouvre comme une croisée sur un jardin nocturne
La main de Jacqueline X", (CT 170)

The relationship between hands and eyes is discussed in an article by Jean Roudaut, _Un geste, un regard_. He explains first of all their basic difference:

"L'oeil est toujours rattaché à la personne. La main au contraire, et particulièrement dans Nadja, tend à être indépendante." 1

He then goes on to discuss their similarities:

"L'oeil et la main sont les instruments de la mise en contact, du rapprochement inopiné, et nécessaire, de réalités distantes (ce que ne sont ni le goût, ni l'odorat; on sait d'autre part en quelle suspicion Breton tient la musique); ils sont des organes de contemplation ou de préhension, et d'union de soi à ce qui est vu ou touché." 2

This latter point is the important one; but whereas the union "par le regard" tends to be spiritual, the touch of the hand is, above all, the expression of physical contact. The communicating functions of the eyes and hands are therefore complementary.

To justify his claim that hands and eyes are instruments of the union of opposites, Roudaut quotes firstly an example from _Le Surréalisme et la Peinture_:

"L'eau et le feu se conjurent vertigineusement dans les yeux verts d'une femme roussé", 3

1. In André Breton et le mouvement surréaliste, NRF, April 1967, p.837.
2. ibid., p.838.
3. Id., p.839.
and secondly one from Nadja, where the heroine, looking at a flaming hand over the Seine, claims that:

"......le feu et l'eau sont la même chose."¹ (cf. supra, p.209)

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Hands and eyes, for Breton, seem therefore to be related to the fusion of elements, and, of course, the juxtaposition or fusion of air and water is an aspect of the title of the recueil. This initial fusion of elements is then reinforced in the text of the poems by further examples. Apart from the splendid image from Le poisson-télescope.... (the "haute flamme couchée dans la neige") earth, fire and water are fused in the fairy forest of Au beau demi-jour..... (v. supra, p.515). In Monde dans un baiser..... the two elements in the title of the recueil are brought together once more:

"Déhors l'air essaye les gants de gui
Sur un comptoir d'eau pure". (CT 158)

The smooth surface of the water reminds Breton of the bars in the cafés of Paris, and the mistletoe is presumably blown by the breeze above the water. In modified form the same elemental fusion occurs at the very end of L'aigle sexuel exulte.....:

"Et les carrières de chair bourdonnent seules au premier rayon renversé dans ce rayon
Je prends l'empreinte de la mort et de la vie
À l'air liquide". (CT 164)

Though presumably inspired by the previous allusion to snow, the phrase "l'air liquide" is still surprising and pleasing to the mind and senses alike.

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¹. In André Breton et le mouvement surréaliste, NRF, April 1967, p.639.
Likewise sea and land are fused in the final line of *On me dit que là-bas...*, in an image which evokes the foam on the crest of the waves in terms of apple-blossom:

"Tout le pommier en fleur de la mer". (CT 179)

(From such fusions of opposites, of course, the "surreal" is supposed to be born).

However, as we pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the title-phrase "L'Air de l'Eau", may have other meanings, meanings which would justify the preponderance of water-images in this recueil. The "baguettes de coudrier" mentioned in *Monde dans un baiser......* are the traditional instruments of the water-diviner; water is the natural element of the telescope-carp; elsewhere there are allusions to icebergs, the casting of anchors, reefs putting to sea, in addition to the water-images already cited with particular reference to the "ondine".

One could regard the elemental fusions as indications of the growing influence of hermeticism on Breton's poetry, but they may simply be evocations, conscious or subconscious, of the theme of union, the union between a man and a woman, which is the principal thread running through *L'Air de l'Eau*.

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The elemental fusions, when interpreted literally, however, constitute negations of elementary physical properties. In a recueil whose principal setting is a wondrous fairy-world, this category of image ought to be conspicuous. Yet apart from the allusion to the "second soleil de serins", it is very difficult in practice to separate images negating elementary physical properties from
visually hallucinatory images. In both there is the quality of "dépaysement", which is partly created by Breton's use of the genitival metaphor, as in the gruesome "lampes de viscères" in Le marquis de Sade...

A number of "dépaysements" rely on the substitution of glass for the normal material of an object: "journal de verre", "cuisses de verre"; but whereas the glass-metaphors in Nadja suggest, conventionally, the idea of transparence, the image of the "cuisses de verre" evokes the coolness and smoothness of the woman's thighs, and the explanation of the glass newspaper may be that it is seen through the shop-windows to which Breton refers two lines earlier. (CT 164)

In other visual hallucinatory images the effect of "dépaysement" is created by the use of surreal colours: "rosée noire", "bisons bleus", "axolotls à souliers bleus", and even "étoiles rousses" (cf. the expression "lune rousse", on which it is presumably based). All these examples bear witness to the readiness of the Surrealist poet to give full vent to his desire, which Breton in L'Amour fou discusses in connection with the image.

Two interesting examples of aural surrealism are found in L'Air de l'Eau. When one reads the poem Je rêve je te vois..., one comes to the lines:

"J'écoute siffler mélodieusement
Tes bras innombrables". (CT 162)

One's first impression is that it is the woman's arms which are whistling; but the next line corrects the original impression:

"Serpent unique dans tous les arbres".

The arms of the woman in the superimposed pictorial images remind the poet of snakes. Once this is understood, it is quite easy to
see how Breton came to attribute the sound usually associated with
snakes to a woman's arms. Furthermore, if there is some connection
between the fountains of Sivas mentioned at the end of the sequence
and the god Shiva (cf. supra, p.521, note 2), the reference to the
snake would be even more appropriate, since Shiva is often depicted
surrounded by snakes. Thus, by simple association of ideas one
sometimes arrives at a rational interpretation of what seemed to be
a rather obscure image.

In Toujours pour la première fois.... there is the line:
"Plus la clé chante à la porte de la chambre inconnue", (CT 180)
which recalls the image of the musical door in Clé de Sol (v. supra,
p.302). Interpreted literally, the singing key would be a pure case
of personification, but perhaps the imminent presence of Jacqueline
alters for the ear of the poet the sound of the key in the keyhole
and makes it melodious; what is usually a noise becomes a song. Or
alternatively, Jacqueline may be singing as she turns the key in
the door and Breton transfers the source of the song; but for Breton
at least the sound of the key becomes surreal.

In one poem, A ta place.... there is a specific reference to
the idea of hallucination, with which Breton explains the opening
sequence:
"A ta place je me mèfiera du chevalier de paille
Cette espèce de Roger délivrant Angélique
Leitmotiv ici des bouches de métro
Disposées en enfilade dans tes cheveux
C'est une charmante hallucination lilliputiennne". (CT 177)
The motif of the knight, together with the later allusion to the
"perron du château de la violence", gives the poem the flavour of a
medieval setting. To evoke the action of the knight Breton employs
one of his fairly rare explicit literary allusions, in which he
refers to a hero and heroine in Orlando furioso, though he omits the detail of the mythological "hippogriFFE".

The customary images lending the mask of the abstract to the concrete, or vice versa, still recur periodically, but because of their largely verbal force, their attraction now seems weaker than that of other categories.

The role of humorous images is even more diminished, though in a recueil inspired by Breton's new experience of "l'amour fou", this is hardly surprising. There is perhaps a touch of gentle humour in the following lines from Et mouvement encore....:

"Et je souris lorsqu'un ami me reproche non sans raison De ne pas avoir en général Montré assez de défiance à l'égard de cette obsession poétique". (CT 175)

There is also the odd hint of word-play, in the transformation of the stock phrase, "homme de paille", into the image of the "chevalier de paille", as in the homonymy and pleonasm in the phrase "du sagittaire en fer de lance".

The arbitrary simile is still quietly rivalling the metaphor in certain of the poems. There are two fine examples in the final description of the woodland in Au beau demi-jour.... (cf. supra, p. 519).

The first comparison ("hagard et dur comme une libellule") relies on surprise, for the idea of hardness is precisely the opposite of what the motif of the dragonfly conventionally suggests; the second ("comme les deux feuilles centrales d'un immense muguet"), on the other hand, succeeds on account of its very precision and appropriateness in the context.

The gratuitous simile in Il allait être cinq heures du matin... "Un ver luisant Soulevait comme une feuille Paris" (CT 172),
corresponds perfectly to the magic atmosphere of the recueil. A street-lamp or a light from a window presumably lies behind the image of the glow-worm, lifting up the leaf of darkness as day breaks over the city.

Nonetheless, it is possible that the importance of the apparently arbitrary imagery in L'Air de l'Eau is less than in Breton's previous Surrealist collections, simply because of the greater import of the subject-matter. This opinion is held by Clifford Browder, who makes the following comments on this collection:

"....... Surrealist imagery still abounds, but each poem is obviously related to the central theme of love and can often be interpreted by reference to Breton's concepts of passion and objective chance..... The poet's professions of love are often self-explanatory, and the extravagant imagery accompanying them seems only natural in the context. Furthermore, there is even a tendency towards static description and coherent narrative, in which case the poetry loses in intensity but gains in clarity." 1

We perceive, however, no loss in intensity in L'Air de l'Eau compared with the earlier recueils; on the contrary, these compact and delicately passionate poems with their fragile clusters of images mirror admirably the intensity of the poet's emotions.

Yet although the images, when extracted from their context, may appear as gratuitous as their counterparts in Breton's earlier collections, when they are read in the context of the poems of L'Air de l'Eau one is not so struck by the quality of arbitrariness. The element of surprise they possess seems natural in these new settings. Moreover, the greater constancy of the subject-matter has the effect of reducing the potential shock-impact of the images;

1. André Breton, Arbiter of Surrealism, p.163.
but for Breton to convey accurately the freshness of his new experience of love, the jaded metaphors of previous generations would not be as appropriate as surrealist images with their novel motifs and points of reference.

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As for their form, all the fourteen poems of *L'Air de l'Eau* are fairly short and are written in the "vers libres" which have become Breton's favourite poetic medium. Once more one cannot help but notice the great contrast between the violence and the ferocity which frequently mark Breton's polemical writings and the peaceful, ethereal, translucent, quivering atmosphere which prevails in his poems. In this *recueil*, and perhaps above all in texts such as *Je rêve je te vois....., Au beau demi-jour.....* and *Yeux zinzolins....*, Breton reaches the summit of his achievement in the field of the short poem. Not only in the evanescent flashes generated by successful images but also now in entire poems Breton creates the lyrical quality he desired to see in modern poetry. Occasionally it is possible to locate the source of this lyricism in recurring *leit-motive*, such as the phrase "Je chante" in *Yeux zinzolins....*, or the use of the alliteration which is the hallmark of Eluard's poetry, as in the line, "Sous un second soleil de serins sauvages", in *On me dit que là-bas.....*

One has the impression at times, however, with these untitled poems, that they have no real beginning or end, that they are extracts from some greater poem; they possess a quality of timelessness, like the waves of the ocean, which the simple title of the *recueil* may suggest, and which they imitate in their lay-out and their
rhythm, varied yet incessant, and in their sound's ebb and flow.

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Though critics agree that Breton's basic style does not change greatly during a span of thirty or forty years, the subject-matter of his poetry does change, even though favourite motifs inevitably reappear throughout his work. Breton does turn his attention to new kinds of inspiration, to new subjects; if this were not the case, his writings would soon lose their appeal. There is therefore a continual evolution in his poetry, as there is in the poetry of Aragon, Desnos and Eluard, though in Breton's case it is not nearly so marked and assumes different forms.

In L'Air de l'Eau Breton appears to have struck the right balance in the analogies between the need to surprise and the need to be comprehensible; the surrealist images in this recueil play a major part in the creation of the lyrical quality Breton desires, but without swamping the basic themes of the poems.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SHORT POEMS (1935-1948)

Having produced what is probably his finest recueil of short poems in L'Air de l'Eau, Breton, as will be seen in the final chapter of this study, turns his attention in the 1940's to perhaps the much more difficult task of writing a series of long poems, "modern epics" or "symphonic poems". At roughly the same time he adds to the trilogy of Nadja, Les Vases communicants and L'Amour fou the final work of that series, Arcane 17, a work in a similar vein but of probably far greater scope. From time to time, however, when he is so inclined, Breton does write further short poems and automatic texts, so that when he published Poèmes in 1948 he had some new material to add to his collection in addition to the "epics" of the 1940's, and when the NRF Poesie editions, Clair de Terre and Signe Ascendant came out, other texts from the same period were included. In this chapter we shall be considering interesting features of the short poems Breton wrote between L'Air de l'Eau and the publication of Poèmes in 1948; and because they were not originally presented to the public in recueil form we shall treat them by and large as individual poems. They constitute a poetic diary covering perhaps the most turbulent period of Breton's life, evoking marriage, divorce, re-marriage, the temporary loss of his daughter, war, exile and his return to France; and this autobiographical aspect is one of their most important features.

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The first poetic text Breton produced after L'Air de l'Eau was Au lavoir noir (CT 183-189), beginning "Papillons de nuit...."
a meditation set off by the sight of a moth and containing the insect's imagined monologue. The text has the appearance of orthodox automatic writing, with some pleasant images and touches of humour. At the end of the moth's speech it bids Breton farewell and makes allusion to its flight towards the lamp:

"Je repars sur ma roue oblongue, pareille au désir japonais de se jeter dans la gueule du volcan." (CT 187)

The comparison, bringing out the suicidal attraction that light and fire possess for moths, is both pleasing and apt; and just beforehand Breton makes an amusing and thoughtful observation inspired by his noticing of the moth and the awareness of a hailstorm outside:

"Tout peut apparaître dans un grêlon, la Vierge à des enfants, cela s'est vu, et même un papillon à des hommes. Mais le papillon disparaît beaucoup plus lentement." (CT 186)

One can imagine Breton smiling at his afterthought and his scepticism. Later in the text he remembers an anecdote which brings a further smile to his face:

"Et j'avais, pour ma consolation philosophique, le souvenir de l'homme qui, consulté sur ce qu'il aimerait qu'on fit pour lui quand il viendrait à mourir, demanda qu'on plaçât dans son cercueil une brosse (pour quand il tomberait en poussière)". (CT 187)

However, Au lavoir noir brings no significant development as far as the image is concerned.

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Breton, for Poèmes, grouped together five poems to cover the period 1935-1940. Monde is an attractive little piece evoking the "salon de madame des Ricochets", but the description, achieved largely by means of surrealist images, is inevitably very fanciful, creating an Alice in Wonderland atmosphere:
"Dans le salon de madame des Ricochets
Les miroirs sont en grains de rosé pressés
La console est faite d'un bras dans du lierre
Et le tapis meurt comme les vagues
Dans le salon de madame des Ricochets
Le thé de lune est servi dans des œufs d'engoulevent
Les rideaux amorcent la fonte des neiges". (SA 16)

Though the visual "dépaysement" and the fusion of the animate
and the inanimate seem grotesque when interpreted literally, when
these lines are regarded as a simple evocation of a very genteel
world, it is their delicacy and their charm which impress. This is
reinforced by the word order of the second line, where the displacemen
t of "pressés" to the end, so that it rhymes with "Ricochets",
briefly gives the impression of an earlier poetic form.

There is a veritable fairyland setting for Le puits enchanté,
as its title suggests. The poem, though written later than L'Air
de l'Eau, really belongs there. Breton is meeting the "lady of the
lake", and this reference paves the way for the subsequent image of
Ophelia in the may-fly ballet and the allusion to the woman who will
not rise to the surface in the beautiful final sequence:

"Pendeloque du lustre central de la terre
Mon sablier de roses
Toi qui ne remontes pas à la surface
Toi qui me regards sans me voir dans les jardins de la
provocation pure
Toi qui me m'envoies un baiser de la portière d'un train qui fuit". (SA 19)

Possibly the ear-drop suggests the alternative meaning of "pende-
loque", the crystals of a chandelier, and this is then expanded
into an elemental or even a cosmic image; and the cliche of the
hour-glass, already seen in L'Union libre, is refreshed here by the
addition of the roses.

Earlier in the poem the woman is given an eternal quality by
the implicit comparison in the reference to the Medusa:
"C'est Méduse casquée dont le buste pivote lentement dans la vitrine
De profil je caresse ses seins aux pointes aîliées".  (SA 18)
The image of the Medusa personifies the theme of the "regard",
though for Breton it is a "regard amoureux", and the theme of love
is implied in the other literary allusion, to Peter Ibbetson.

Breton leaves behind in this poem the world of ordinary mortals, represented by the city disappearing in the distance, and enters "nature's night-club". He feels he is penetrating the mysteries of the universe and becoming part of them:

"A moi la fleur du grisou
Le ludion humain la roussette blanche
La grande devinette sacrée".  (ibid.)

The third poem in the series, written at the end of October 1938, is *Cours-les-toutes*, inspired by a Red Indian chief and dedicated to Benjamin Péret, who shared Breton's interest in the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The poem could easily have been included in the later group, *Xénophiles*. Without resorting to an excess of facile local colour, Breton by his images evokes the mystery and the grandeur of the Indian chieftain:

"Au coeur du territoire indien d'Oklahoma
Un homme assis
Dont l'œil est comme un chat qui tourne autour d'un pot
de chien dent" (SA 20);
and by slight distortions he creates new myths; the council of the braves becomes a council of their gods.

Yet the life of the Indians is not seen through rose-tinted spectacles; Breton appreciates the reality of their existence, their struggle against the continual encroachment on their territory of the Whites. If the latter came originally in search of gold and silver, now they drill for oil:
"Le pétrole comme les cheveux d'Eléonore"  
Bouillonne au-dessus des continents  
Et dans sa voix transparente  
A perte de vue il y a des armées qui s'observent...." (ibid.)

Or else they exploit for the purpose of tourism the Indians themselves:

"Ce pays ressemble à une immense boîte de nuit  
Avec ses femmes venues du bout du monde  
Dont les épaules roulent les galets de toutes les mers  
Les agences américaines n'ont pas oublié de pourvoir à  
ces chefs indiens  
Sur les terres desquels on a foré les puits  
Et qui ne restent libres de se déplacer  
Que dans les limites imposées par le traité de guerre". (SA 21)

When there are allusions in this poem to magic ceremonies and rituals, they are presented discreetly and enigmatically; but they immediately take on a surreal quality:

"Au carrefour des routes nomades  
Un homme  
Autour de qui on a tracé un cercle  
Comme autour d'une poule". (ibid.)

Though the majority of the allusions are transparent enough, Breton does not hesitate to throw in more personal images: the beautiful visual evocation of the quiet waters in terms of a thousand closed eyelids, the gratuitous description of the governor's car, said to resemble a sea-urchin whose each and every spine is a flamethrower, an image which could be explained with reference to the cliché, "bristling with bayonets", and the following baroque and truly surreal tableau:

1. One is tempted to relate the opening image in this sequence to descriptions of one of Poe's heroines, either to the "yellow hair" of Lenore or "the naturally waving auburn hair" and "the wavy flow of her auburn tresses" - variants found in The Gift version of the tale Eleonora but not in the basic Broadway Journal version which Baudelaire used for his translation.
"Un carrosse ne pouvant être mu que par l'éclair
Comme celui dans lequel erre les yeux fermés la princesse Acanthe
Une brouette géante toute en limaces grises
Et en langues de feu comme celle qui apparaît aux heures fatales dans le jardin de la tour Saint-Jacques
Un poisson rapide pris dans une algue et multipliant les coups de queue". (SA 22)

These strange images serve to remind us of the association the Tour Saint-Jacques has with alchemy and magic, before the poem ends with a series of lyrical transformations of the name of the chief, which evoke the freedom of his erstwhile way of life and of that of his ancestors:

"Il s'appelle
Il porte le nom flamboyant de Cours-les-toutes
À la vie à la mort cours à la fois les deux lèvres
Cours ta chance qui est une volée de cloches de fête et d'alarme
Cours les créatures de tes rêves qui défaillent rouées à leurs jupons blancs
Cours la baguette sans doigt
Cours la tête de l'avalanche". (SA 23)

To a certain extent, this poem prefigures the later and much more important *Ode à Charles Fourier*, which was written in the Far West when Breton visited Hopi and Zuni reservations. Its style, with its irregular groups of lines alternating simple statements and picturesque images and allusions, is similar to that adopted for the *Ode*.

*La Maison d’Yves* is obviously inspired by a visit to the house of Tanguy, though it was written at sea in March 1938, as Breton was on his way to Mexico.

It is a strange poem, in which a number of constantly recurring lines form an obsessive series of *leitmotiv*:

"Avec la lampe-tampe
Avec la scierie si laborieuse qu'on ne la voit plus
Avec toutes les étoiles de sacrébleu
Avec les tramways en tous sens ramenés à leurs seules antennes
Avec la crinière sans fin de l’argonaut
Avec le mobilier fulgurant du désert". (SA 25)
It may be that Breton is here trying to suggest the universe of Tanguy's canvases, in which objects taken from the real world are employed as points of contrast thanks to which other elements take on their occult significance. (cf. supra, p.137). The atmosphere of Tanguy's picture *L'Orage* (1927),\(^1\) with its suggestion of shooting-stars, a lighthouse, mandrake-figures, patches of light cloud against a menacing dark sky and a landscape of devastation, dotted with primeval flora and fauna, is perhaps recaptured in Breton's poem. Alternatively, this poem may be a kind of sketch for the fuller evocation of Tanguy's symbolic environment Breton gives in a text dating from 1942 and destined for subsequent editions of *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*:

"De l'autre côté de l'horizon, dont presque toutes ses toiles accourent la ligne rigoureuse - et en parfait accord avec cette disposition Yves Tanguy s'abstient de toute déclaration touchant le but qu'il se propose d'atteindre, ne livre rien de ses intentions, est bien trop dédaigneux pour démentir celles qu'on lui prête - sur le versant non plus de l'art mais de la vie et sous un ciel plus dense, moins lavé de toutes les aurores des grands voyages, une maison basse oscille entre la Bretagne et un quartier de Paris des plus sordides, Locroman dans le Finistère et la rue du Château (XIV\(^{\text{e}}\) arrondissement). L'étrange demeure, en vérité. Un ruisseau rapide chante comme s'il roulait des pierres en traversant obliquement la salle à manger, sans quitter des yeux la profonde cheminée noire où jonglent des crêpes. Dans l'angle de la pièce, un petit bar américain exclusivement tapissé d'affiches de cinéma de l'autre guerre: 'Les Mystères de New York', etc...." \(^2\)

Set against the poem's "refrain" (the recurring leitmotive) are a number of isolated images in the form of rhyming couplets in the style of the following example:

"Et la toile de Jouy du ciel
-Vous, chassez le surnaturel." (SA 24)

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In addition to this superb cosmic image alluding to the famous pattern there are other attractive images which likewise evoke the painter or his mysterious canvases: a transparent landscape, a soothsayer in his element, Ariadne in her jewel-box room, sphinxes running the services, their eyes covered with linen veils.

In this poem the images are presented without commentary: Breton captures the aquarium silence, to which he alludes in *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* and which seems to surround the artist, introduced there only right at the end of the text like a mute god observing his creation:

"Yves derrière la grille de ses yeux bleus".  

The final poem from the period 1935-1940, *Quels apprêts*, is altogether different in tone from the preceding ones. Despite the implications of the title, the war had already started, for it was written in May 1940 in Poitiers, where Breton had a medical post at the "centre de pilotage". It gives Breton's somewhat veiled but very personal reactions to contemporary events; between the lines one can read his sadness and despair:

"Les événements d'un autre ordre sont absolument dépourvus d'intérêt
Ne me parlez pas de ce papier mural à décor de ronces
Qui n'a rien de plus pressé
Que de se lacérer lui-même". (SA 27)

His reaction to the imminent defeat of France is not expressed, like Aragon's, in popular images of roses and lilacs, but in more hermetic terms: his vision is of trains, like bulging wardrobes, sliding along milky rails, of girls steeling themselves like rabbits against the bite of the stoat, of black flames, apocalyptic images of destruction, dissolution and collapse:

"Un galop lointain
C'est la charge souterraine sonnée dans le bois de violette
et dans le buis
Toute la chambre se renverse
Le splendide alignement de mesures d'étain s'épuise en une
seule qui par surcroit est le vin gris". (SA 27-28)

They culminate in the splendid final image, which brings out Breton's feelings of fatigue and helplessness in the face of events, seeing through a glass darkly but comprehending not, borne along by forces beyond his control:

"L'argus de la dérive chère les yeux fixes mi-ouverts mi-clos". (SA 28)

This is the true preface to Fata Morgana, which takes over in the same vein once Breton has reached Marseilles after his country's collapse and partition.

The poems of the group 1935-1940 therefore follow the course of Breton's life from the new and magical experience of love shared with Jacqueline via his first trip to the New World in 1938 to his enlistment at the outbreak of the war.

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The next series covers the years 1940-1943, but like the preceding one, exists only on the fringe of Breton's creative work at the time, for during that particular period Breton wrote the first three of his long poems. In the somewhat hermetic texts of 1940-1943 can be discerned oblique references to the exodus of Breton and his family after the defeat of France: images of trunks and stations, a level-crossing, a trembling castle which is perhaps the villa "Air-Bel" where the Bretons were lodged in Marseilles in the winter of 1940-41 prior to their departure for America. After the theme of the voyage comes the theme of separation in the six lines of Intérieur:
"Une table servie du plus grand luxe
Démessurément longue
Me sépare de la femme de ma vie
Que je vois mal
Dans l'étoile des verres de toutes tailles qui la tient
renversée en arrière
Décollée en coup de vent". (SA 57)

This darkest hour in Breton's life, when he suddenly found himself alone in a foreign country whose language he did not speak, is recalled by Charles Duits who made the acquaintance of both Breton and Jacqueline in New York in 1942-43:

"Bien que leur union se fût dissoute, une affection vive demeurait entre Jacqueline et Breton que je vois encore (dans le merveilleux soleil qui, ainsi que je viens de le noter, souligne d'un trait blond presque tous les souvenirs que je garde de Bleeker Street) lent, obscur, occupant trop de place, triste mais triste comme peut l'être un enfant, gauchement debout parmi les toiles, les plantes, le chevalet, pendant que nous parlions de choses qui n'intéressaient aucun de nous parce que de toute évidence il était impossible de parler de l'essential. Ce fut Breton qui me présenta à Jacqueline (il disait encore 'ma femme', mais avec une gêne visible)...."¹

Though three thousand miles away from the war in Europe, Breton was never able to forget it for long, and Guerre is, in fact, the title of one of the poems in 1940-1943. Here the dogs of war are transformed into an obscene, grotesque, apocalyptic beast, reminiscent of the "dragon" of Lautréamont: its eyes are the colour of the swelling sea, its scales the opposing armies; the hecatombs of youth bring a glow to its pustules. The two sides are depicted derisively as two independent cockerels hurling insults at each other at dawn from their respective dung-hills. In a splendid image, which perhaps evokes the attraction of the more heroic aspect of war, the beast undergoes a partial metamorphosis into a fleet of warships from the days of sail:

¹. v. Duits, C., André Breton a-t-il dit passe, Paris: Denoël, 1969, p.112.
"J'ai cru que la Bête se tournait vers moi j'ai revu la saleté de l'éclair
Qu'elle est blanche dans ses membranes dans le délié de ses bois de bouleaux où s'organise le gust
Dans les cordages de ses vaisseaux à la proue desquels plonge une femme que les fatigues de l'amour ont parée d'un loup vert". (SA 59)

Breton recognizes that this is a false alarm and reveals, too, that it is a misleading image; it is not his intention to portray war as attractive; hence the poem ends with a sequence which brings out the full squalor, the filth, the nausea and the obscenity of war:

"Dans l'odeur suffocante de cicindèle
De sa litière souillée de sang noir et d'or vers la lune elle aiguise une de ses cornes à l'arbre enthousiaste du grief
En se lovant avec des langueurs effrayantes
Plattée
La Bête se lèche le sexe je n'ai rien dit". (SA 59-60)

Though the word "cicindèle" is pleasing, the effect of this insect-image is repulsive when it refers to the stench; moreover, the image of the tiger-beetle evokes the somewhat unearthly clash of armoured corps, the great tank-battles of the desert war. The allusion to the horns suggests perhaps a bull or a rhinoceros making ready to attack, but the verb "se lover", though nowadays used to describe the coiling of snakes, brings back the impression of a fabulous beast, from which Breton never strays in this poem, and evokes not only the crude horror and the violence of war, but also its irrational, unfathomable and almost extraterrestrial force.

There was the hint of this in the text Les Grands Transparentes placed at the end of Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste ou non (1942) (cf. supra, p.169); and a poem written in New York, Premiers transparents, perhaps tries to evoke this occult notion in terms of a series of Surrealist motifs: the cuttle-fish leaning on its elbows at the window, the clown of the eclipse, the mandarin-wind.

In Breton's shortest poem, Plus que suspect, a strange
hallucination, perhaps suggesting a growing militarism or the deployment of America's military might, follows the image of a mysterious malaise:

"Les chênes sont atteints d'une grave maladie
Ils sèchent après avoir laissé échapper
Dans une lumière de purin au soleil couchant
Toute une cohue de têtes de généraux". (SA 56)

It is as if Breton can only jot down fleeting impressions whose full import he cannot understand; but it is thus that Breton's symbolism operates; his symbols, the signs he detects in the world around him, are opaque, at least at first, waiting to be deciphered, but defying for as long as possible the would-be decoder.

The two texts La courte échelle and La porte bat, placed under the common heading of Mot à mante, though brief, are nevertheless perhaps the most interesting of the series, as far as their language is concerned, for Breton tries out some new techniques; word-play of a rare type, exploiting blends or portmanteau words, after the manner of Joyce, and the reverse process, akin to the technique of the "Lettristes" of the immediate post-1945 period. The opening lines of La courte échelle illustrate the "blends":

"Passe un nuagenouillé
Devant les mots qui sont la lune
(Les cornes de la girafenêtre)
J'ai demandé un cafélín", (SA 61)

whereas the first line of the second poem shows the other method which is not exploited so systematically:

"La por por porte por". (SA 62)

They are but passing experiments, however, never to be repeated; Breton has no wish to write a French Finnegans Wake. His use of juxtaposition is much more discreet.

La courte échelle integrates into the final blends the name
of a young artist Breton had just discovered, Matta:

"Dans la langue totémique Mattatoucantharide Mattalismancenillier". (SA 61)

Possibly these lines are intended to evoke the representation of the quadridimensional universe, the "paysages à plusieurs horizons" or the "désintégration des aspects extérieurs" Breton noticed in Matta's paintings at that time.¹

"Des Épingles tremblantes"

Breton's next series of poems, *Des Épingles tremblantes*, was eventually published en bloc in *Signe Ascendant*, though one text, *La lanterne sourde*, was included in *Poèmes*. It contains eight prose-poems followed by a piece in "vers libres", and they are inspired by Breton's stay in Martinique in 1941. They give Breton's reactions to the island's natural beauty and its charming curiosities, disclosed during his walks there with Aimé and Suzanne Césaire. There are inevitably traces of exoticism, but this theme is coupled with that of the beauty of woman.

*Le Brise-lames* is inspired by a statue of Joséphine de Beauharnais, one of the most famous natives of the isle, which to Breton seems to place old Fort-Royal under a tender, feminine sign. As he looks at the statue hidden among the coconut palms, Breton thinks of the Directory and hears the noise of Napoleon's great battles.

In a poem written specially for Madame Césaire Breton seeks to locate the secret of the beauty of the island's Creole girls and discovers a superb and appropriate analogy in the play of sunlight on the sea:

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"En vue de quel dosage ultime, de quel équilibre durable entre le jour et la nuit — comme on rêve de retenir la seconde exacte où, par temps très calme, le soleil en s'enfonçant dans la mer réalise le phénomène du 'diamant vert' — cette recherche, au fond du creuset, de la beauté féminine ici bien plus souvent accomplie qu'ailleurs et qui ne m'est jamais apparue plus éclatante que dans un visage de cendre blanche et de braises?"

(SA 80)

The young coloured girls who inspire *Fortuese sans fardeau* recall to Breton's mind the opening lines of Baudelaire's sonnet,

"Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et sacrés
Même quand elle marche on croirait qu'elle danse".

As they effortlessly balance their baskets on their heads, they suggest to Breton images of totem-poles and caryatids, both of which evoke the statuesque beauty of the girls.

The series ends significantly with a final attempt to portray in words the exotic beauty of the Martinique women, which endows even the fountains in the squares with a mythological air:

"Ici les fontaines Wallace étourdies de lianes prennent un aspect mythologique
Pour la beauté rien qu'à sa marche la reine passe sur l'autre bord
Sa gorge du crépuscule clair des roses de Sénégal
Sa main toute jeune joue le long des grilles du palais."

(SA 86)

The image of the Senegal roses suggests, of course, the girl's African ancestry and the colour of her skin is painted delicately in its twilight shade.

As Breton strolls around the streets of Fort-de-France, his eyes are ever open to the city's simple wonders; pride of place goes to the multi-coloured street-signs, one reminiscent of the negativist canvases of Magritte, with their principle of contradiction:

"Qu'on se représente, de la taille d'un aigle, un papillon bleu ciel sur lequel se lit en lettres blanches le mot PIGEON. Au demeurant, un naturaliste de ce nom, simplement...." (SA 77)
Then he is struck by the names of tropical fish, seen at the Marché aux Poissons, and does not miss the opportunity to supply new motifs to his poetry: the sea-porcupine and the trunk-fish ("le diodon" and "le coffre"). They bring new colours to Breton's poetic spectrum, sulphur-yellow and amethyst; they add new patterns and textures to his canvas, bold stripes, artistic speckles, a capricious glaze, they are "de vrais poissons-paradis ardents comme des gemmes" (SA 78), in a twilight world between animal and mineral; and in the empty shells Breton hears not the sound of the sea but the bloody revolt of 1848.

Similarly La providence tourne is inspired by tropical fruit: the sour-sop, the star-apple and a fascinating variety of fig, reminiscent of the apple in Eden:

"Sous sa robe oblongue hérisée, le corossol, mi-lampion mi-feuillage, livre sa chair de sorbet neigeux; près d'un puits le calamine fait glisser au centre d'un automne fondant sa chaîne de pépins noirs; sans oublier cette figue de fard violine dans laquelle il est défendu de mordre...."

Just as a street-sign suggested the universe of Magritte, here a fruit reminds Breton of a painting by Chirico. Art and nature are as one.

One curious poem, La carte de l'île, is simply a list of place-names in Martinique and thus recalls the "ready-mades" of Clair de Terre. Some of the names are like surrealist images, e.g. "Sémaphore de la Démarche", "Piton Crève-Cœur", "Anse Marine".

Breton in his turn becomes a landscape-artist of the first order as he sketches his impressions of the tropical rain in the opening images of La lanterne sourde:

"Et les grandes orgues c'est la pluie comme elle tombe ici et se parfume: quelle gare pour l'arrivée en tous sens sur mille rails, pour la manœuvre sur autant de plaques tournantes
de ses express de verre! À toute heure elle charge de ses lances blanches et noires des cuirasses volant en éclats de midi à ces armures anciennes faites des étoiles que je n'avais pas encore vues." (SA 81)

In these three visual images the torrential rain is thus depicted first of all in terms of the pipes of an organ, which renders its majestic music, its accompanying claps of thunder and flashes of lightning, together with an attempt to capture its refreshing fragrance; secondly its density and ferocity is suggested by the image of an immense railway terminus with a thousand tracks and platforms, an image reinforced by the sight of the rain splashing into huge puddles, which makes Breton think of the turntables on which the engines are shunted (the engines are brought into the picture in this poem by Breton's seeing the transparent rain as surreal glass expresses); thirdly the image of the medieval joust, with lances striking against breast-plates, not only heightens the impression of the rain falling heavily into the puddles but also gives new life to the cliché, "Il pleut des hallebardes".

Whereas the sight of the rain falling suggested to Baudelaire in the Spleen poem Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle... the visual image of prison-bars, which expresses the poet's depression and feeling of claustrophobia, for Breton in Martinique it lies behind these more violent, yet more grandiose images.

Still it rains, but the picture changes and Breton sees the rigging of a ship; now it abates and the visual pattern alters: the images of vertical lines are replaced by evocations of the rain-drops poised daintily like tiny magic lanterns on twigs and leaves:

"La pluie pose ses verres de lampe autour des bambous, aux bobèches de ces fleurs de vermeil agrippées aux branches par
des soirés, autour desquelles il n'y a qu'une minute, toutes
les figures de la danse enseignées par deux papillons de sang".
(ibid.)

As the impression changes once more, Breton is reminded of
an image he might have come across in Du côté de chez Swann:

"Alors tout se déploie au fond du bol à la façon des fleurs
japonaises, puis une clairière s'entrouvre: l'héliotropisme
y saute avec ses souliers à poulaine et ses ongles vrillés.
Il prend tous les coeurs, relève d'une aigrette la sensitive
et pâme la fougère dont la bouche ardente est la roue du
temps. Mon œil est une violette fermée au centre de
l'ellipse, à la pointe du fouet." (SA 81-82)

This allusion evokes perfectly the kaleidoscopic nature of Breton's
imagery; dynamic and convulsive, fragile and subtle, ever capable
of infinite variation. As the sun begins to shine again, the
plants respond and turn to the light, and Breton expresses this
phenomenon of heliotropism by his discreet suggestion of a magical
elfin figure with pointed shoes and spiral nails, touching the
leaves and petals with a wand-like plume. There is magic in the
water, too, thanks to the reflections which transform or fuse the
eye and the violet.

Breton is here in his element; everywhere he looks in the
world around him he sees counterparts of his basic inner universe;
the fairy world of L'Air de l'Eau has become reality in Martinique,
despite the war, despite the concentration-camp. Though these
poems are less well-known than the next series, Xénophiles, they
imply the same love of one's fellow-men, especially of oppressed
peoples.

"Xénophiles"

The opening text of Xénophiles, in the Signe Ascendant edit-
ion, is a prose-poem, beginning La nuit en Haïti.... Written in
January 1946, it therefore dates from Breton's visit to that country,
where he arrived on December 4th, 1945, to be met by his old friend, Dr. Pierre Mabille, who was already there as a "conseiller culturel", and by the Cuban artist, Wifredo Lam, and where he was to be instrumental in fomenting a revolution. The poem is, however, essentially an evocation, or a transposition, of the art of Wifredo Lam, and in fact was included in subsequent editions of Le Surréalisme et la Peinture as a piece of genuine art-criticism. Against the threatening background of the dawning of the atomic age, Breton is led nevertheless by the vitality of the youth of Haiti and the work of the young Cuban artist to dream of a new paradise:

"La nuit en Haiti les fées noires successives portent à sept centimètres au-dessus des yeux les pirogues du Zambèze, les feux synchrones des mornes, les clochers surmontés d'un combat de coqs et les rêves d'édén qui s'ébrouent effrontément autour de la désintégration atomique." (Sa 88)

Breton then alludes to Lam's "vêver", introducing another new poetic metaphor and another term of modern art-criticism:

".... c'est-à-dire la merveilleuse et toujours changeante lueur tombant des vitraux invraisemblablement ouvrages de la nature tropicale sur un esprit libéré de toute influence et prédestiné à faire surgir de cette lueur les images des dieux." (ibid.)

To the image of the rose-window Breton had employed in earlier works is thus added a more modern variant, evoking both a new art-form and a further opening of Breton's eyes to the windows of a much wider world. Breton is placing his faith in the emerging peoples and especially in their artistic expression. Breton regards the secret of Lam's art as being precisely the opposite of Picasso's, for it lies in attaining

".... à partir du merveilleux primitif qu'il porte en lui, le point de conscience le plus haut, en s'assimilant pour cela les plus savantes disciplines de l'art européen...." (Sp 169-171)

Moreover, in Haiti and Cuba magic is part of everyday life, and to
reflect this Breton makes allusion to a familiar demon or Voodoo god, "le loa Carrefour - Eleggúa à Cuba - qui souffle sur les ailes des portes." (SA 88)¹

In the beautiful final lines of the poem Breton employs again the image of the flight of egrets to evoke the role of Lam's art in the elaboration of the modern myth:

"Témoignage unique et frémissant toujours comme s'il était pesé aux balances des feuilles, envol d'aigrettes au front de l'étang où s'élabora le mythe d'aujourd'hui, l'art de Wifredo Lam fuse de ce point où la source vitale mire l'arbre-mystère, je veux dire l'âme persévérante de la race, pour arroser d'étoiles le DEVENIR qui doit être le mieux-être humain." (ibid.)

Here the flight of the egrets embodies superbly both the beauty of tropical nature and the magically exotic paintings of Lam.

The next poem of Xénophiles is one of the most beautiful Breton wrote, La moindre rançon. It is an evocation of Chile, the native land of Breton's third wife, Elisa, whom he married just before leaving the United States of America in 1945.

"La moindre rançon"

"Toi qui ronges la plus odorante feuille de l'atlas Chili
Chenille du papillon-lune
Toi dont toute la structure épouse
La tendre cicatrice de rupture de la lune avec la terre Chili des neiges
Comme le drap qu'une belle rejette en se levant
Dans un éclair le temps de découvrir
De toute éternité ce qui me prédestine à toi Chili
De la lune en septième maison dans mon thème astral

¹. Significantly, it was in 1945 that the Haitian government officially recognized the Voodoo cult. The giant Voodoo serpent was supposed to possess all the secrets of a magic language magnified by sacred music, and could lodge in the head of any individual and drive him into a "loa" state of frenzy, cf. Bessy, M., A Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural, pp.275-276 and p.283.
Je vois la Vénus du Sud
Naissant non plus de l'écume de la mer
Mais d'un flot d'azurite à Chuquicamata
Chili
Des boucles d'oreilles araucanes en puits de lune
Toi qui prêtes aux femmes les plus beaux yeux de brume
Touchées d'une plume de condor
Chili
Du regard des Andes on ne saurait mieux dire
Accorde l'orgue de mon cœur aux stridences des hauts voiliers
de stalactites
Vers le cap Horn
Chili
Debout sur un miroir
Et rends-moi ce qu'elle est seule à tenir
Le brin de mimosa encore frémissant dans l'ambre
Chili des catéadores
Terre de mes amours" (SA 89-90)

The title suggests that the poem is the ransom Breton pays to
free Elisa from the death of her daughter and himself from the sorrow
created by the separation from Jacqueline and Aube.¹

Each of the stanzas presents a new image of Chile. The ideas
of stanza I are inspired by the physical shape of the country, which
suggests to Breton the image of a caterpillar, nibbling a leaf (Argen-
tina); but Breton is not content to leave the image in this raw state;

¹ cf. Arcane 17, pp.23-24:
"Avant de te connaître j'avais rencontré le malheur, le désespoir
...... Et de quels confins les plus horriblement gardés de tous
ne venais-tu pas, quelle initiation à laquelle nul ou presque
n'est admis ne t'avait pas sacrée ce que tu es. Quand je t'ai vue,
il y en avait encore tout le brouillard, d'une espèce indicible,
dans tes yeux. Comment peut-on, et surtout qu'peut-on renaitre
de la perte d'un être, d'un enfant qui est tout ce qu'on aime, à
plus forte raison quand sa mort est accidentelle et qu'en cet
enfant, presque une jeune fille, s'incarnaient objectivement (ce
n'est pas toi seule qui me l'as dit) toute la grâce, tous les dons
de l'esprit, toute l'avidité de savoir et d'éprouver qui renvoient
de la vie une image enchantée et toujours mouvante à travers
un jeu tout neuf, follement complexe et délicat, de tamis et de
prismes?.....Chaque fois que tu te remémore ces atroces circon-
stances, je n'ai dans mon amour que d'épier à la dérobée au fond
de tes yeux le signal qui a voulu que le terrible passage à niveau
fit brusquement volte-face, alors que tu y étais si loin engagée...
..."
he gives it greater resonance, firstly by exploiting the homonymy of the word "feuille" (leaf, page) and by describing it as the most fragrant one of the atlas, secondly by specifying that it is a moon-moth caterpillar. In a footnote, Breton himself explains the particular significance of the moon-moth, which became for him almost a symbol of the New World:

"C'est un grand papillon vert amande finissant en clé de sol qui passe vers minuit. Je ne le connaissais pas avant de me rendre en Amérique. Il me visita peu après dans une maison située en plein bois. Sa venue et son insistance me parurent augurales." (SA 89, note 1)

The butterfly is an archetypal symbol of metamorphosis, and the line "chenille du papillon-lune" brings this out in full, containing in itself the transition from caterpillar to moth, and implying the transformation Elisa brought to Breton's life. As was seen in the chapter on Arcane 17, she leads him out of the valleys of despair and war to new peaks of hope and liberation.

Stanza II is likewise inspired by the structure of Chile and begins by making allusion to a discovery made by geologists which supports the hypothesis that the Pacific basin is the scar left on the surface of the Earth at the time of its separation from the Moon. The thought of the snow-clad Andes then suggests to Breton another of his favourite images, and also a favourite image of Eluard, the white sheet a woman throws back as she rises in the morning. This stanza provokes Robert Bréchon to make the following pertinent observation:

"Les images suggèrent une idée générale de nouveauté, de premier matin du monde. Mais en même temps, elles se rapportent aussi à la relation amoureuse entre le poète et Elisa: la 'cicatrice de rupture' rappelle le mythe platonicien de l'androgyne primitif. Ainsi, les images s'organisent en un symbole qui donne au poème son sens: la prédestination de l'amour." 1

Breton, of course, refers to the myth of Androgyne in *Arcane 17*, where this thought is clearly related to his meeting with Elisa (v. supra, p.275), but the idea of predestination is made explicit only in Stanza III, where it is reinforced by the allusion to Breton's astral chart, which also continues the lunar theme.

Before the sunrise Breton sees the Morning Star, Venus, but immediately thinks of the goddess of love rather than the planet, and paints his new version of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. Because his private goddess has become Elisa, he sees Venus rising not from the ocean but from a blue flood of azurite in the great copper-mines at Chuquicamata. Then at the end of Stanza IV the moon theme is brought back in the allusion to the crater-like shape of the earrings worn by the native Araucanian girls. This leads into the stanza devoted to the beauty of the Chilean women, whose eyes are portrayed superbly by the image of a condor feather and the expression "regard des Andes". (l. 20).

As Breton's gaze moves down the map, he comes to Cape Horn, and he evokes the wind-jammers battling against the elements; the strange image of the stalactites (l. 21) possibly suggests the masts of the sailing-ships. Breton may have seen a parallel between his own struggle and that of the tall ships and wants to place himself in harmony with them; they may have come from Europe, but their battle against the elements symbolizes paradoxically the battle for freedom of the peoples of the New World. At the end of this stanza referring to the southernmost tip of the country Breton is again guided by its physical outline on the atlas, as he sees her standing upright between the Atlantic and the Pacific. Because one ocean seems a mere reflection of the other Breton employs the image of a mirror.
In the final stanza the physical shape of Chile motivates once more the imagery and is now seen as a sprig of mimosa quivering in amber: the colour of the flower introduces the alchemical theme of gold, embodied in Chile by the oatiadores, the prospectors. At the very end love is thus equated with the search for gold and re-calls the words Breton wrote in 1925 at the beginning of the Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité: "............. je cherche l'or du temps". (PJ 7)

Though the images of this poem, when dissected rationally, still bring together distant realities, e.g. Chile and a caterpillar, they possess in their context an amazing naturalness. At one and the same time they are apt and new. The lines tremble with rhythm; the word "Chili" acts as a drum-beat refrain, punctuating the music of the Indian flutes the lyricism of the stanzas suggests. This hymn to Chile is also the song of new love; the exotic land in the south of South America - the furthest from France - has become in part Breton's country, even without his setting foot on its soil. Perhaps La moindre rançon, in its simple beauty, eclipses the poems of L'Air de l'Eau and realizes at last Breton's full potential as a poet, matching the most lyrical of his prose-passages.

Neither La moindre rançon nor La nuit en Haïti....., however, are characteristic poems of Xénophiles: the remaining five poems are all written in the same new style: brief and enigmatic, they reflect something of the aura of mystery surrounding their subjects and titles. Korwar, Uli and Tiki are inspired by Oceanian figurines, fetiches of Dutch New Guinea, New Ireland and the Marquesas Islands respectively. These poems are, in fact, images in the original sense of the word, being representations of statuettes bearing
religious significance, and the form of the poems is a reflection of the figurines themselves. **Dukduk** is inspired by the famous secret society of Melanesia; **Rano raraku** takes its name from the basalt quarry and volcano in the South-East corner of Easter Island, where the great statues are to be found.

A photograph of a figurine of **Korwar** was to appear on page 4 of *L'Art magique*. The example shown there is clasping a snake to its heart and this helps to explain the allusion of 1. 5:

"Tu as relevé contre ton cœur l'herbe serpentine". (3A 91)

Though Breton in his poem changes the snake into the serpentine plant, this does not take away the sense of magic, since this plant is known for its medicinal properties; moreover, the statuette appears to be on the threshold of life and death, and would in any case have been considered by its original owner to have supernatural powers. Breton perhaps hints at these powers when he speaks of the "extra-lucid" look in Korwar's eyes. Korwar seems to sit in judgment:

"Dans la cuvette de nos traits
Tous nos actes sont devant nous
A bout de bras". (ibid.)

As he reflects on these lines and interprets again the expression on the figurine's face, Breton sees the opportunity to have a sly dig at the Existentialists who had taken over from the Surrealists in Paris, before finishing with an allusion to Korwar's well-preserved state:

"Tu nous la bailles belle sur l'existentialisme
Tu n'es pas piqué des vers" (ibid.)

As is the case with **Uli** and **Tiki**, **Korwar** is written in a mock incantatory style. As Breton addresses the figures, he lists
their virtues and features. This technique is illustrated admirably in Ulis:

"Pour sûr tu es un grand dieu
Je t'ai vu de mes yeux comme nul autre
Tu es encore couvert de terre et de sang tu viens de créer
Tu es un vieux paysan qui ne sait rien
Pour te remettre tu as mangé comme un cochon
Tu es couvert de taches d'homme
On voit que tu t'en es fourré jusqu'aux oreilles
Tu n'entends plus
Tu nous reluques d'un fond de coquillage
Tu création te dit haut les mains et tu menaces encore
Tu fais peur tu émerveilles". (SA 92)

In line 3 Breton is evoking a myth of creation, more primeval and for that more realistic that the Classical Prometheus myth. Ulis is the god and creator of primitive, not civilized, man, and is depicted powerfully immediately after the act of creation, still covered in earth and dripping blood, an old peasant as ignorant of the mysteries of his act as the first woman giving birth for the first time. Whereas the Christian God rested on the seventh day, Ulis replenished his forces by eating like a pig; whereas the Christian God made man in his own image, Ulis is still covered with traces of man; his labour was harder and more earthy. Ulis is deaf to man's prayer, but keeps careful watch from his shell, is still menacing and still inspires great admiration.

Tiki is most noteworthy for the fact that it contains one of the strangest surrealist images in Breton's poetry:

"Je t'aime à la face des mers
Rouge comme l'oeuf quand il est vert". (SA 94)

This contradiction brings out the importance of the irrational in the beliefs and practices of primitive man. Yet Tiki has a familiar, cozy side; he is a caring, protective god; and this is suggested tenderly in the next lines:
"Tu me transportes dans une clairière
Douce aux mains comme une caille
Tu m'appuies sur le ventre de la femme
Comme dans un olivier de nacre".

In the hands of the god Breton feels like a new-born child, and the warmth, peace, affection and love Tiki brings is conveyed fully by the comparison with the quail; Tiki is a steadying influence and a guardian spirit, who keeps vigil over his sleeping owner.

Perhaps in these three poems Breton is attempting to reflect something of the attitude of the French sociological school he and Legrand discuss at the beginning of L'Art magique:

"L'école sociologique française, dès les premières années de notre siècle, va se donner à tâche de réagir contre l'empirisme des ethnologues anglais, lesquels avaient cru pouvoir conclure que la magie résulte de la généralisation abusive d'expériences en elles-mêmes valables et à partir desquelles la science avait pu prendre son essor." (AM 9)

Breton believed that "tout principe de dépassement du niveau de conscience actuel" must reside in magic, in the sense of the traditional science of the secrets of nature, transcendent magic rather than sorcery; he believed that magic still has an important role to play in human life.

Furthermore, Uli, Korwar and Tiki were written to illustrate the deep interest Breton took in the art of the South Sea Isles. In the foreword he wrote for the exhibition of Oceanian art in Paris in that same year of 1948 Breton exclaims:

"Océanie.... de quel prestige ce mot n'aura-t-il pas joué dans le surréalisme. Il aura été un des grands éclusiers de notre cœur. Non seulement il aura suffi à précipiter notre rêverie dans le plus vertigineux des cours sans rives, mais encore tant de types d'objets qui portent sa marque d'origine auront-ils provoqué souverainement notre désir. Il fut un temps, pour tels de mes amis d'allois et moi, où nos déplacements, par exemple hors de France, n'étaient guidés que par l'espoir de découvrir, au prix de recherches ininterrompues du matin au soir, quelque rare objet océanien. Un irrésistible besoin de possession, que par ailleurs nous ne nous connaissions
Breton goes on to mention some of the virtues of Oceanian art, which correspond more or less exactly to certain principles of Surrealism:

"Il y a d'abord la stupéfiante disparité de l'art de ces îles, fonction de leur dissémination, de leur repli en éventail de palmes sur elles-mêmes...... Le monde de l'imagination en profite pour donner ici ses produits les plus exubérants qui, aux yeux de l'observateur comme de l'indigène, eclipsent en grande partie le monde réel...... Il y a aussi que le merveilleux, avec tout ce qu'il suppose de surprise, de faste et de vue fulgurante sur autre chose que ce que nous pouvons connaître, n'a jamais, dans l'art plastique, connu les triomphes qu'il marque avec tels objets océaniens de très haute classe......" (CC 215-216)

He remembers a great mask from New Britain, crowned with a parasol, whose spike consisted of an enormous carving of a praying mantis; according to Breton, unless one has seen this mask, one cannot know the meaning of the expression, "le sublime poétique".

Rano raraku probably bears witness to Breton's friendship with Alfred Métraux, whom he had met in New York during the war and who has written an important study of the people and myths of Easter Island,¹ in which there is a description of Rano raraku.

Breton's poem begins, however, with what he would consider to be a splendid anti-classical view of history, which would be that of the statue-sculptors of the island:

"Que c'est beau le monde
La Grèce n'a jamais existé". (SA 95)

After the defiant leitmotif, "Ils ne passeront pas", and a somewhat gratuitous allusion to his horse feeding in the crater, Breton

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¹ L'Ile de Pâques, Paris: Gallimard (Coll. 'Idées'), 1965.
evokes succinctly the rite of the election of the ancient kings of
the island, the "birdmen":

"Des hommes-oiseaux des nageurs courbes
Volèrent autour de ma tête...." (ibid.)

Then Breton in his imagination sees himself as one of the famous
giant statues, three quarters buried in the earth, chaffing the
ethnologists, before alluding in the final line to the prostrate
position of most of the statues:

"Les hautes images sont tombées". (ibid.)

This image of images has a somewhat Biblical quality, and seems to
evoke not only the fallen idols of Rano raraku.

Though Breton keeps to the same form for the remaining poem
of Xénophiles, Dukduk, the source of inspiration has changed and,
what is more, the poem is not so much an evocation of the Melanesi-
an secret society but a humorous Surrealist warning, ending as it
does with the word "Gare", inspired, no doubt, by the previous
allusions to a locomotive and a tunnel. Before then, however, it
contains a magnificent image, which describes the flight of
flamingoes:

1. In L'Art magique Breton and Legrand explain more fully this
allusion: "Au revers d'une statue enlevée (de l'ile de Pâques)
par les Anglais en 1868, on remarque les pétroglyphes de la rame
et de l'oiseau, c'est-à-dire la signature (?) ou la figuration
d'un 'homme-oiseau': tangata-manu. Ce fait crée un lien entre
les moai (statues) et le rite magique de l'élection des anciens
rois de l'île, les 'hommes-oiseaux'.

Au printemps austral, face à l'océan qui ne se borne au
sud que par les glaces de l'Antarctique, tout le peuple gravissaît
la montagne Rano-kao, pour épier un flet couvert d'oiseaux
de mer à l'époque de la ponte. Sur cet flet, les candidats à
la royauté envoyaient à la nage des serviteurs qui attendaient
parfois plusieurs semaines le manu-tara (l'hirondelle de mer).
Celui dont le serviteur apercevait le premier un œuf de cet
oiseau devait se raser la tête, il était 'l'homme-oiseau', le
tangata-manu, roi de toute l'île pour un an." (AM 146)
Like the image of the egrets taking to the wing in Monde dans un baiser..... and that of the wild canaries in On me dit que là-bas...

... the flight of the flamingos suggests the colour and the rays of a multitude of rising suns, an image which is a negation of an elementary physical fact (or property, to use Breton's terminology), if it must be described in such prosaic terms, but which is rather an evocation of the Surrealist wonderland which is Breton's basic poetic universe. The allusion to the ordeal by fire, inspired by the French name of the birds, further heightens the image, not only by evoking the suddenness of the birds' flight but also by reinforcing the impression of a blaze of colour against a background of white smoke.

The effect of this Surrealist paradise is developed further by the erotic comparison with a train of naked women emerging from a tunnel of sobs.

Though the poems of this final part of Xénophiles are interesting for their form, the series as a whole is of significance as far as its principal theme and subject are concerned. They reflect not only Breton's adherence to the movement founded by Garry Davis, "Citizens of the World",¹ but also his ever-widening horizons, both literal and metaphorical, and his love of his fellow-men, especially

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"Dès le mois d'avril 1948, Breton avait d'ailleurs pris la parole au cours de la première réunion publique organisée par ce mouvement, afin d'assurer ses promoteurs de la sympathie et de l'appui des surréalistes. Aussi, lorsque Garry Davis interrompt, le 20 novembre, la séance de l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies, au Palais de Chaillot, ceux-ci se trouvent naturellement à ses côtés."
if they are oppressed.

To conclude this rather motley chapter, we propose to discuss very briefly significant points in the three poems Breton charmingly grouped under the title **Oubliés** when he published *Poèmes*.

"**Oubliés**"

The first of these "forgotten" poems, *Ecoute au coquillage*, was written at sea in 1946 during Breton's journey back to France. It shows how he was thinking of his daughter he had been obliged to leave behind in America and recalls her birth a decade earlier and the almost sacred act of giving her a name, which signalled the beginning of a new epoch for him:

"Je n'avais pas commencé à te voir tu étais AUBE". (SA 118)

Her birth and earliest infancy are symbolized by the allusion to boxes of pink and white sugared almonds; ten years later he sees her face in a tropical flower, known in Martinique as the "fleur du bal", which seems to share with Aube the mystery of existence.

Sadly he feels they have been parted for ever and ever; but then, thinking perhaps of how in his life love had been reborn, he remembers the legend of the Phoenix to give him hope anew, so that the poem ends with a new portrait of Aube, wearing an ethereal summer dress spangled with horseshoe magnets which are perhaps subtle representations of the attraction of father and daughter.

In *Je reviens* the reader is let into Breton's thoughts and emotions as he returns home to his apartment in Paris; at first he hardly recognizes the quarter; familiar things have disappeared

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1. In fact, Aube returned to Paris the following year to live with her father.
from view, street-names mean nothing, prices have risen outrageously, the taxi-driver does not know the way, they go into a decrepit "tabac", the curtains of which remind him of Haïti; the names and pictures on the bottles and posters are new to him but as stimulating as they ever were, recalling Cartes sur les dunes and providing him with new poetic material:

"Les étiquettes des bouteilles portent les mots Libres Pêcheurs
Condine on dirait de l'eau-de-vie de Dantzig Evita de Martines
Et les boîtes de cigarettes flamboient d'images échevelées
La merveille au mur est un éventail à soupiraux
Madame sommes-nous encore loin de Chorhyméné
Mais la belle au buisson ardent se mire dans ses ongles
Des joueurs au fond de la pièce abattent des falaises de vitraux
Nous rebroussons". (SA 121)

As he sees new buildings springing up everywhere, Breton realizes that the face of Paris is changing again, and not just literally,

The final poem, Sur la route de San Romano, is a manifesto in miniature, but a lyrical one which practises what it preaches.

The motifs juxtapose the abstract and the concrete, animal, vegetable and mineral, nature and society, the manifold impressions the poet has trained his eye and mind to notice and capture. The consequence of this, as far as the imagery is concerned, provoked Gérard Legrand to make the following observation:

"Dans ce dernier poème, à l'image se substitue pour la première fois la pure désignation de ce que le poète désire, rendant à la fois le monde transparent et différent, c'est-à-dire le rendant solennel."2

Though there is some validity in this remark, it is not, however, the whole truth. Admittedly the poem begins with a clear statement of principle:

1. The title of this poem may have some obscure connection with that of one of the panels of the Uccello triptych, Sur la déroute de San Romano.
2. In Breton, A., Legrand, G., Poesie & autre, p.5.
"La poésie se fait dans un lit comme l'amour
Ses draps défaits sont l'aurore des choses
La poésie se fait dans les bois". (SA 122)

Though the nuptial bed and bedroom and the woods are, as we have seen, important provinces of Breton's poetic universe, lines 1 and 3 imply also, in the reverse direction, that life can be regarded as poetry and that a poet draws his material from life. Breton has not abandoned the image; line 1 is clearly a comparison and line 2 is a metaphor, and furthermore, a favourite one, evoking the dawn - and all dawn signifies - by the allusion to thrown back sheets.

After this opening section Breton makes the interesting claim:

"Elle a l'espace qu'il lui faut".

Breton sees things in their proper perspective; he feels he knows the precise importance poetry has in life. He seeks in four similar "stanzas", consisting of lists of motifs, to evoke succinctly the material of poetry, taken from all the various walks of life, as from the imagination (represented in the image of the road of mental adventure which takes over from the title-image):

"L'oeil du milan
La rosée sur une prèle
Le souvenir d'une bouteille de Traminer embuée sur un plateau d'argent
Une haute verge de tourmaline sur la mer
Et la route de l'aventure mentale
Qui monte à pic
Une halte elle s'embrassaille aussitôt". (ibid.)

Breton sees poetry as a quiet and private expression, as the initial comparison with love-making had already implied:

"Cela ne se crie pas sur les toits
Il est inconvenant de laisser la porte ouverte
Ou d'appeler des témoins". (ibid.)

The heroic, patriotic lyricism of the men of the Resistance is not for Breton, nor is occasional poetry. He does not see a poem as a
battle-cry. Again Breton insists on the private nature of poetry (11. 23-5 and 11. 33-5). It should not have the brash style of the newspapers, nor the rabid rhetoric of the Chamber, nor the jollity of barrack-room ballads; it should instead bring illumination, a veritable avalanche of light (11. 26-32); it should be delicate and graceful (11. 36-42).

As a counterpart to the allusion to space in line 4, four lines from the end Breton talks about poetry and time; it is unhurried; it does not have to meet deadlines; in the poetic embrace as in the physical embrace eternity and the instant are as one.

The final line reveals, as indeed the whole poem reveals, why Breton's poetry is devoid of the ferocity and violence of his polemical writings. Although he may always have evoked private and personal experiences in his poems, they are essentially very pure and discreet. Poetry, for Breton, has little to do with the world's problems; in one sense it is a universe apart, though its basic material may be taken from the world outside as from the poet's inner world.

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If one places oneself in the position of Breton in 1948, when he was compiling his anthology Poèmes, one can regard *Sur la route de San Romano* as his poetic testament. It is the last poem of that collection and reveals clearly his conception of poetry at that particular moment. He was not to know that he would write an important series of poems a good decade later. In 1948 Breton could look back not only on his finest collection of poems in "vers libres", *L'Air de l'Eau*, but also on a completed series of long
poems and on a series of four long works in prose (Nadja, Les Vases communicants, L'Amour fou and Arcane 17). In one area alone, however, his life's work was not complete: the prose-poem.

Though Les Champs magnétiques and especially Poisson soluble had revealed the marvellous potential of automatic writing and though Anna Balakian regards the latter as Breton's Illuminations, "that is, the illustration of the principle and the expression of the marvellous vision", they are not wholly satisfactory. The doubts Breton expressed about automatic writing in the 1930's possibly imply that he, too, felt that more could still be achieved in this domain, and whether or not the poems of Constellations were written with this at the back of Breton's mind, nevertheless this final recueil fills the gap.

1. Balakian, A., André Breton, p.65.
CHAPTER NINE

"CONSTELLATIONS" (1959)1

Breton's own foreword to Constellations runs as follows:

"L'ensemble des vingt-deux planches réunies sous le titre Constellations et qui, dans l'œuvre de Miró, s'échelonnent entre les dates du 21 janvier 1940 et du 12 septembre 1941, constitue une série au sens le plus privilégié du terme. Il s'agit, en effet, d'une succession délibérée d'œuvres de même format, empruntant les mêmes moyens matériels d'exécution. Elles participent et diffèrent l'une de l'autre à la façon des corps de la série aromatique ou cyclique de la chimie; considérées à la fois dans leur progression et leur totalité, chacune d'elles y prend aussi la nécessité et la valeur de chaque composante de la série mathématique; enfin le sentiment d'une réussite ininterrompue, exemplaire qu'elles nous procurent, garde ici, au mot série, l'acception qu'il prend dans les jeux d'adresse et de hasard." (SA 127)

With reference to this foreword complementary information was supplied by Gérard Legrand in Poésie & autre, where the texts and reproductions of the paintings are placed side by side, as they are in Signe Ascendant:


Although this final chapter devoted to Breton's short poems is concerned primarily with Constellations, his last major recueil, a couple of years later Breton did publish Le la, which consists of a kind of preface where the poet discusses automatic writing and four "phrases de demi-sommeil" registered during the 1950's:

'L'03 dont le claquement de peau réside en l'ut majeur comme une moyenne';

'Le lune commence où avec le citron finit la cerise';

'On composera donc un journal dont la signature, compliquée et nerveuse, sera un sobriquet';

'Si vous vivez bison blanc d'or, ne faites pas la coupe de bison blanc d'or'. (SA 174-179)

These phrases are interesting, however, only as a record and an indication that Breton to the end of his days maintained an interest in the subconscious voice. The preface simply reveals once more the importance Breton always attached to such phrases, which he "collected" with the same care as he would give to precious stones and which he regarded, in fact, as touchstones. They seemed to give him the note, so to speak.
"Ainsi s'exprime Breton dans une introduction à l'édition de luxe (350 exemplaires) de cet ouvrage, paru en 1959, et où les planches de Miró s'accompagnaient de vingt-deux 'proses parallèles' du poète. On ne saurait proposer non plus de meilleur terme pour signifier ces textes qu'on trouvera ici reproduits dans leur intégralité. Issu chacun d'une rêverie produite par l'image, ils n'en répondent pas moins, par la constance de leur timbre, à l'unité d'inspiration du peintre. À l'enchantement que nous procurent les sigles et les astérismes de Miró, vient ainsi s'ajouter - sans jamais s'astreindre à l'évocation littéraire - celui d'un autre tissu féérique, où sur la trame de l'enfance, de la destinée et de l'amour se joue l'évocation toujours frémissante du contact de l'homme avec la nature et la légende, doubles interprètes de son horoscope spirituel. Constellations apparaît ainsi comme l'un des moments les plus révélateurs, à tous égards, de la poésie, voire de la pensée, d'André Breton."

Thus, in these Surrealist "transpositions d'art", Miró's gouaches are translated into the verbal images of Breton's prose-poems. The pictures, or their titles, or their general impression or atmosphere, are the spurs to Breton's imagination.

The "proses" of Constellations are seen by Alain Jouffroy as the final stage in the progressive concentration of Breton's poetic thought:

"Pendant les premiers exercices d'écriture automatique, Breton a laissé couler l'énergie mentale......., cette énergie qui nous traverse et que le poète se proposait de capter. Sa fluidité est grande jusqu'à l'Air de l'eau. Puis, il a exercé sur cette énergie même un contrôle de plus en plus dur jusqu'à composer les poèmes extrêmement élabores et mystérieux de Constellations, les derniers qu'il a fait paraître." 2

Written in Paris in the last quarter of 1958, they are Breton's final distillation in the field of the short prose-poem; and in this chapter we shall see how this, and the fact that the poems of Constellations are "transpositions d'art", affects the

1. op.cit., p.335.
nature, role and functions of the imagery.

The world these poems portray is the world of the imagination, the world of dreams and daydreams, of fancy and desire. Left to his own devices, a child sees in the tassel of a curtain, dimly lit by a fickle, flickering lamp, the heraldic paw of a young lion. Though the title, *L'Échelle de l'évasion* (SA 131) suggests a girl eloping with her lover, one sees before very long that this is but an image, chosen to evoke the child's escape from reality, provoked by the sight of a Jack-in-the-box and "Pierre-le-Hérissé".

Even a purring cat seems lost in a world of dreams, and the poem entitled *Femmes au bord d'un lac à la surface irisée par le passage d'un cygne* (SA 161) begins with a splendid and mysterious evocation of the women's castles in the air:

"Leur rêverie se veloutée de la chair d'une pensée proportionnée aux dimensions de l'oeil cyclopéen qu'ouvrent les lacs et dont la fixité fascina qui devait se faire le terrible héritier du Retour Éternel."

In the image of the velvet petals of the pansy all the delicacy, the softness and the bright colours of the daydreams are summed up in a flash.

The theme of the escape into the world of the imagination assumes greatest importance, however, in the text with the intriguing title *Personnages dans la nuit guidés par les traces phosphorescentes des escargots* (SA 133), which is developed immediately and given surprising force by the poem's opening sentences:

"Iares sont ceux qui ont éprouvé le besoin d'une aide semblable en plein jour, — ce plein jour où le commun des mortels a l'aimable prétention de voir clair. Ils s'appellent Gérard, Xavier, Arthur... ceux qui ont su qu'au regard de ce qui serait à atteindre les chemins tracés, si fiers de leurs
poteaux indicateurs et ne laissant rien à désirer sous le rapport du bien tangible appui du pied, ne mènent strictement nulle part...."

In these few lines, remarkably powerful yet at the same time delicate and discreet, Breton gets to the heart of what separates great poets from the common run of men. Nerval, Forneret and Rimbaud placed their trust in their imagination and penetrated the world of dreams, even in their waking hours. They are the ones who see, whereas the others, without knowing, are for ever lost in a wood.

So Breton concludes his poem with the following advice:

"À l'éveil, le tout serait de refuser à la fallacieuse alltée le sacrifice de cette lueur de labradorite qui nous dérobe trop vite et si vainement les prédictions et les incitations du rêve de la nuit quand elle est tout ce que nous avons en propre pour nous diriger sans coup férir dans le dédale de la rue."

Many years earlier, at the end of the section Breton devotes to Miró in Le Surréalisme et la Peinture, he had quoted Forneret in this respect, after stressing that ".... L'imagination pure est seule maîtresse de ce qu'au jour le jour elle s'approprie....":

"N'en déplaise à quelques idiots, je donne ici pour imprescriptibles d'autres droits que ceux de la peinture et malgré tout j'espère que Miró ne me contredira pas si j'affirme qu'il a d'autres soucis que de procurer à qui que ce soit un plaisir gratuit de l'esprit ou des yeux. 'Tout dire se peut avec l'arc-en-ciel des phrases!': souscrire comme je crois devoir le faire à cette maxime de Xavier Forneret, c'est ne pas s'attarder à la contemplation de cet arc-en-ciel et c'est, au-delà, s'instruire de ce que Miró dit." 1

Similarly, the reader must not be distracted by simple admiration of the fresh and delicate beauty of Breton's words in these poems: a number of them do convey important truths. Personnages dans la nuit guidés par les traces phosphorescentes des escargots is a little poetic gem, cut with finesse and precision, yet it

is more than that; like *Sur la route de San Romano* it is a miniature manifesto. Likewise, *Le 13 l'échelle a frôlé le firmament* (SA 151) not only creates a new myth, but also has the air of a parable. The scene is set in the first two sentences:

"Celle qu'aima l'Amour, on sait que, pour avoir voulu le voir en l'éclairant d'une lampe alors qu'il dormait, elle le mit en fuite en lui laissant tomber sur la main une goutte d'huile enflammée. Il lui est dit qu'elle ne le retrouvera que tout en haut de la Tour dont l'escalier commence comme celui de l'Hôtel de la Reine Blanche à Paris mais se rompt et se hérisse de toujours plus d'obstacles en s'élevant labyrinthine vertical en coupe de murex tombé en ruines."

Having scaled the tower, having overcome all its obstacles, having clambered over the ruins of this vertical labyrinth, the girl meets with just further disappointment: Eros is not there, and she hears the derisory cries of the mythical figures of Temptation down below: grotesque hybrids, half women, half mole-cricket, like vampires playing their dulcimers. It is only then that the girl hears a voice from the Tower, like the voice of an oracle or a god, giving her counsel, wise if enigmatic:

"Les yeux fermés redescends par où tu es venue. Tu ne t'arrêteras pas au niveau du sol. C'est quand à nouveau tu seras parvenue ici en reflet que tu sera révélé l'équilibre des forces et que tu poseras le doigt sur le coffre de parfums."

The moral of this tale is presumably that one must not seek love in haste; it comes in its own good time; yet the message is phrased in the most oblique of terms, in which Breton possibly exploits the association between the words "reflet" and "réflexion" and the homonymy of the latter; but the image of reflexion in this context suggests not just the theme of light and enlightenment, but also the ups and downs the girl must experience before she finds love, whose wonders are suggested superbly in the image of the casket of
perfumes, reminiscent of Pandora's box, at the end of the poem.

Also in the style of a parable, or perhaps of an ancient legend, is L'Etoile matinale, (SA 139) where the Morning Star summons a poor shepherd and bestows on him a mysterious gift with magical properties:

"Elle dit au berger: 'Approche. C'est moi qui t'attirais enfant vers ces caves profondes où la mer en se retirant gare les œufs des tempêtes que lustre le varech, aux myriades de paupières baissées. Seulement à la lumière frisante, comme on met la main sur les superbes fossiles au long de la route qui se cherche dans la montagne dynamitée, tu brûlais de voir jaillir l'arête d'un coffre de très ancien ouvrage qui contint (ce n'est même pas la peine de le forcer) tout ce qui peut ruisseler d'aveuglant au monde. Je te le donne parce que c'est toi comme chaque jour pour que tes sillons grissolent et que, plus flattée qu'aucune, ta compagne sourie en te retrouvant'."

The theme of love filters gently through the recueil. It is central to Femme dans la nuit (SA 145), which begins with a beautiful representation of Everywoman running to meet her lover in the open country, at sea and in the city, and which then throws the reader into the heart of a "dispute" at a Provençal Court of love:

"Mir Bernat, dit Sifre adossé au rempart de Carcassonne, d'une dame j'ai la moitié, mais je n'ai pas bien pu décider s'il me vaut mieux le bas ou le haut."

A similar atmosphere of medieval love prevails in the poem with the significant title, Le Réveil au petit jour, (SA 155) which alludes to the epic of Huon de Bordeaux, where the hero, protected by Auberon, wins the fair Esclarmonde. In Breton's version the dwarf Auberon takes on his more familiar form of Oberon, King of the Fairies, who bids us watch the magic of the finale:

"Chut! Sans plus bouger il nous convie à entendre le beau Huon frapper à la fois aux Cent Portes. En effet le cor magique brame en chandelier dans le lointain. Le sang coulera mais il ne sera pas dit que le Chevalier manque à nous rapporter les quatre molaires et les moustaches au prix desquelles est Esclarmonde et s'accomplit le sacrifice quotidien."
At the end of *Vers l'arc-en-ciel* (SA 157) the sorceress figure of Concha spells out the alphabet of love; elsewhere there is a charming picture of benches in the streets worn away in time by endless successions of young lovers:

"Les bancs des boulevards extérieurs s'infléchissent avec le temps sous l'étreinte des lianes qui s'étoilent tout bas de beaux yeux et de lèvres." (SA 167)

The motif of the twining lianas captures splendidly the embraces, the kisses in the starlight of eternal youth, and suggests, furthermore, the presence of the trees, whose verdant branches seem to reach down to bless the loving couples.

Yet if love fills the atmosphere of the poems of *Constellations*, their true subject is Woman. As in Miró's elegant canvases, Her presence is perpetually attested. Her form moulds the sand on the beach, though the latter claims the converse in its dialogue with the cork:

"Comme le lit de sa plus belle nuit je moule ses formes qui suspendent en leur centre la navette de la mer. Je la flatte comme un chat, à la démembre vers tous ses pôles. Je la tourne vers l'ambre, d'où fusent en tous sens les Broadways électriques. Je la prends comme la balle au bond, je l'étends sur un fil, j'évapore jusqu'à la dernière bulle ses lingeries et, de ses membres jetés, je lui fais faire la roue de la seule ivresse d'être." (SA 135)

Not to be outdone, the cork, too, paints and sculpts Her beauty in this poem which captures both the childlike innocence and charm of the little song by Desnos, *Chant du ciel*, and an eroticism, in the depiction of the ecstasy the woman feels.

In the next poem (SA 137) the camera gradually moves from a misty shot of the antlers of a stag reflected in troubled waters to a close-up of a siren combing her golden locks:

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"Que sous le pouvoir du peigne cette masse fluide, mûrement brassée de sarrasin et d'avoine, tout au long épinglée de décharges électriques, n'est pas plus confondant dans sa chute le torrent qui bondit couleur de rouille à chaque détour du château de Fougères aux treize tours par la grâce du geste qui découvre et recouvre le nid sournoisement tramé des vrilles de la clémation."

In this magnificent evocation of a woman's hair, the starting-point is, of course, virtually a cliché, the comparison with a torrent or a cascade, but this is ramified into a fine and complex image: the picture of the waterfall is gradually merged with that of fields of golden corn, to be followed by a movement back to the tenor with the allusion to the electricity generated by the combing of the hair, which in turn gives way to a further suggestion of both the colour and the image of a stream when Breton paints the "château" of Fougères. This reference to the twelfth century castle immediately makes the woman the heroine of a tale of courtly love, but it is with an impression of her physical attraction that the poet wishes to leave us, hence the final more sensual description, which recalls the theme of the veiled erotic.

Perhaps even more of the flavour of Miró's women is captured by Breton in Danseuses acrobates (SA 147), where the circus-riders and the tight-rope walkers blend into a background of graceful axes and slender curves, which are clearly inspired by the accompanying picture. The poetess, "La Belle Cordière", becomes not surprisingly a female counterpart of Breton, as she rediscovers her mission, "... qui est de faire grésiller le sel de la terre. Elle mire l'instant où le soleil doit devenir noir comme un sac fait de poil et le vent joncher la terre de figues vertes." (SA 153)

The most gallant portrait, and the one which epitomizes Breton's vision of Woman, not just in Constellations, but also in
all his creative writings, is contained in one simple sentence at
the end of the evocation of the daydreams of the heroines of Femmes
au bord d'un lac à la surface irisée par le passage d'un cygne:

"Elles s'y rendent en tapis volant, sur le merveilleux nuage
d'ignorance. C'est là que la vapeur des alambics fait
ruche et que le bras, qui reflète à s'y méprendre le col de
cygne, pointe tout distraitement sur l'angle du miel. Plus,
entre les mots, la moindre brise: le luxe est dans la volupté.
- Toute femme est la Dame du Lac." (SA 161)

In these few lines Breton presents the whole atmosphere of Arthurian legend: the wizardry of Merlin in the reference to the stills
and the magic carpet; the hint of myth in the presence of the White
Swan; the code of chivalry, explicit in the final words but in
truth all-pervading.

As will be seen too, in the final section of this study,
devoted to the long poems, Breton in the final part of his life
includes in his poems more and more medieval allusions and captures
more and more the tone of the medieval romance and allegory. His
earlier admiration for Gothic castles and Gothic novels is supple-
mented now by an admiration and appreciation of Celtic myths and
legends. These medieval allusions make Breton's poetic universe in
Constellations even more of a fairy world than it had been hither-
to, and, as we have seen, all his previous recueils, L'Air de l'Eau
in particular, seemed to have been set in wonderland, in a world of
dreams, where "le merveilleux" was king.

At times Breton makes specific mention of sorcery, as in
La Postesse:

"Des taillis où couve une chanson ensorcelante perce par
d'éclairs et ondule la pointe du sein de la belladone." (SA 153)

In this atmosphere of magic the image which gave the plant its name
is delicately revived: the belladonna is changed back into a
beautiful woman; and at the end of Personnage blessé (SA 141) Breton suggests that anyone can suddenly awaken and find himself in the heart of a magic forest.

The scenes depicted in these poems suggest the world of the ballet: the characters seem to dance delicately and gracefully across the stage, in gauzy costumes of pastel shades, against a fairy backcloth.

The impression of a fairy paradise is reinforced, however, by the manifold allusions to flowers and plants, to the birds present in Miró's titles, to precious stones, to surreal beasts. These motifs, very often chosen for the beauty of the words themselves, bring a new vocabulary to poetry: amongst the birds one finds "cormorans", "accenteur", "corbeau", "cygne" and "rossignol"; amongst the myriad botanical allusions there are "fuchsia", "pensée", "le sorbier", "akène", "coquelicot", "sarrasin", "avoine", "clématis", "garance", "magnolia", "une amande qui germe", "seringa", "belladone"; from the insect kingdom one comes across "lucioles", "vers luisants", "criocère", "courtilière", "cerfs volants"; in the precious stones there are "labradorite" and "agate oeillée".

In the final poem, Le Passage de l'oiseau divin, however, the birds and butterflies acquire extra dimensions; in their care-free flight Breton reads an elementary yet profound lesson:

"Un oiseau, un papillon ne sont jamais tristes. Les papillons sont très élevés en esprit; ils jouent avec les enfants; le papillon le sait et s'en amuse; il s'échappe toujours, même quand on l'attrape et qu'on le tue." (SA 171)

The man of the city has acquired the simple wisdom of the peasant. The birds and butterflies know the secret of happiness and are the masters even in death.
The motif of the key-bearer is quite explicitly a hermetic motif in this poem, and both the tramps' alphabet and the language of the birds evoke arcane codes. Yet the charm of the poem resides not so much in its occultism as in its little allegory of the pilgrim, possibly inspired by Flamel's reputed pilgrimage to Compostella, and in the image of the Seine flowing lazily and peacefully beneath the bridges of medieval Paris and minting memories. One little touch, the allusion to the "méreaux", counters distributed to the members of the chapter, is sufficient to make the picture complete.

At the level of imagery, images belonging to the categories Breton listed in the first Manifeste are still to be found; in this respect one can cite the apparently hallucinatory sequence at the beginning of Le Réveil au petit jour:

"À tire d'aile s'éloigne le bonnet de la meunière et voilà qu'il survole le clocher, repoussant les cerfs-volants de la nuit, comme les autres en forme de coeurs et de cages. La charrue à tête d'alouette le contemple de l'herbe grasse."

The wind blows away the bonnet of the miller's wife and, as in Miró's canvas, it blends with the birds and insects in the sky and, as it flies over the steeple, becomes one of them. Then in the dream-like
vision the lark, perched out of character on the plough, is seen as its head: the bird and the implement are fused into one surreal mongrel, breaching once more the concept of the three kingdoms: animal, vegetable and mineral. There is further visual surrealism in Personnage blessé (SA 141), where an old woman carries a bundle of red-hot thorns. Furthermore, the "jeu de l'un dans l'autre" is recalled by the opening line on page 169: "Le sorbier entre dans la lyre ou bien la lyre dans le sorbier."

The curves, the lines, the zigzags, the crescent moons, the "sigles" and the "astérismes" of Miró's paintings are reflected in the allusions to whorls, scrolls, musical notes and signs in Breton's poems. Le Chant du rossignol à minuit et la pluie matinale (SA 149) begins with a splendid image, which perhaps evokes the nightingale's song, of a treble-clef bestriding the moon; at the end of the same poem quavers, rather than old women, place the lids on their pots. Vers l'arc-en-ciel (SA 157) contains the motif of flowery volutes and the image of a diabolo; elsewhere in the recueil mention is made of graphs, arcs, musical scores, wires and shuttles, épées and foils, climbing plants and twirls of smoke, flashing blades and beating wings.

Vers l'arc-en-ciel likewise evokes Miró's land of birth: the scarlet "muleta" introduces the image of the bull-fight, the agility of the matador, his tormenting of the bull, the stab-thrust and the spurt of seething blood.

The title Constellations is a further spur to the imagery; the picture accompanying "traces phosphorescentes des escargots" suggests that this strange phrase may be an evocation of the Milky Way, which is mentioned explicitly in Femme dans la Nuit (SA 145).
One of the titles has been seen to be *L’Étoile matinale*: in other texts Breton speaks of the starlight, the night, the moon and the firmament. One title is especially significant for the way in which it unites several major motifs and themes: *Chiffres et constellations amoureux d’une femme* (SA 165).

One series of images, in particular, summarizes very simply Constellations and points to the cosmic forces at work behind the theme of love: these images suggest the idea of attraction. In the sand’s eulogy of Woman in *Femmes sur la plage* (SA 135) the dominant imagery evokes this theme: allusions to poles, amber, the neon lights of Broadway; the "femme à la blonde aisselle coiffant sa chevelure à la lueur des étoiles" (SA 137) is charged with static electricity; in *Danseuses acrobates* (SA 147) Breton speaks of a strange radar "qui aiguille infailliblement les rencontres" and at the end of the same sentence mentions the phenomenon of "tropisme", which determines the direction in which a plant grows. The bird deciphering the unknown to the young lovers (SA 167) employs a curious symbol of blazing flowers, possibly inspired partly by the stars, to evoke the theme of attraction, coupled finally with that of harmony:

"Elles (les fleurs) sont pour nous traduire en termes concrets l’adage des mythographes qui veut que l’attraction universelle soit une qualité de l’espace et l’attraction charnelle la fille de cette qualité mais oubliée par trop de spécifier que c’est ici à la fille, pour le bal, de parer la mère. Il suffit d’un souffle pour libérer ces myriades d’aigrettes portueuses d’akènes. Entre leur essor et leur retombée selon la courbe sans fin du désir s’inscrivent en harmonie tous les signes qu’englobe la partition céleste."

Here the themes of woman and love, the motifs of birds and flowers, ciphers and stars, scrolls and musical notes are brought together in the magic atmosphere of this multiple image which is a microcosm
of the whole recueil. Both Constellations and the universe of Miró are admirably summed up by Breton himself in the section of Le Sur-réalisme et la Peinture devoted to the Spanish painter:

".........Pour mille problèmes qui ne le préoccupent à aucun degré bien qu'ils soient ceux dont l'esprit humain est pétri, il n'y a peut-être en Joan Miró qu'un désir, celui de s'abandonner pour peindre, et seulement pour peindre, (ce qui pour lui est se restreindre au seul domaine dans lequel nous soyons sûrs qu'il dispose de moyens) à ce pur automatisme auquel je n'ai, pour ma part, jamais cessé de faire appel, mais dont je crains que Miró par lui-même ait très sommairement vérifié la valeur, la raison profondes.............

...........Derrière les incantations répétées en latin de campagne, dans l'ombre de la chaudière à retours de flamme où par définition les produits de la combustion doivent revenir sur eux-mêmes avant de passer par la cheminée, il est permis de voir en chaque étoile une fourche, dans un corps même humain 'une substance pleine de points, de lignes et d'angles' et cela sans plus, dans un animal à plumes les plumes, dans un autre animal les poils, de ne juger la France, l'Espagne que selon leur contour sur la carte et ce qu'il offre dans sa sinuosité de particulier, de ne demander au réel que le surexpressif, l'expressif au sens le plus enfantin, et de ne rien combiner au-delà de cet expressif. Mot pour œil, dent pour mot. Nul n'est près d'associer comme lui l'inassociable, de rompre indifféremment ce que nous n'osons souhaiter de voir rompu." 1

In the universe of Miró, as in Constellations, the association of the unassociable, which was the original basic criterion for the successful surrealist image, is achieved with a remarkable spontaneity and naturalness. It is as if the bonnet was made to fly over the spire rather than stay perched on the head of the miller's wife; and it is this subtle combination of the surprising and the natural which makes not just the imagery of Constellations but also the whole recueil in almost every detail so attractive and aesthetically pleasing. The images no longer jar, as they did frequently in Les Champs magnétiques; they no longer destroy the thread of the poem, but rather give it ever more interest and delicate grace.

Just as *L'Air de l'Eau* marks the summit of Breton's achievement in the field of the short poem in free verse, so *Constellations* fills what had been an important gap in Breton's poetry, the need for a splendid collection of short prose-poems.

However, *Constellations* not only fills this particular gap but also perhaps eclipses *L'Air de l'Eau* and therefore does become his finest *recueil*, because although *Constellations* contains as many surprising images as *L'Air de l'Eau*, they are integrated even more happily into the framework of the poems than is the case with the earlier collection.

Before our study of Breton's poetry is completed, however, we have to consider the series of long poems Breton wrote during the Second World War: *Pleine Marge*, *Fata Morgana*, *Les États généraux*, and the *Ode à Charles Fourier*; they add an extra dimension, both literally and metaphorically, to his writings and, furthermore, throw extra light on the question of imagery, analogy and symbolism.
CHAPTER TEN

THE QUARTET OF LONG POEMS: "PLEINE MARGE", "FATA MORGANA", "LES ETATS GENERAUX", THE "ODE A CHARLES FOURIER"

Making no mention of Pleine marge, Anna Balakian in her book André Breton groups the last three of this series together and refers to them as "The Epic Poems". Yet Pleine marge is written in the same style as the other three poems, it possesses the same basic structure as the Ode à Charles Fourier and though it is somewhat shorter, only Violette Nozières of Breton's other poems can match it for length. Moreover, like Fata Morgana, Les Etats généraux and the Ode à Charles Fourier, it was written during the Second World War and sheds light on Breton's reactions to a particular period and aspect of the war.

Anna Balakian feels that with these poems Breton creates a new genre, the modern epic; she regards it as his most marked contribution to poetry and claims:

"With these poems Breton joins, in fact, Claudel and St. John Perse [sic] in a triptych of France's modern cosmic poets, in the first half of the twentieth century. But what distinguishes Breton's from the more grandiose manner of the other two is that he brings himself in collision with world events and searches for their meaning in the microcosm of his life as well as in the macrocosm of the natural world.

Before Breton the epic always identified a hero or heroes who transcended cataclysmic events in spirit at least, if not in body; they struggled against overpowering forces and forgot their personal lives in the participation in the collective phenomena upon which they had an impact. The tradition of the epic was to be carried on by Breton's erstwhile companions, Eluard and Aragon, in the eloquent exchange between the 'I' and the collective conscience, as virtual heroes of the Resistance. In a surge of lyricism - except for the more sophisticated Broedliande of Aragon - they virtually dissipated all the cryptic character of surrealist communication, as if direct expression heightened the poignancy of the dark spring of 1940 when 'the roses and the lilacs' dripped blood across the countryside...................... Beside their unilateral
and universal message so instantaneously understood by the
generation participating in the events of 1940, Breton’s
poems lack outer vibrance, are indeed sotto voce, and are
related dimly to the events that triggered them.

The intransigence of Breton revealed itself once more as he desisted from the natural and easy path by which he
could have given simple expression to the gigantic tragedy.
Instead, he created a form of poetry more hermetic than it
had ever been in the days of automatic writing. The ellipsis
of language coupled with the enigmas of thought produced the
closed character of these last poems. 1

Though it is perhaps an exaggeration to claim that these
poems are more hermetic than the automatic texts and to claim, as
Anna Balakian does, that they all exceed three hundred lines, when
Les États généraux contains but 212, nonetheless her words serve
as a good introduction to this final series of poems.

Yet although Anna Balakian’s term "epic poems" brings out
the dimensions of the works and the importance of their themes, the
term "symphonic poems", if one may employ this musical expression
in its transferred sense, could portray their structure and basic
nature: somewhat free in form, they are composed of a number of
different movements, only more or less inter-related; each is con-
structed around one principal theme, myth or symbol, but they all
contain an intricate pattern of sub-themes; they possess great
rhythmic variation; and at times certain devices in the lay-out,
e.g. the use of italics, movements from verse to prose or vice versa,
may be seen as changes of key or indications of a form of poetic
orchestration.

The nomenclature of these poems matters little, however; what
does matter is their merit and interest as poetry; one can be con-
tent to refer to them as Breton’s quartet of long poems.

"Pleine marge" (1940)

In a foreword to the 1962 edition of Pierre Mabille's book, Le Miroir du Merveilleux, a foreword entitled Pont-Levis, published in Perspective cavalière (PC 192-203), Breton recalls the circumstances in which Pleine marge was written. After the armistice of June 1940 Breton was demobilized in the unoccupied zone. Completely without means and with his wife and small daughter to support, Breton's first thought was to seek refuge with Pierre Mabille, who had been his family doctor as well as a close friend in Paris but had moved to Salon-de-Provence. Mabille shared Breton's interests in anthropology and occultism; according to Breton, Mabille was greatly influenced by Pierre Piobb, the first translator into French of Robert Fludd's treatises on general astrology and geomancy, and was particularly interested in the Centuries astrolégiquestres of Nostradamus, whose tomb is to be seen in Salon-de-Provence. It was therefore not just because of Mabille's hospitality that Breton dedicated Pleine marge to him:

"Je ne puis me proposer ici que de faire entrevoir le partage de Pierre Mabille entre la pensée discursive appuyée sur les plus solides connaissance et le goût de scruter à longues antennes. C'est plus spécialement à cette dernière disposition qu'entend rendre hommage la dédicace que je lui ai faite alors de mon poème 'Pleine marge', entrepris à la fin de notre séjour à Salon et achevé à Martigues toujours dans sa lumière." (PC 196-197)

The poem was written in the month of September 1940, when it seemed to Breton that they were encamped on a "terrain vague", and it is perhaps in this light that one can begin to understand the implications of the poem's title. Breton is left with time on his hands, he has full latitude, there is a very wide margin to fill. Breton feels that he is only on the fringe of great and possibly
cataclysmic events. It was seen in Arcane 17 that Breton believed that the experience of very deep boredom could sometimes lead to strange but valid solutions to life's problems. Breton felt that it was when one is completely "disponible" that interventions of objective chance can play a decisive role. It is almost certainly because of this that Pleine marge is dominated by the theme of the encounter.

In the opening lines, however, Breton reveals certain important aspects of his character. He begins with the proud statement, implying perhaps that he is a leader rather than a follower, perhaps that he suspects initiates or those who claim to have accomplished the Great Work:

"Je ne suis pas pour les adeptes" (SA 30).

(It is presumably for the statement of principle in the opening lines that Philippe Audoin regards Pleine marge as a "poème-manifeste".) Then with the aid of a splendid image Breton evokes the feeling of rebellion sparked off in him by the sight of a church:

"La lampe de mon cœur file et bientôt hoquète à l'approche des parvis". (SA 30)

He sees himself as the embodiment of risk and revolt, a person who cannot settle for the quiet life; and these ideas give rise to the next sequence of images:

"Je n'ai jamais été porté que vers ce qui ne se tenait pas à carreau
Un arbre élu par l'orage
Le bateau de lueurs ramené par un mousse
L'édifice au seul regard sans clignement du lézard et
mille frondaisons" (ibid.)

The idea of storms, explicit in the image of the tree singled out to be struck by lightning, implicit in the ship brought back to harbour

1. Audoin, P., Breton, p.135.
by a cabin-boy, presumably the sole survivor of the crew, are particularly appropriate, of course, in the late summer of 1940, when the full significance of the fall of France was only just becoming apparent after the traumatic effect of the initial shock.

Twice in these opening lines of the poem Breton's revolt is expressed in terms of images of light or fire (the masculine element): the "lampe" (l. 3) and the "bateau de lueurs" (l. 6); and this recalls the claim Breton was to make at the end of Arcane 17, "......c'est la révolte même, la révolte seule qui est créatrice de lumière". (cf. supra, p.292). Later in the poem the tone of revolt is expressed with images of excess, like the breaking of the pedal-board of an organ:

"Les coquillages géants des systèmes tout érigés qui se présentaient en coupe irrégulière dans la campagne
Avec leurs escaliers de nacre et leurs reflets de vieux verres de lanternes
Ne me retiennent qu'en fonction de leur part de vertige
Fait à l'homme qui pour ne rien laisser échapper de la grande rumeur
Parfois est allé jusqu'à briser le pédalier". (SA 32)

Thus the man who strikes a jarring note is a man after his own heart.

According to Breton, the only women in his life had been those who shared his defiant attitude and his refusal to content himself with narrow "reality":

"Je n'ai vu à l'exclusion des autres que des femmes qui avaient maille à partir avec leur temps
Ou bien elles montaient vers moi soulevées par les vapeurs d'un abîme
Ou encore absentes il y a moins d'une seconde elles me précédèrent du pas de la Joueuse de tympanon
Dans la rue au moindre vent où leurs cheveux portaient la torche". (SA 30)

Reading these lines one thinks of Nadja, just as the image of Jacqueline is suggested by the subsequent allusion to a Byzantine queen, first seen in the "quartier des Halles".
With her begins the series of encounters, firstly with women, secondly with the rebels of history. Amongst the women Breton mentions a cave-child whose embrace prolonged for life the Eskimo night, even when dawn engraved its reindeer on the window-pane (a splendid variation of Breton's standard images of dawn, steamed-up or icy windows), a nun with lips of nasturtium noticed in the bus from Crozon to Quimper, "l'ancienne petite gardienne ailée de la Porte", and finally the lady Breton saw smiling at him from the depths of the Etang de Berre (an allusion clearly inspired by Breton's visit to Martigues at the edge of the lake).

The rebel figures of history Breton includes in the second sequence are the fifth century heresiarch, Pelagius; the Franciscan illuminate, Joachim of Floris, who, disgusted by ecclesiastical abuses, elaborated a mystical doctrine announcing the triumph of spiritual values, but possibly selected by Breton because of his prophecies, too, or because he was a chief impetus for radical movements in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance; the medieval German philosopher Meister Eckhart, with whom Hegel had recognized affinities and who was condemned by the Pope for his mystical and pantheistic theories; Cornelius Jansen, Deacon Paris, and their successors, the Bonjour brothers of Fareins, representing the most famous heretical doctrine in France since the time of the Albigensians; and even perhaps Catherine Cadière, "La belle la violée la soumise l'acciablante La Cadière", to whom Huysmans refers in LÀ-bas and who was one of the principals in a notorious case of "sorcery by the
breath" in the eighteenth century.¹

Though Breton makes it plain that he does not share the ideas of these historical figures, all the more so as they are by and large religious heretics, he does admire their rebellious stands:

"Et même des êtres engagés dans une voie qui n'est pas la mienne
Qui est à s'y méprendre le contraire de la mienne
Elle s'ensable au départ dans la fable des origines
Mais le vent s'est levé tout à coup les rampes se sont mises à osciller grandement autour de leur pomme irisée
Et pour eux q'a été l'univers défenestré

O grand mouvement sensible par quoi les autres parviennent à être les miens
Même ceux-là dans l'éclat de rire de la vie tout encadrés de bure
Ceux dont le regard fait un accroc rouge dans les buissons de mûres
M'entraînent m'entraînent où je ne sais pas aller
Les yeux bandés tu brûles tu t'éloignes tu t'éloignes
De quelque manière qu'ils aient frappé leur couvert est mis chez moi". (SA 32-33)

The implication is that because such figures have in the past come to Breton's rescue by serving as spiritual guides, he is making himself available in 1940 to meet and greet like minds, who will give him a lead, as the image of the blindfold suggests. Later in the war Breton's discovery in a New York bookshop of an edition of the works of Fourier is a perfect example of how this operates. These guides play a special role in Breton's life; they bring encouragement and new outlooks, so that he can admit:

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¹ Girard, a Jesuit priest, was accused at Aix in 1731 of seducing Catherine Cadière by this means and of other offences in connection with her. One day Girard found an excuse to blow away something from the young lady's gown and from that moment she fell under his spell and became infatuated with him. Her religious ecstasies increased and she even displayed the Christ stigmata. At length doubts arose in Mlle Cadière's mind and she told her parents what had happened. In consequence, Père Girard was arrested; some accounts relate that he was acquitted of the charges, others state that he was burnt at the stake. (v. Rollo Ahmed, The Black Art, London: Jarrolds, 1968 edition (first published 1936), p.106.)
"Avec eux et le vent j'ai tout ce qu'il me faut". (SA 34)

The evocation of the rebels of history, like that of the women, is at times somewhat fanciful; Breton still does not spurn the sudden intuition presented by a strange image, or a "phrase de réveil", which can be coupled with a more rational statement to complete the portrait. Pelagius is painted in one line:

"Mon beau Félage couronné de gui ta tête droite sur tous ces fronts courbés" (SA 33)

The mere mention of the mistletoe crown suffices to evoke the Celtic priest.

The portrait of Joachim of Floris is, however, much more surreal:

"Joachim de Flore mené par les anges terribles
Qui à certaines heures aujourd'hui rabattent encore leurs ailes sur les faubourgs
Où les cheminées fusent invitant à une résolution plus proche dans la tendresse
Que les roses constructions heptagonales de Giotto". (ibid.)

The visual surrealism of the opening lines of this sequence may contain an oblique allusion to aeroplanes, in addition to evoking the abbot's visions and statues of angels in churches. Though the phrase "les roses constructions heptagonales de Giotto" may seem strange, the Italian artist did produce what one can regard as seven-sided paintings, e.g. The Crucifixion in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, and pink was one of his favourite colours; otherwise the word "heptagonales" may evoke the experience of perception and depth in Giotto's pictures.

These portraits, like the whole poem, are mixtures of simple statements, anecdotes, allusions and surrealist images. In their interplay the function of the images resembles that of the chance encounters, of the intervention of "le hasard objectif" in Breton's
life. They act as refreshing stimuli to the poet's mind, they make him see hitherto unsuspected analogies, just as within the basic surrealist image itself distant realities are thrown together. The images are thus more than mere ornamentation, though they are still largely instrumental in creating the poetic quality, in the traditional sense of the term. They provide the colour, but they also supply the surprise and the sudden extra dimensions. The particular function and nature of the imagery of *Pleine marge* is well illustrated in one short "stanza" in the middle of the poem:

"Je prends mon bien dans les failles du roc là où la mer précipite ses globes de chevaux montés de chiens qui hurlent où la conscience n'est plus le pain dans son manteau de roi Mais le baiser le seul qui se recharge de sa propre braise". (SA 32)

The stanza opens on a fairly prosaic note, as Breton draws his sustenance from the simple pleasures of nature; but the thought or sight of the sea crashing against the rocks immediately suggests the picturesque but apt image of the waves transformed into horses ridden not by human jockeys but by baying dogs, an image which captures all the thrills, the excitement and the spectacle of the racecourse or battlefield, and presents not just the visual impression of the blue-green sea topped with white foam but also the sound and the fury of the mass of water as it pounds against the rocky shore. The use of the _enjambement_ has the effect of emphasizing the word "précipite" and the force of the sea whose action it evokes. The idea of drawing sustenance is then ramified, firstly by the allusion to bread, secondly by the allusion to the kiss. The second two lines possibly suggest that physical nourishment, symbolized by the bread, albeit bread in a royal cloak, is not enough, and that the more spiritual food, love, is required, too. Breton's knowledge
that his wife and daughter are by his side in his hour of want is at least as consoling as the recollections of the encounters and the inspiration of the heretics. (At the end of the poem the idea of drawing sustenance is combined with the image of the heretics, for there Breton states that they have left him a goodly supply of provisions.) With the aid of these simple things Breton can recharge his batteries, so to speak, the idea of the final words of the sequence. This, in fact, is the real note of the poem. Breton's stay in Salon-de-Provence gives him the chance to collect his thoughts. He was struggling to find a solution: he had time on his hands, but no control over events. Writing *Pleine marge* helps him to clear the air a little; this poem is in reality a prelude to the three longer epic poems of wartime, and in theme and tone it is very much a prelude to *Fata Morgana*, written a few months later in similar circumstances, though by then the Bretons had moved to Marseilles.

Unlike *Fata Morgana*, however, the structure of *Pleine marge* is fairly linear. The poem can be divided into four parts: in the first section (ll. 1-11) Breton reveals what he regards as the basic aspects of his character; the second section (ll. 12-30) is devoted to the theme of the encounter; section three (ll. 31-53) begins with fresh revelations of Breton's personality, which gradually introduce, in general terms, the theme of the heretic; the final section (ll. 59-78) is the section of the rebels and heretics of history. There is thus a regular progression in the poem; even though it contains some surrealist images and some surreal sequences, the basic structure is a rational one. Breton returns to this pattern with the *Ode à Charles Fourier*, but in the meantime he con-
structed Fata Morgana in a completely different manner. Nonetheless because of their length, because of their subjects, because of the time of their composition, Pleine marge and Fata Morgana belong to the same series.

"Fata Morgana" (1940)

The arrival of the Bretons in Marseilles, where they were the guests of Victor Serge at the villa "Air-Bel" belonging to the Comité de Secours américain aux Intellectuels, did not change their basic plight. Thus the mood of Fata Morgana is very similar to that of Pleine marge, though Marseilles brings new points of reference, without which Breton would not have been able to write this new poem.

The title Fata Morgana is itself almost a kind of rebus, containing different layers of significance. The "fata morgana" is a kind of mirage, seen especially in the Strait of Messina. In the mirage apocalyptic figures can be perceived in the morning sky over the Mediterranean. Breton's poem is a poem of dawn. It unfolds his thoughts and feelings at a time which must have seemed apocalyptic to him, and near the end Breton refers to "le sens d'une révélation mystérieuse" (SA 49). "Fata Morgana" is also, however, the Latin form of "la fée Morgane", a figure to whom Apollinaire had made frequent allusion. In Italian poetry the Fata Morgana dwelt at Mongibel in Sicily; as far as her role in Breton's poem is concerned, it is as well to remember that the personality of Morgan in the Romance poems is quite different from the one portrayed in English versions of the legends:

"Morgan le Fay is seldom presented under the sinister, or at least ambiguous aspect, that she wears for English readers:
more frequently, she is a type of beauty."  
At the beginning of Breton's poem there is the suggestion that the fay is the protector of the refugees, huddled together in the town:

"Ce matin la fille de la montagne tient sur ses genoux un accordéon de chauves-souris blanches." (SA 36)

Moreover, in the Brittany cycle Morgane was the fairy of the Île de Sein, off the west coast of Finistère, which Breton, in company with Eluard and Valentine Hugo, had visited in 1931. There she was reputed for her healing powers. Her name, though it has been interpreted in sundry ways, has invariably been connected with the sea, and so she becomes for Breton a sea-goddess and a symbol of his coming sea-voyage. To complicate matters further, however, Morgan was confused in the Middle Ages with Morrigan, the Celtic goddess of war, who used to appear in the guise of a hideous bird unto warriors who were destined to perish in the combat. When one recalls that Breton, earlier in 1940, had served on the medical staff at the pilots' school in Poitiers, the legend of the hideous bird assumes particular significance, though to anyone in 1940 the concept of war in the air and the sight of squadrons of the Luftwaffe must have given rise to thoughts of the Apocalypse.

2. Anna Balakian has made a very interesting discovery, as far as the allusion to the "chauves-souris blanches" is concerned: "Chauves-souris blanches was the term used by which the White Russian refugees of the Communist Revolution had been known in Paris where they flocked in the 1920's, when Breton was a youth. The analogy with the 1940 refugees is obvious." (André Breton, p.186).
3. cf. VC 39; "...J'ai constaté l'été suivant, de l'île de Sein que son nom doit rendre chère aux psychanalystes, que les bateaux n'étaient ni plus ni moins immobiles sur la mer"; and v. photograph in Alexandrian, S., André Breton par lui-même, p.33.
Anna Balakian suggests that the fairy Morgan is perhaps identifiable with the statue of Notre-Dame de la Garde which dominates Marseilles, and this may explain Breton's image of "la fille de la montagne" for the church was built on a hillock.

_Fata Morgana_ is worthy of the appellation, a "symphonic poem": its multiple themes, inter-related to a greater or lesser degree, create a series of movements and interludes. The poem is not marked, however, by a rational progression. Odd suggestions of one theme are followed by notes of another, and so on throughout the piece.

The structure is therefore parallel rather than linear, and this is an obvious indication of the poem's analogical rather than discursive development.

This is similar to what H.M. McLuhan describes as the "cubist perspective" of the opening of _The Waste Land_,

".... which renders, at once, a diversity of views with the spectator always in the centre of the picture." 2

The effect on the reader is that he feels at first that he has been abandoned in a maze, and this is, of course, more or less Breton's feeling after his flight to the South after the fall of France. Both the poet and the reader have to find a path out of this metaphorical labyrinth. The solution, if only a temporary one, for the poet, is to present the complex of images, ideas, signs, symbols he detects; a possible solution for the reader is to try to extricate one by one the various themes and motifs. In any case the device of thematic elaboration, the use of _leitmotiv_, is, at

1. André Breton, p.186.
least since Wagner, a fundamental aspect of symbolism; moreover, it is one of the features of the rhythm of the poem, if one gives to "rhythm" the meanings ascribed to it by E.M. Forster in Aspects of the Novel, where it is defined both in terms of the relationship between large movements as in a symphony and in terms of recurrent themes.

The first series of themes revolves around the title and involves allusions to Arthurian legend. After the title and the initial allusion to the "fille de la montagne", there is perhaps an oblique reference to Morgan in 1. 29, which recalls earlier Surrealist games:

"Si j'étais une ville dis-tu Tu serais Ninive sur le Tigre", (SA 37)

for in a Spanish version King Arthur's life was preserved by the care of Morgan and the virtues of the Tigris.¹

The main Arthurian allusions come at the end of the poem, however, where there is a mysterious white stag,² winged and with glints of gold, which steps out of the "bois du Châtelet", draws a sword and attacks a ubiquitous eagle.

A little later, though one thinks automatically of Paris when Breton refers to Notre-Dame, it may well be that he had in mind the church in Marseilles, and certainly that city and the background of contemporary events form the second obvious series of themes.

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2. The white stag or hind is, of course, very common in Arthurian stories: "There is the one that leads Floriant to Morgan's palace in Floriant et Florete. In Graelent a white doe, pursued by the hero, guides him to his fairy love, and it is in the form of a white stag that Zepiro brings the Sicambrian king to Gerne in Parsaforeset." (Gardner, E.C. The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature, p.324).
As soon as Breton awakes, he is reminded of his exile. The furniture in the bedroom is not his, and in the opening sequence of the poem it becomes the source of images evoking his feeling of uneasiness:

"Dans l'angle je commence à voir briller la mauvaise commode qui s'appelle hier
Il y a de ces meubles embarrassants dont le véritable office est de cacher les issues

Il y a de ces meubles plus lourds que s'ils étaient emplis de sable au fond de la mer
Contre eux il faudrait des mots-leviers". (SA 36-37)

The pieces of furniture are the symbols of refuge, but also the reminders of exile; at times perhaps Breton feels guilty of a kind of "mauvaise foi" in fleeing to the South. This feeling is perhaps evoked by the image of the "mauvaise commode"; Breton is aware at times that he is wallowing in the past, in memories. He notes the hotels with their plants, the florists' shops, an ivy-covered balcony, the cranes in the docks. In a dream the municipal watering-carts are transformed into an attractive image of women, the spray of water suggesting a dress (l. 37). So even in wartime Marseilles Breton can transform reality into poetry, just as the fay in the Arthurian romances could summon the hero to fairyland. To while away the time Breton remembers a popular custom and tries to read his destiny in the coffee, in the bubbles created by the sugar:

"Ce sont autant de baisers égarés
Avant qu'elles ne courent s'anéantir contre les bords
O tourbillon plus savant que la rose
Tourbillon qu'emporte l'esprit qui me regagne à l'illusion enfantine
Que tout est là pour quelque chose qui me concerne" (SA 40)

There is none of the lassitude of Prufrock's "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons", however; the bubbles become for Breton symbols of the workings of fate, and as such are swollen in his
imagination into whirlpools, which would seem to evoke the cataclysmic forces recently unleashed in the world, but which, in fact, provoke a new surge of optimism in the poet. The fragile and evanescent quality of the bubbles helps to explain these rapid changes of significance. We are reminded of J. Middleton Murry's concept of "crystallization" in the image-creating process:

"Where there is a true emotional reaction to the objects of the external world, there is also a keen sensuous perception; and the vividness of the perception is the warrant of the genuineness of the emotion." 1

The nuptial bed which brings love and repose after the uncertainty of the daytime is the tenor in a long series of images in the central part of the poem. It is transformed, possibly because of the thought of sleeping-cars, into an express train, reminding him of the journey to Marseilles, rather than the little railway at Cordoba in Mexico which symbolized happy memories. It becomes a mysterious loom, the source of the music of the spheres. The phrase, "le lit fonce sur ses rails de miel bleu", with its surreal colour, not only evokes very well the smoothness and speed of the train, but also becomes a kind of leitmotif, which captures the regularity of the sound as the train races along the track.

At times the uncertainty gives way to despair and fear:

"Mais rien n'est vériifié tous ont peur nous-mêmes
Avons presque aussi peur". (SA 42)

It begins to seem futile to continue the struggle. In the middle of a strange parable in italics the tone is one of resignation:

"Pour que ce qui ne peut plus durer ne dure plus
Il est tout prêt à ne plus durer lui-même
Un pour tous advienne que pourra
Où la vie serait la goutte de poison
Du non-sens introduit dans le chant de l'alouette au-dessus des coquelicots". (SA 44)

From references to games of chance (the three-card trick, loaded dice) the reader deduces Breton's feeling that he is in the hands of fate. Such allusions and the series of conditional clauses near the beginning of the poem recall the Surrealist games, another of which was invented in Marseilles, the "Jeu de Marseille", which takes the name of one of the standard versions of the Tarot pack and which is discussed and explained in La Clé des Champs. (CC 66-68)

The war itself is perhaps suggested, as it was in the contemporary poem Guerre (v. supra, pp. 546-547), by the image of a scaly dragon, "la bête aux écailles de roses aux flancs creux dont j'ai trompé depuis longtemps la vigilance" (l. 53). This may likewise be the significance of the allusions later in the poem to a basilisk, the mythical reptile whose look had the power to kill. The creature is mentioned explicitly in l. 221, but the curious manner of its birth gave Breton the material for the apparently gratuitous surreal idea of ll. 235-236:

1. (ll. 28-33): "Si j'étais une ville dis-tu Tu serais Ninive sur le Tigre
Si j'étais un instrument de travail Plût au ciel noir tu serais la canne des cueilleurs dans les verreries
Si j'étais un symbole Tu serais une fougère dans une nasse
Et si j'avais un fardeau à porter Ce serait une boule faite de têtes d'hermines qui crient
Si je devais fuir la nuit sur une route Ce serait le sillage du géranium
Si je pouvais voir derrière moi sans me retourner Ce serait l'orgueil de la torpille".
"Et l'oeuf religieux du coq
Continue à être ouvé religieusement par le crapaud".

The allusions to the basilisk prompt Breton to think of the Egyptian gnostic Basilidian sect, and this in turn becomes the source of further images and allusions, to cameos of Abraxas (1. 233) and to the figure 365 in the following line.¹

Against the forces of war and exile it is largely the presence at Breton's side of Jacqueline and Aube which gives him the strength to go on. Though line 6 of the poem,

"Un jour un nouvel amour et je plains ceux pour qui l'amour perd à ne pas changer de visage",

might suggest that Marseilles has brought to Breton yet another new love, Charles Duits, when he is describing his meeting with Jacqueline in New York, writes:

"Ce fut aussi pendant l'année 1943 que je liai connaissance avec la femme qui avait inspiré à Breton L'Amour fou, L'Air de l'Eau, Fata Morgana enfin que je regarde comme son plus grand poème.²"

Thus, if Breton refers in Fata Morgana to a new love, one must interpret it as an indication that his love for Jacqueline is still young and fresh; and indeed certain lines of the poem are very reminiscent of L'Air de l'Eau, as, for example, the following sequence:

"Parce que tu tiens
Dans mon être la place du diamant serti dans une vitre
Qui me détaillerait avec minutie le gréement des astres

1. "Pierres d'Abraxas" are gems which bear this name engraved upon them together with magic symbols. They are not particular to the Basilidians or even to the Gnostics, though Abraxas or Abrasax was a mystic name used by the Basilidian sect. According to Greek numerology the numbers represented by its letters, when added together, gave a total of 365. By this term the Basilidians represent the 365 emanations of the deity.

According to Irénée, the bishop of Lyons who opposed the Gnostics, Basilide taught that from the Supreme God 365 heavens, including ours, emerged.

2. Duits, C., André Breton a-t-il dit passe, p.111.
Deux mains qui se cherchent c'est assez pour le toit de demain
Deux mains transparentes la tienne le murex dont les anciens
ont tiré mon sang". (SA 39)

The splendid image of the diamond evokes not only Jacqueline's
beauty and purity, but also reveals clearly that she is at the
centre of Breton's universe; and even if they do not have their own
roof over their heads, at least they have each other, they have
their embrace. In the image of the transparent hands Breton feels
and seems to see the blood whose colour suggests the image of
Tyrian purple.

The sight of the telegraph-wires provokes an image of love,
communication and dazzling light (ll. 130-131):

"L'amour ces fils télégraphiques qui font de la lumière insa-
tiable un brillant sans cesse qui se rouvre
De la taille même de notre compartiment de la nuit".

Even when Breton begins to doubt, wondering whether love
could survive the exodus, with its constant removals, its succession
of journeys by rail to unknown towns, the mere sound of Jacqueline's
voice is sufficient to chase away his fears:

"Tu viens à moi de plus loin que l'ombre je ne dis pas dans
l'espace des séquoias millénaires
Dans ta voix se font la courte échelle des trilles d'oiseaux
perdus"; (SA 43)

and through her love Jacqueline takes on the healing role of the
Morgan of old, to add a new facet to the "ondine" figure of L'Air
de l'Eau.

As Breton looks back on his life, he sees how love, whether
it be embodied by Simone, X or Jacqueline, has come to his rescue and
saved him from loneliness and despair:

"De la brune à la blonde
Entre le chaume et la couche de terreau
Il y a place pour mille et une cloches de verre
Sous lesquelles revivent sans fin les têtes qui s'enchantent
Dans la suspension du sacré
Têtes de femmes qui se succèdent sur tes épaules quand tu dors".  
(SA 45)

And Breton feels that because he loves Jacqueline, his one and only love at that time, he has loved all women (ll. 217-218). There is no question of promiscuity: but because Breton loves Jacqueline, she has become Woman incarnate. Because of Jacqueline and Aube Breton has the strength to face the future, whatever it may bring.

The first symbol of hope reborn is the dawning of a new day, the note on which the poem opens, and significantly also the note on which the poem ends. The final line of the poem is the simple phrase, "Le soleil", and the first part of the poem is marked by the leitmotif, "Un jour un nouveau jour". With the view of the sun rising in the Mediterranean sky Fata Morgana, which evokes Breton's hour of darkness, ends with the theme of light. The sun appears to have dispelled the mirage and cleared the sky. It dominates and excludes everything else. Beneath its cheering rays life resumes something like its normal course, and this is the idea symbolized earlier by the market-gardener preparing his stall in the market beneath Breton's watchful eye (ll. 195-196).

Though the train-journeys to unknown destinations at times in this poem seem to represent Breton's uncertainty, the theme of the voyage can on the other hand be the token of adventure: it clearly has this connotation in l. 40:

"De nos jours songe qu'une expédition se forme pour la capture de l'oiseau quetzal dont on ne possède plus en vie que quatre exemplaires."

This interesting item of news no doubt reminds Breton of his visit to Mexico in 1938, for the quetzal is a bird of the mountain forests of Mexico and Guatemala and was in the past an emblematic
bird for the Indians who adorned themselves with its brilliant
green, gold and red feathers. Moreover, reading of this expedition
in search of the quetzal probably seemed a favourable omen to Breton
on the eve of his own departure for the New World, where he was to
visit Indian reservations and discover more Indian mythology in
addition to writing some of his most important works. A similar in-
dex is suggested by an earlier allusion to the Bretons' imminent
journey across the Atlantic:

"De l'autre côté qui sait la barque aimantée nous pourrions
partir ensemble
À la rencontre de l'arbre sous l'écorce duquel il est dit
Ce qu'à nous seuls nous sommes l'un à l'autre dans la
grande algèbre". (SA 37)

The image of the magnetized boat not only is a pleasant reminder of
the magic ships of the romances but it also appears to indicate
that the Bretons' journey to the Americas was predestined and that
it would in some way provide the solution to their problems, as it
in fact did, though not in the way they would have anticipated.

Thus despair gives way to optimism, and this is translated
by the image of a clearing opening up in a wood whose "exit" had
seemed locked (ll. 124-5). Thanks to love the "husk of fog" is
split and they emerge into the light. Towards the end of the poem
Breton speaks in terms of progress, albeit a hermetic progress
(ll. 239), which leads him to admit that even if he himself had no
real reason to hope, others could be optimistic about the future of
mankind:

"Certains vont même jusqu'à soutenir qu'il n'est pas impossible
que l'homme
Cesse de dévorer l'homme bien qu'on n'avance guère de ce côté". (SA 48)

To foster the mood of optimism Breton, true to his beliefs,
is on the constant look-out for signs, "indices", in the world
around him which might give him guidance. Unlike the earlier Symbolists, however, the poet himself is as yet unaware of the significance of things he suspects may well be symbolic or have symbolic potential. This theme has just been noticed in the concept of the search for a tree whose bark would reveal what Breton and Jacqueline are to each other in the great algebra of existence; it was present, too, in the attempt to read the future in the bubbles in the coffee (v. supra, p. 600). A stream strikes Breton as being the master of a secret (l. 11. 115-6); Breton refers to "cette suite de prestiges" (l. 248); in the sequence devoted to the white stag there is an allusion to "une révélation mystérieuse" (l. 262).

As in L'Amour fou Breton feels that certain objects may hold the keys to the enigma; almost as soon as he awakes, Breton thinks of such an object (l. 2); similarly, a little later his thoughts turn to an object in the possession of Wolfgang Paalen, who had left for Mexico even before war was declared. In the same section of the poem the allusion to crystals is motivated by this belief:

"...Sur les paliers mordorés dans le moule à gaufre fracassé où se cristallise le bismuth
À la lumière des châteaux vitrifiés du mont Knock-Farril dans le comté de Ross
Un jour un nouveau jour cela me fait penser à un objet que garde mon ami Wolfgang Paalen
D'une corde déjà grise tous les modèles de noeuds réunis sur une planchette
Je ne sais pourquoi il déborde tant le souci didactique qui a présidé à sa construction sans doute pour une école de marins". (SA 38)

The importance such signs assume for Breton is even indicated categorically in Fata Morgana:

"Plus à portée de l'homme il est d'autres coincidences
Véritables fanaux dans la nuit du sens
C'était plus qu'improbable c'est donc exprès". (SA 40)
In his important essay on the surrealist image, *L'art de brûler la chandelle par les deux bouts*, Marc Eigeldinger, when he discusses at some length Breton's concept of "coïncidences", mentions this very allusion:

"Alors que Baudelaire appelle correspondances les rapports qui s'établissent entre les divers ordres de la sensation et entre le visible et l'invisible, selon une terminologie empruntée à Swedenborg, André Breton préfère parler de coïncidences. On aurait tort de prendre ces deux termes pour de parfaits synonymes. L'idée de correspondances implique un rapport de continuité logique, perçu par l'imagination, ou tout au moins une relation fondée sur un ordre cohérent, en quelque sort providentiel, et dans lequel aucune part n'est abandonnée au hasard. Au contraire la notion de coïncidences exclut toute logique, tout critère rationnel, elle repose sur la toute-puissance du hasard et de l'inspiration immédiate, elle favorise le surgissement des images gratuites et imprévues, l'irruption de l'arbitraire et de l'insolite dans le champ de la poésie. .. Les coïncidences éclairent les cavernes de l'être et des choses, elles sont de véritables fanaux dans la nuit des [sic] sens et de véritables instruments de connaissance. Elles appliquent plus intégralement que les correspondances baudelairiennes le principe de l'équivalence et de la réciprocité. Ainsi les coïncidences ne se présentent jamais, telles les correspondances, sous un aspect d'ordonnance pré méditée et d'harmonie concertée, elles surgissent brusquement et provoquent des chocs, des collisions dus à la confrontation arbitraire de deux objets distants."  

Breton's philosophy is founded on these coincidences, on these workings of objective chance; likewise his poetics. So it comes as no surprise that the signs Breton seeks to decipher in these coincidences become thematic motifs in one of his major poems. Furthermore, certain *leitmotive*, in appearance and in all probability automatic phrases, especially the ones written in italics, play a similar role; they act as spurs to the development of the poem, just as certain signs appear to give fresh meaning to the poet's existence: e.g. the insistent line, "Le lit fonce sur ses rails

de miel bleu" (ll. 86, 91), the observation and question coming perhaps from Jacqueline's mouth or even from the mouth of Aube, "Comme c'est joli qu'est-ce que ça rappelle" (l. 27) or the neologism given to Breton by a little girl, again possibly his daughter:

"Mystérieusement une très petite fille interroge
 Andrée tu ne sais pas pourquoi je résédise". (SA 45)

Such remarks, overheard or addressed specifically to Breton, assume a much deeper significance than they do in Apollinaire's "poèmes-conversations"; they are regarded not just as the raw material of poetry but rather as keys to life's problems.

The situation of France in the winter of 1940-1, defeated by Germany and divided into two separate zones, makes Breton look back through the pages of history for similar circumstances, perhaps to help to convince him that his country would rise again from the ashes of defeat. Only when it is viewed in this light does the allusion to Admiral Coligny in line 38 begin to appear more than a chance observation and assume real significance in the context of the poem, for not only was Coligny, by then a convert to the Protestant faith, one of the first victims of the Saint-Bartholomew massacres, assassinated by a German, Besme, one of the henchmen of Henri de Guise, but also he had distinguished himself against the Spaniards and seems to have prefigured the policy of Richelieu against the House of Hapsburg.

The division of France reminds Breton of earlier struggles of factions, for example the conflict between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians, and this probably explains the references near the end of the poem to Isabella of Bavaria and to the "bal des Ardents", the notorious fancy-dress ball organised in 1393 for the
marriage of a lady-in-waiting to the queen, at which five young nobles, disguised as savages and wearing costumes smeared with pitch, were burnt alive, and the king himself only narrowly escaped a similar fate.

Perhaps supporting this allusion is the subsequent reference to "les beaux traits ambigus de Pierre de Lune à cheval/Personnifiant le second luminaire", since Charles VI hoped that the schism in the church would be ended if the Avignon Pope, Benedict XIII (Pedro de Luna) abdicated. This allusion, of course, also brings back to the poem the themes of light and the new day dawning.

As Breton looks further back into the past, in a manner which prefigures the dream of Ancient Egypt in Arcane 17, history itself is merged with myth, and one of the more mysterious sections of Fata Morgana is an invocation to the mummified ibis, the sacred bird of the Egyptian god, Thoth. Thoth calculated time, he determined for men the duration of their earthly existence and thus became the master of their destinies. It is perhaps for this reason that Breton, completely at the mercy of Fate, addresses himself indirectly to Thoth, via the ibis mummy:

"Dans les entrelacs de l'histoire momie d'ibis
Un pas pour rien comme on cargue la voilure momie d'ibis
Ce qui sort du côté cour rentre par le côté jardin momie d'ibis
Si le développement de l'enfant permet qu'il se libère du fantasma de démembrement de dislocation du corps momie d'ibis
Il ne sera jamais trop tard pour en finir avec le morcelage de l'âme momie d'ibis......." (SA 45-46)

This mention of dismemberment and of the dislocation of the body is, of course, a reminder that Thoth helped Isis to bring back to life her brother-husband, Osiris. As Breton recalled this legend, he may well have been thinking of the dismemberment of France and the dislocation of his own mode of existence, and thus the resuscitation
of Osiris would be a further source of encouragement to Breton.

Furthermore, Thoth was regarded in hermetic literature as the inventor of writing and, by extension, of all the branches of the arts and sciences which depend on writing: magic, medicine, astronomy, astrology, theosophy, alchemy.¹ Thus, of all the gods Thoth was perhaps the one most suited for becoming Breton's own private god, and it is appropriate that Breton in his hour of need should turn to Thoth for succour.

The theme of occultism is reinforced by the allusions to the basilisk and the cameos of Abraxas, and the bestiary of the poem has a distinctly hermetic flavour: in addition to the basilisk and ibis, other creatures mentioned, the stoat and the lion, assume a particular significance in hermetic texts. At the level of the mineral world the cameos of Abraxas are accompanied by opals and turquoise (l. 101): in the past opals, like turquoises, were reputed to have qualities of sympathy and protection.²

It is by now almost impossible to separate image from allusion or anecdote in Breton's poetry. The opening line of Fata Morgana,

"Ce matin la fille de la montagne tient sur ses genoux un accordéon de chauves-souris blanches",

is clearly an image, in every sense of the word, as we have seen; but the phrase, "Ouf le basilic est passé tout près sans me voir", (l. 221) is likewise an image, whether or not Breton has actually seen a real lizard, for it is a poetic idea, in the strict sense of the word, the sense which led Hugo to proclaim that "Image et

idée sont le même mot." One can still find images which would fit the categories listed by Breton in the first Manifeste, but their immediate surreal effect is not as striking as it is in his earlier recueils: it is somewhat easier now to relate the images to the poem's themes. However intricate the structure of the poem may be - and it is itself a kind of puzzle or rebus - the images seem to belong there and in the course of time all the pieces may be proved to fit together tightly, though at present some appear to be attached more tightly than others and some even appear to belong to a different jigsaw.

If one examines the images from the point of view of their content rather than their form, it must be already obvious that Breton is continuing to draw on French or Celtic history, myths or legends (Morgan le Fay, Isabella of Bavaria, Coligny), together with those of hermetic tradition, rather than on Classical or Christian mythology, and in a poem inspired by the fate of France as well as his own personal fate in the winter of 1940-1 this is reasonably appropriate.

Fata Morgana is clearly one of Breton's most significant poems as well as one of his finest. It is possibly the poem which brings out best Breton's undoubted gifts; it is the poem which is perhaps the best illustration of the uniqueness of his style. It contains the quintessence of Breton's poetry, combining as it does the products of automatism with carefully enunciated statements, strange images with serious reflections, mysterious revelation with personal confession. It is a poem which reveals some of the secrets of Breton's search for, and exploitation of, very private symbols, which challenge both the poet and the
readers to decipher their significance. Yet it would be unwise to
try to consider it outside the context of the particular moment of
its composition. It is the poem of the aftermath of defeat, the
poem of Breton's uncertainty on the eve of his departure for the
New World, whence he addresses the two remaining poems of the
series, Les États généraux and the Ode à Charles Fourier.

"Les États généraux" (1943)

The poem entitled Les États généraux was written in New
York in October 1943, but Breton recalls its origins in a text
dating from the very end of his career, Le la:

"......... D'une de ces phrases à allure de sentence
particulièrement belle: 'Il y aura toujours une pelle
au vent dans les sables du rêve', en 1943 j'ai fait la
trame d'un long poème: 'Les États généraux', qui est
sans doute celui auquel je tiens le plus......" (SA 174-175)

Explanations of the significance of the "phrase du réveil"
and the main preoccupations of the poem have been offered by
Philippe Audoin:

".........cette sentence, moins énigmatique qu'il n'y
parait puisqu'elle tend à suggérer que le tréfonds
onirique préserve tout principe d'action émancipatrice,
court à travers le poème à la façon d'un fil d'Ariane,
cependant que chacun de ses fragments prélude à un
développement de timbre et de rythme distincts. Le dis-
cours s'y joue librement, sans que l'affluence des
images spontanées n'obscurcisse le débat fondamental
qu'il institue entre les chances de l'amour, les plus
hautes exigences spirituelles, et l'opacité du réal
qu'aggravent encore les dénouements du temps......" 1

Indeed, the "phrase de réveil", the beginning of which re-
calls the title of the prologue to Le revolver à cheveux blancs,
evokes a continuing reliance upon dreams and their work, and the
image of the sands brings back perhaps the myth of the Sandman.

Anna Balakian has given a more explicit summary of the poem's thematic content:

"In fact, the major theme of the poem is illumination in the darkness, an equation he (Breton) tries to set up between two words and two concepts: bâtir and abattre, which in rebus fashion seem to lodge one in the other. Can leveling down and building up be historically related as they are in the construction of big cities, where nothing can be added except by the destruction of something old?

Again the poem is designed on several levels. The theme of liberty and struggle against despotism is contained most overtly in the title...." ¹

Anna Balakian does not bring out fully, however, the links between the themes. To appreciate these links one should bear in mind Breton's quotations at the end of Arcane 17 from a book he had come across in New York, Auguste Viatte's Victor Hugo et les Illuminés de son temps (v. supra, pp.291-2). Illumination, revolt, exile and freedom co-exist in Les Etats généraux, as they do in the myth of Lucifer. Auguste Viatte writes thus:

"Le futur Eliphas Lévi......dépeignait la révolte de Lucifer comme la source première de la vie; il fallait les ténèbres pour équilibrer la lumière, la négation libératrice pour donner son mouvement à l'univers; l'exil du Rebelle n'est qu'une épreuve à laquelle le Verbe divin se soumet à son tour." ²

The full significance of the title, Les Etats généraux, and its evocation of Breton's attitude in the poem, is revealed by an observation Breton was to make the following year in Arcane 17:

"Il est , dis-je, dans la vraie, dans la grande tradition française, un esprit que nous n'avons jamais cessé de revendiquer, de faire notre: c'est celui qui passe dans les Cahiers des Etats Généraux ou qui anime les décrets de 93, celui qui, à travers les fluctuations d'intérêt d'un problème à l'autre, inspire aussi bien le mouvement de Fort-Royal que l'Encyclopédie, qui suscite Benjamin Constant et Stendhal tout comme, au long du dernier siècle,

1. André Breton, p.189.
il imprime sa marque caractéristique au mouvement ouvrier. Qu'on ne voie ici de ma part nul plaidoyer à l'appui de quelque humble requête destinée à abréger un temps d'exil. Je reste convaincu qu'un peuple, eût-il été historiquement le plus grand porteur de liberté qui soit au monde, ne peut aucunement se reposer dans l'attente que les autres peuples parviennent à son niveau, sous peine d'y perdre son génie et de voir se corrompre les idées dont il ne fait plus que rétrospectivement sa substance." (A 84-85)

Recently André Thirion has recalled what Breton said to him in 1946 about the resurrection of the concept of "les États Généraux" and the role he would like to see it play in the contemporary political set-up:

"Breton était favorable à des États Généraux: les techniciens et les savants, les éducateurs et les artistes, les travailleurs de la ville et des champs rassemblés pour tenir à jour des cahiers de doléances, et conseiller les gouvernements." 1

By this means the spirit of the 1789 revolution could perhaps be recaptured and a sense of participation in government given to the man in the street. So the title of the poem written in 1943 was not an ephemeral image but an indication of a deep-seated and cherished idea; and Breton sought a new revolution, a new kind of revolution, bringing new freedom to the oppressed. He speaks of a quest for liberty in the section of the poem entitled Toujours (l. 62), and towards the end of Une pelle he makes a plea for collectivity, the brotherhood of man, universal harmony:

"Il suffisait que le peuple se conquit en tant que tout et le devint
Pour qu'il s'élève au sens de la dépendance universelle dans l'harmonie
Et que la variation par toute la terre des couleurs de peau et des traits
L'avertisse que le secret de son pouvoir
Est dans le libre appel au génie autochtone de chacune des races
En se tournant d'abord vers la race noire la race rouge

Earlier Breton argues that it is time to put aside "the individual appearances of bygone days" and prophesies an era of great transformation:

"D'ailleurs les mœurs vont beaucoup changer
Le grand interdit sera levé". (SA 66)

The theme of revolt is embodied first of all by Delescluze, who during the Commune had directed the struggle against the regular army and had been killed on the barricades (l. 49). Later in the poem it is in part revolt which is incarnate in the allusions to Esclarmonde (ll. 129-133), presumably Esclarmonde de Foix, the Albigensian martyr, rather than Esclarmonde, the wife of Huon de Bordeaux, to whom Breton clearly refers in Le Réveil au petit jour, one of the "proses" of Constellations. Anna Balakian's explanation of the significance of Breton's choice of the figure of Esclarmonde reveals the latter's function in the poem:

"Esclarmonde, whom he invokes in this poem of rebellion against all the downtrodden of the world, is a symbol of the pure and selfless rebel. Breton's choice of her as his symbol is characteristic of his general inclination towards heroes of lost causes, of physical defeats and moral victories, rather than toward those who accomplish their missions. Esclarmonde de Foix was just such an undaunted figure. Though she was defeated, her soul wanders over the world, as Breton envisions: she is the power of protest that combats tyranny millennium after millennium. Even if the power of rebirth of such a heroine is ephemeral, it is a recurring phenomenon. The spirit of Esclarmonde is identified so Breton with the power of metempsychosis that makes mankind spring back from successive tyrannies even as the phoenix rises from its ashes, though it may be true that 'the phoenix is made of ephemeral' ." \(^1\)  

Breton, exiled in New York, sees a certain resemblance between

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1. Balakian, A., André Breton, p.190.
Esclarmonde and himself. He is very much aware of the "grande rosace des batailles" thousands of miles away, very much aware of the men giving their lives in legions, trapped like fish in war's great net, in the blood-red rays of the setting sun, even though the image he prefers to keep of them is the farewell to their loved ones.

It is possible, too, that the allusion to Fabre d'Olivet (l. 117) has a similar motivation to that of Esclarmonde, for at the beginning of the nineteenth century this scholar, deeply moved by the tragedy of the Albigensian crusade, had dreams of a progressive and independent nation in the South of France. He was one of the precursors of the Félibrige movement and wrote an important body of Provençal poetry: as he grew older, he delved more and more into esoterism; furthermore, he had been an opponent of the Empire.

It may be that Fabre d'Olivet embodies also the theme of "illumination in the darkness", for Auguste Viatte appears to treat him as one of the "illuminés" of the early nineteenth century, and this ought to be a clue to yet another connection between Surrealism (or at least Breton's version of Surrealism), Romanticism and Symbolism, for, as P. Mansell Jones has pointed out:

"Eighteenth-century Illuminism was one of the main sources from which the Romantic poets and later on the Symbolists derived that profound sense of analogy which remains the key to their writings".  

It is the literal idea of illumination which is more overtly important, however, in _Les États généraux_. Charles Duits, a close

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acquaintance of Breton at the time, observes:

"Les étoiles filantes étaient particulièrement nombreuses cet été-là. Les hauteurs étaient pleines de points mouvants dont les chutes entrecroisées dessinaient des losanges bleus, violets et noirs, aux arêtes de feu." 1

Although Breton does not refer in so many words to the Northern Lights, New York is on the "auroral zone" where they are most common, and the poem contains a number of allusions to light; the particular character of these allusions appears to reflect accurately the curious cosmic phenomenon; they appear sometimes as a diffuse formless volume of luminosity, sometimes as a long wavy band or curtain, with folds and flutings, high in the sky; in the first section of the poem there is the series, "la verticale d'étincelles" (l. 10), "ce fil superbe sans cesse renaissent de sa rupture" (l. 12), "un feu de forge" (l. 34); and the final section commences "Mais la lumière revient" (l. 201), and ends with the lines:

"La flèche part
Une étoile rien qu'une étoile perdue dans la fourrure de la nuit". (ll. 211-212)

These lines may be inspired by the sight of a shooting star or by one of the bright stars, perhaps the Pole Star mentioned in line 165, which are visible through the Aurora Borealis. In a testamentary wish Breton even desires to appropriate the Pole Star as his private symbol:

"On m'épargnera la croix sur ma tombe
Et l'on me tournera vers l'étoile polaire". (SA 72) 2

It might also be possible to see the poem's "phrase de réveil" as

1. André Breton a-t-il dit passe, p.189.
2. In fact, a stone star Breton purchased in Saint-Cirq La Popie shortly before his death was incorporated by Alexander Calder into the monument he made for the poet's tomb.
a verbal symbol or equivalent of the Aurora, since it is thought that the latter is connected with the Earth's magnetic fields, which gave Breton and Soupault the title of the first series of automatic texts.

The Northern Lights in the night sky acquire for Breton metaphorical significance; in the opening lines of the poem there is the recurring motif, "polis mes yeux", which possibly evokes the idea of gazing into a crystal-ball. Breton desires to see what the future holds, but he appears at this stage to see through the glass very darkly. Nonetheless, the crystal-ball offers a succession of images and visions. In a mood of optimism, as the poem advances, Breton begins to see the dawn at the end of the dark night of war, and at the personal level, the Northern Lights may bring him the consolation that the end of the tunnel of unhappiness and loneliness may soon be in sight; the final section is dominated by images of light. In a "vision nocturne" (l. 134) Breton sees, too, a brighter future for poetry:

"Une fois pour toutes la poésie doit resurgir des ruines"; a few lines earlier Breton proclaims that poetry must move in new directions and that "les chansonnettes vont mourir de leur belle mort"; and with Les États généraux, of course, Breton practises superbly what he is preaching. Finally he suggests that the visions of the night must be extended from the physical to the moral plane.

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Despite the superficial appearance of a linear structure as in Fleine marge, a theme tends to be dotted about the various sections, as was the case with Fata Morgana. It has been seen that
the poem is divided into a number of sections headed by the segments of the "phrase de réveil" which was its starting-point; and before we discuss certain aspects of the imagery, the main points or features of the various sections will be mentioned briefly.

Les États généraux opens with a kind of prologue (ll. 1-36), dominated by images of the Northern Lights and the crystal-ball visions, but Breton makes here his first attacks on the individualism of the past and on the slaughter of war, using the strange image of "une seule châtaigne de culs de mandrilles", at one and the same time amusing and derogatory.

Il y aura contains a series of curious phrases in italics:
"D'où vient ce bruit de source", "Une bouffée de menthe", "Une libellule", "On dirait qu'on bat des cartes de miroir dans l'ombre". The second of these appears to set in motion, like Proust's "madeleine", a flash of involuntary memory, taking Breton back to when he was nearly twenty; both this phrase and the others are possibly automatic phrases acting as indices, giving fresh impetus to the poet's conscious thought. The allusion to the shuffling of the cards may be a further indication of the fact that Breton knows that he is no longer the master of his own destiny, that his life is in the hands of the Fates.

Toujours, very reminiscent of the poems of Clair de Terre because of its apparent arbitrariness, its allusion to "les sous-produits de l'imagination" (l. 65), and its word-play, "Le mot polie rouillée et poule mouillée" (l. 54), speaks of the poet's quest for freedom.

In Une pelle the motif of the shovel paves the way for a series of images of building and destruction:
"La cassure de la brique creuse sourit à la chaux vive" (1. 73),
"À l'heure où les griffons quittent les échafaudages" (1. 80),
"Chantier qui tremble chantier qui bat de lumière première" (1. 108),

before the final symbolical poser:

"L'énigme est de ne pas savoir si l'on abat si l'on bâtit". (1. 109).

Breton sees the shell of the building as a symbol of the new era of freedom and the brotherhood of man he hopes to see come into being after the end of the war.

*Au vent* begins with the attractive image:

"Jersey Guernesey par temps sombre et illustre
Restituent au flot deux coupes débordant de mélodie". (SA 69)

Whether or not the image of the twin goblets is inspired by the islands themselves, a footnote or variant referring to the "tables tournantes" appears to suggest that it is the islands' association with Spiritualism in the nineteenth-century which motivates their choice by Breton, and indeed the allusions in this section to Fabre d'Olivet and to the late nineteenth-century authority on occultism, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, are accompanied by allusions to the Tarot cards, the Hebraic alphabet, as well as the Esclarmonde sequence.

*Dans les sables* continues the poem's allusions to magic, and despite the hint of further examples of the workings of involuntary memory in the thought of the lights of the Seine, is set basically among desert tribes, possibly the Indians in whom Breton took a deep interest during the latter part of his stay in the New World.

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1. This allusion to "l'alphabet hébreu" is possibly inspired by Fabre d'Olivet's work, *La langue hébraïque restituée* (1815), which despite its errors and its generally fanciful nature, was an interesting guide for subsequent comparative grammarians.
Like them Breton performs a strange rite, tracing in the sand a mysterious quadrilateral figure containing a dark oval slightly left of centre. On the four sides of the quadrilateral are four horned figures, representing the past, the present, the future and the eternal, but for the reader the solution remains as enigmatic as ever:

"C'est par là qu'on entre
On entre on sort
On entre
on ne sort pas". (SA 73)

Shortly beforehand Breton spins a coin to seek a solution to what the future holds, and is perhaps encouraged by its fall:

"Pile ou face face la pièce nue libre de toute effigie de tout millésime
Pile
La pente insensible et pourtant irrésistible vers le mieux". (SA 72)

The final section, Du rêve, beginning and ending with the theme of light, is slightly reminiscent of Mallarmé's sonnet on his cigar, Toute l'âme résumée...... (where there is a curious comparison between smoking and writing a poem, where the images of a poem are lost in what they create, as one smoke ring abolishes another), and evokes Breton's feeling of pleasure, however transitory it may be, as he puffs contentedly at his pipe, half lost in a daydream, imagining in the ash a fairy-spider.

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The images give the poem its vitality, however; they set up constantly fresh vibrations; their motifs are drawn from all sorts of spheres; zoological terms, exotic and otherwise, (the "manu-code", a variety of bird of paradise, the "condylure", a member of the mole family, mandrills, "la dorade", "éphémères" or may-flies,
"griffons", "le poulpe", the wild goose, the flamingo, the kingfisher); botanical allusions (sweet marjoram, bean-pods, an almond, mint, edelweiss); occult references (to keys, the Tarot cards). Lists of motifs of this kind do not really illustrate the nature of the imagery of the poem, however: this can be revealed better by examining a few lines, such as the opening sequence of Dans les sables:

"Il passe des tribus de nomades qui ne lèvent pas la tête
Parmi lesquels je suis par rapport à tout ce que j'ai connu
Ils sont masqués comme des praticiens qui opèrent
Les anciens changeurs avec leurs femmes si particulières
Quant à l'expression du regard j'ai vu plusieurs d'entre elles
Avec trois siècles de retard errer aux abords de la Cité
Ou bien ce sont les lumières de la Seine
Les changeurs au moment d'écailler la dorade
S'arrêtent parce que j'ai à changer beaucoup plus qu'eux
Et les morts sont les œufs qui reviennent prendre l'empreinte
du nid
Je ne suis pas comme tant de vivants qui prennent les devants
pour revenir
Je suis celui qui va". (SA 71-72)

Breton's own exile in America and his discovery there of a strange Eskimo mask make him think of nomadic tribes and, moreover, think of himself in such terms. The mask, although in the form of a reindeer head, reminds him first of all of the masks worn in operating-theatres (an example of a very personal analogy) and then, in another very subjective and private image, of the old money-changers of Paris and their wives. The involuntary memory leads to confusions and distortions which are accentuated by the lamplight near the river: the money-changers become fused with fishmongers and are seen in the act of "écailler la dorade", perhaps instead of "écailler des dorures". For Breton the "changeurs" become emblems of the whole process of change, of metamorphosis, developed in the idea behind the phrase "les morts sont les œufs qui reviennent prendre l'empreinte du nid" and in the exchanges at the verbal level in the following line,
"Je ne suis pas comme tant de vivants qui prennent les devants pour revenir",

which Breton employs as a springboard for his defiant claim at the end of the sequence where he reveals the positive, forward-looking nature of his stance; he is ready to accept change, and indeed ready to help to bring about change.

This poem contains, too, what is perhaps Breton's most interesting evocation of his own imagery:

"Les images m'ont plu c'était l'art
A tort décrié de brûler la chandelle par les deux bouts". (SA 70)

This image itself, the art of burning the candle at both ends, not only points to the ideas of excess and extravagance in surrealist imagery but also is an image of fire; and fire, in addition to being the male element, is an agent of metamorphosis. If "illumination in the darkness" is one of the major themes of the poem, its dominant imagery revolves around light and fire. Even the image of the "fourrure de la nuit" at the very end of the poem, which seems at first sight merely to evoke the blackness of the night, possibly evokes, too, the static electricity in cat's fur. Moreover, the poem contains allusions to a smithy fire (l. 34) and to volcanoes (Vulcan's forges) (l. 83); the tobacco-images near the end of the poem give force to the old adage, "there's no smoke without fire"; and the very mention of Esclarmonde inevitably calls to mind her death at the stake. Pride of place amongst the poem's mythical creatures has to go, because of all this, to the sun-man (l. 193) in the section inspired by the desert-tribes and to the bird of fire, the phoenix. Though it is normally regarded as a resurrection-symbol, the deeper significance of the rather curious image of the phoenix in Toujours, a phoenix made of may-flies, could be indicated
by Bachelard's comments on a passage from George Sand's *Histoire du Réveur*, where the traveller on the slopes of Mount Etna dreams before his fire of birch-logs and meditates on the insects he sees hurling themselves into the flames. Bachelard observes:

"L'amour, la mort et le feu sont unis dans un même instant. Pour son sacrifice dans le coeur de la flamme, l'éphémère nous donne une leçon d'éternité. La mort totale et sans trace est la garantie que nous partons tout entiers dans l'au-delà. Tout perdre pour tout gagner. La leçon du feu est claire." 1

Breton, by 1943, had lost a wife, a daughter, a country and a home. Yet within two or three years he remarried, returned to 42, rue Fontaine, and was reunited with Aube.

**The poem is thus set metaphorically under the sign of Lucifer: it is a poem of fire and light, of defeat and revolt, but perhaps, too, a poem of hope for the restoration of the fallen, like Baudelaire's *Les Litanies de Satan*. Breton's poem is much more bewildering and much more significant than the latter: it is a verbal labyrinth. Although Philippe Audoin regards its "phrase de réveil" as its "fil d'Ariane", it does, in fact, contain explicit references to threads (11. 12, 209). Of course, the myth of Lucifer is often accompanied by that of Prometheus; Marcel Lobet quotes Maurice Nadeau writing of Breton in *Littérature présente*:

"Il est à la fois Prométhée et Lucifer", 2 and also Bachelard's explanation of symbolism of fire, representing "le désir de changer, de brusquer le temps, de porter toute la vie à son terme, à son au-delà." 3

1. La psychanalyse du feu, Paris: Gallimard (Coll. 'Idées'), 1971, p.36.
3. id., p.15.
So it would be possible to see Les États généraux, in a sense, as a verbal re-enactment of the Promethean myth: Breton steals the fire of heaven and makes of it a poem. Once more we see that Breton's imagery is transcending the limits of the surrealist images listed in the Premier Manifeste and embraces analogy, myth and symbol. This development is continued, and perhaps reaches another climax in the last of the long poems, the Ode À Charles Fourier.

The "Ode À Charles Fourier" (1945)

If Les États généraux recalls the myth of Prometheus, the symbolism of the Ode À Charles Fourier stems from the legend of the Golden Fleece. This last long poem, perhaps because of its title and its manifest subject-matter, has received more attention from critics than the others in the series: it is discussed, of course, in Anna Balakian's André Breton; it is the subject of one of the most important chapters in André Breton: Essais et Témoignages (Gérald Schaeffer's Un Petit Matin de 1937); and an annotated edition by Jean Gaulmier was brought out in 1961, the basic intention of which is to explain the poem's allusions to Fourier's philosophy.

It was in reply to an inquiry from Jean Gaulmier that Breton explained in writing the circumstances of the ode's composition:

"À la question que vous me posez—comment j'ai été orienté vers Fourier—je me trouve en peine de répondre. Jusqu'en 1940, je ne le connaissais guère que par les anthologies qui ne s'intéressent à lui que sous l'angle de la réforme sociale. C'est à New-York que j'ai pu me procurer ses œuvres complètes dans l'édition de 1846 et seulement alors j'ai découvert en lui 'le grand poète de la vie harmonienne', pour reprendre votre expression à laquelle je m'associe pleinement. Les cinq volumes m'ont accompagné presque seuls au cours d'un assez long

voyage que j'ai fait durant l'été 1945 dans l'Ouest des États-Unis et qui m'a mené d'abord à Reno (Nevada) où j'avais à divorcer et me remarier sance tenant comme cela se fait là-bas. C'est dans le jardin de la pension qui nous abritait, ma future femme et moi, que j'ai commencé à écrire l'Ode. Il se peut qu'elle participe de la si singulière atmosphère de Reno où 'les machines à sous' (du type de celle que j'ai reproduite dans Les Vases communicants) tapissent les murs, tant des magasins d'alimentation que des bureaux de poste, et qui agglomèrent tant bien que mal la foule de ceux qui aspirent à une autre vie conjugal, aux cow-boys et aux derniers chercheurs d'or. Bien plus sûrement encore, elle transpose mon état affectif d'alors, qui s'exprimera plus directement dans Arcane 17. Entre le commencement et la fin du poème s'inscrit dans le temps le voyage qu'avant de regagner New-York j'ai pu accomplir à travers le Néva da, l'Arizona et le Nouveau Mexique, mi essentiellement par l'intense intérêt que je portai aux Indiens - pueblos en particulier. Le destin qui a été celui de ces hommes et leur impressionnante dignité constituaient pour ma rêverie une toile de fond sur laquelle était appelée à s'empreindre dans tout son relief la personnalité de Charles Fourier - du Fourier que je chéris très spécialement, celui des Quatre Mouvements et des mystérieuses Analogies."

It should come as no surprise therefore, if the poem is bathed in the atmosphere of the Far West.

On a number of occasions Breton has discussed the composition of this ode. An oft quoted remark is one he made to Aimé Patr in the interview for Paru, published in March 1948:

"......l'Ode à Charles Fourier prend place sur cette courbe dont je vous parlais, qui admet l'automatism pour point de départ mais ne me dérobe pas en cours de trajet à certaines obligations contingentes. En l'occurrence, le trait d'union est la personnalité de Charles Fourier elle-même, et la plus grande œuvre constructive qui ait jamais été élaborée à partir du désir sans contrainte, (il est vrai que j'ai feint ici de me plier à la poésie de circonstance, mais vous ne douteriez pas que c'était pour la tuer)." (E 257)

Though it is interesting and useful to know the role of automatic writing in the composition of the Ode à Charles Fourier, in

fact this tells us next to nothing about the poem.

The term "ode" is, of course, rather vague; for the Greeks it was a lyrical song of dignified style, appropriate for singing or formal declaration. The sections of the poem were divided into two stanzas of identical structure called strophe and antistrophe respectively, followed by an epode of contrasting form. In English, the term is now loosely applied to any type of noble lyric with uniform stanzas. Herbert Read confessed:

"I have never understood what precisely an ode is. An ode, in practice, implies a certain architectonic mastery of rhythmic variations; a structure which, I suppose, has analogies in music, but which, from a strictly poetic point of view, does not differ from the long poem in general." ¹

The actual lay-out of the Ode à Charles Fourier gives a clear indication of its structure, however. It is divided into three basic movements, a tryptich in which two lyrical sections envelop a "rational" or "critical" central section. Adopting the line-numbering system employed by Gérald Schaeffer,² the first part, the first address to Fourier (ll. 1-128) evokes Breton's recollection of the sight of Fourier's statue on the Boulevard de Clichy and seeks to relate the state of man and society at the end of the Second World War to Fourier's system; in the central portion consisting of 12 paragraphs, numbered by Breton according to Fourier's anatomy of the passions, the poet continues in a more prosaic style than hitherto to draw up the balance-sheet between the Utopian dream and contemporary reality; the final part (ll. 129-187 or 188?), the renewed invocation to Fourier, is inspired by Breton's contact with Red Indian civilization and the

¹ The Nature of Literature, p.59.
beauty of the American countryside; the new Eden seems a little less distant. The structure of the poem reveals a marriage of poetry and prose, a marriage of the lyrical and the reflective. One's first impression may be that the central movement, contrasting in its flatness with the more lyrical first and third parts, mars the poem; but really it serves to throw the lyricism of the surrounding passages into greater relief: it brings variety; its immediacy, its directness bring home clearly not only Fourier's thought but also, and what is perhaps more important, Breton's observations on society at the end of the Second World War in the light of Fourier's utopic vision.

In addition to this basic division of the poem's structure into three clearly delineated movements, after the manner of the Greek ode, there is a more subtle interplay of subjects, themes and preoccupations. Although the centre of the stage is at first occupied by allusions to Fourier's system and its relation to political, social and moral aspects of contemporary reality, one gradually becomes more aware of the backcloth of the natural universe, the wondrous landscapes of Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico, and the civilization of the Indian peoples. From this emerges the theme of the Quest for Gold, conveyed both by images from Classical mythology and by references to the prospectors in the desert; and this, of course, brings back not only the Alchemy theme but also the dream of a Golden Age, which stems implicitly from the poem's overt invocation and tribute to Fourier.

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One is tempted to ask why Breton should have been so fascinated by Fourier. One realizes at once that the mere accident of discovering the author's complete works in New York is not entirely sufficient reason for the ode. In a retrospective examination of the reasons why the Surrealists took a special interest in Fourier at the end of the war, Breton came up with this explanation:

"Durant toutes les années où le ciel d'Europe s'assombrissait, où s'aiguisaient de part et d'autre des frontières les griefs qui allaient encore une fois déchirer le monde, non seulement ils (peintres et poètes surréalistes) se sont soigneusement abstenus de faire leurs griefs, mais ils ont cherché, ils cherchent encore à dégager, à rendre parlant et audible, par-delà ce qui en surface divise les hommes, ce qui les unit en profondeur de manière à lui donner une bonne fois tout le champ. C'est en ce sens qu'ils se réclament du grand sociologue Charles Fourier, plus révolutionnaire que tous les autres pour avoir conclu à la nécessité de 'refaire l'entendement humain' en commençant par 'oublier tout ce qu'on a appris."

(FC 11-12)

Six years earlier, in 1946, i.e. the year after the composition of the poem, Breton, when asked by Jean Duché what concordance of ideas he had found between Fourier's thought and his own preoccupations, gave the following reply, which gives a clear indication of the particular importance he attached to Fourier:

"Fourier est immense et je n'ai pas de plus grande ambition que de lui faire remonter le courant d'oubli qu'il traverse et qui suffirait à nous renseigner sur la perte de connaissance de ce temps.

Mais ce qui me captive au plus haut point chez Fourier, en relation avec sa découverte de l'attraction passonnée, dont les profits inappréciables restent à tirer et son attitude de doute absolu à l'égard des modes de connaissance et d'action traditionnels, c'est son dessein de fournir une interprétation hiéroglyphique du monde, fondée sur l'analogie entre les passions humaines et les produits des trois règnes de la nature. Fourier opère ici la jonction cardinale entre les préoccupations qui n'ont cessé d'animer la poésie et l'art depuis le début du XIXe siècle et les plans de réorganisation sociale qui risquent fort de rester larvaires s'ils persistent à ne pas en tenir compte.

Je ne saurais trop insister sur le fait que dans l'établissement éventuel d'un mythe nouveau sur quoi fonder une cohésion durable, Fourier ne saurait manquer d'être interrogé des tout
premiers, sinon mis largement à contribution (je pense à sa merveilleuse cosmogonie en devenir, à sa conception de la 'coque aromale', résidence des 'transmondains', etc)."

(E 249-250)

In addition to this, however, Breton could not fail to sympathize with Fourier's condemnation of the ills produced by the system of free economic competition - conditions of work in shops and factories, such as one finds attacked in Nadja, even though Fourier was writing before the Industrial Revolution in France, and chronic unemployment -, his disgust for war and armies, his conviction that the human condition in general could not improve before the condition of women was changed for the better; he shared Fourier's dislike of the domination of the family-unit in modern civilization; he would be impressed by Fourier's reasoning that the workings of society should be based on a scheme of "natural association" in which the gratification of individual desires and passions should serve the general good. Breton no doubt admired the absolute quality of Fourier's attack on "civilization".

The law of "passionate attraction",¹ a cornerstone of Fourier's thought, to which Breton alludes in the final part of the Ode, undoubtedly fascinated him. In Fourier's analysis of the drives, the instinctual forces which motivate so much of human behaviour, Breton would presumably detect an embryonic form of Freudian psychology.

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Allusions to Fourier's thought constitute an important element of Breton's poem, and this is the aspect of the poem on which Gaulmier's commentary has shed most light, of course. Most of the notes at the back of his edition seek to explain, with reference to extracts from Fourier's writings, certain phrases or lines in the poem, a number of which are put in italics by Breton. Little purpose would be served in the present study in duplicating Gaulmier's work in this direction. One should observe, however, that Breton employs certain phrases and ideas of Fourier as springboards for his own imagination, or else certain aspects of contemporary reality call to mind observations made by Fourier. The concept of industrie attrayante, for example, is presented in the following picturesque terms:

"Pour savoir comme aujourd'hui le commun des mortels prend son sort
Tâche de surprendre le regard du lamantin
Qui se prélasse au zoo dans sa baignoire d'eau tiède
Il t'en dira long sur la vigueur des idéaux
Et te donnera la mesure de l'effort qui a été fourni
Dans la voie de l'industrie attrayante". (SA 101)

The manatee is presumably selected because it seems to represent the great prehistoric fauna to which Breton had referred a few lines earlier (l. 51). Their experience is longer than man's; they have seen how slow is man's advance towards Fourier's dream of industry in the Combined Order organized on the basis of attraction and the passions, industry in which man's fundamental need to be active will be harnessed and satisfied. Fourier felt that work could be made attractive only if one was able to work at as many tasks as one wished, at least eight a day, in a group of friends and loved ones drawn to each other not just by a common interest in the tasks at hand.
Whereas the allusions to Fourier's ideas in the first part of the poem are presented in the style of the above example, the central section, written in prose, follows rigidly Fourier's tableau of the twelve "radical" passions, divided into three sub-groups or three branches of the tree of "Unitéisme". In the first sub-section, entitled "Etat des ressorts sensuels", Breton composes five poetic analyses of the passions corresponding to the five senses, and these are exemplified by the second one, La vue:

"a) vers l'extérieur - elle est déchirée de toutes parts (les camps de concentration, les bombardements massifs l'ont tenue à l'extrême limite du supportable); b) vers l'intérieur - elle venait de se découvrir tout un nouveau continent dont l'exploration se poursuivra (grands repères déjà pris en psychopathie et en art)." (SA 105-106)

Thus Breton does acknowledge the progress as well as the regress. He would be the first to recognize that the twentieth century can set against its barbarism new visions in art and new insights into the universe of the mind.

The second sub-section is the "Etat des ressorts affectifs": "L'Amitié", "L'Amour", "L'Ambition", "La Famille", according to Fourier the respective dominant drives of the four ages of man: childhood, youth, maturity and old age. Breton laments over the way in which friendship is all too easily jeopardized in our day and age; he deplores man's fostering of evil or worthless ambitions, he attacks the family system which to him seems to have two products, "fils à papa" and "enfants perdus", and he concludes with the outburst:

"La famille ressort d'aparté, de piétinement, d'égoïsme, de vanité, de division, d'hypocrisie et de mensonge tel que le sanctionne le scandale persistant et sans égal de l'héritage." (SA 106)

Against this, however, Breton can still set the redeeming force of
love, still seen as the "Grand Brillant", the cut diamond with manifold facets, the symbol of purity and light.

The final part of this central movement of the poem is built around Fourier's concept of the three distributive or "mechanizing" passions: "la Cabaliste" or intriguing passion, "la Composite" or the desire for the sort of happiness which could only be found in the mixture of physical and spiritual pleasures, neither of which are suited to a society geared largely to preparation, production and consumption, and "la Papillonme" or the penchant for variety and contrast. The section entitled "la Papillonme" consists of a single line:

"Cri du sphinx Atropos. Travail à la chaîne" (SA 109)

Tense though the second phrase may be, it points, even in the omission of one of the terms, to the sharp contrast between the dream and reality; instead of the variety of tasks Fourier believed to be necessary to make work attractive, Breton sees the monotony of the widespread use of the conveyor-belt; and the strange name given by Fourier to this passion prompts Breton to employ the image of the cry (presumably a cry of protest) of the death's head hawk-moth, the only lepidopter to utter a sound.

In the poem's third and final movement the style of the allusions to Fourier's thought reverts to that of section I, except for a long extract near the end from the third volume of the Théorie de l'Unité Universelle, "Distributions agricoles des séries, et Mariages des Groupes", evoking life in a Fourierist "phalanstère" or community, in which the spirit of co-operation and the atmosphere of an orderly idyll are manifest. It is in this part of the poem that Breton cites what is perhaps Fourier's most famous utterance,
"les attractions sont proportionnelles aux destinées" (l. 160), and
one sees immediately that this proud statement acted like a magnet
in drawing Breton to Fourier, even though the two men are in many
ways "like poles".

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

The contrast between the harsh contemporary reality and the
Utopian dream runs through most of the poem. On the one hand there
are references to shortages and the black market, the unscrupulous-
ness and the scandals of the commercial world, the violence and the
butchery of war, all summarized in one famous line in the poem:

"Indigence fourberie oppression carnage ce sont toujours
les mêmes maux dont tu as marqué la civilisation au fer rouge."

(The image of branding may be inspired by Breton's journey through
the cattle ranching states of America).

The other side of the coin is seen from time to time, as is illus-
trated by two lines near the end of the poem, which contain a
further affirmation of Breton's basic optimism:

"Fourier tranchant sur la grisaille des idées et des
aspirations d'aujourd'hui ta lumière
Filtrant la soif de mieux-être et la maintenant à l'abri de
tout ce qui pourrait la rendre moins pure quand bien même
et c'est le cas je tiendrais pour avéré que l'amélioration
du sort humain ne s'opère que très lentement par à coups
au prix de revendications terre à terre et de froids
calculs le vrai levier n'en demeure pas moins la croyance
irraisonnée à l'acheminement vers un futur édénique et
après tout c'est elle aussi le seul levain des générations
ta jeunesse." (SA 113)

This contrast appears to be symbolized to a degree by the
change of setting from the Old World of the first movement to the
New World of the third.

Paris is the focal-point of the imagery of the first part.
The poem opens with a recollection of the sight one morning in 1937
of Fourier's statue on the Boulevard de Clichy. On its plinth
Breton noticed a bunch of violets, placed there, he assumes, by a
woman, to commemorate the centenary of the visionary's death. The
statue had reminded Breton of a figure on the prow of a ship, and
he feels that Fourier would make an especially appropriate figure-
head in times of moral tempest. This pleasing image gradually
fades from view, however, to be replaced at first by a more prosaic
portrait of Fourier looking down on the adjacent stalls and then by
a more abstract and more deprecating survey of life in Europe at
war.

By the final movement there has been a step forward both in
time and space, as Breton is inspired by the countryside where he
is actually writing the Ode. Breton employs the Gallicized name
of The Petrified Forest, a national park in Arizona, containing
forests of petrified wood, as a symbol of the state of culture at
that time:

"Je te salue de la Forêt Pétrifiée de la culture humaine
Ô plus rien n'est debout
Mais où rodent de grandes lueurs tournoyantes
Qui appellent la délivrance du feuillage et de l'oiseau
De tes doigts part la sève des arbres en fleurs"  (SA 110)

This final line serves to show that, thanks to Fourier, the
symbolic trees can be resuscitated - once again the resurrection
tHEME; and Breton is able to tap again the vein of lyricism and to
discover anew surrealist images, as in the stanza of the Grand
Canyon:

"Fourier je te salue du Grand Cañon du Colorado
Je vois l'aigle qui s'échappé de ta tête
Il tient dans ses serres le mouton de Pamurge
Et le vent du souvenir et de l'avenir
Dans les plumes de ses ailes fait passer les visages de mes amis
Parmi lesquels nombreux ceux qui n'ont plus ou n'ont pas encore
de visage". (ibid.)
At first sight the purpose of these lines may seem altogether obscure, but possibly the spectacle of the eagle soaring over the rocks leads Breton to regard the bird, for the Hopis "our animal", the bearer of man's prayers to the rain-bringing gods, as some kind of image of Fourier, almost god-like in his role of creator of a new social order; and the allusion to Panurge's ram is probably intended not so much to bring to mind his duping of Dindenault as to bring back the image of the Golden Fleece, to which the poet refers in the first movement, for the sheep-trader in Rabelais' Quart Livre claims that it was from his long-wool sheep that Jason took his Golden Fleece.

In the final part of the poem not only does Breton write of Fourier's Philosopher's stone - according to Gaulmier his Law of Passionate Attraction - but also he finds ample justification for developing the theme of the Quest for Gold, in terms of which the alchemists of old interpreted the legend of Jason.

When one recalls that Orpheus was one of the Argonauts, one can begin to perceive more facets of the allusion to "le roseau d'Orphée" in l. 52, which is explained by Gaulmier in his edition of the poem in terms of a comparison:

"Comme Orphée soumet les animaux sauvages par sa musique, Fourier séduit les Civilisés par l'enchantement de l'universelle Harmonie." 1

This comment is perfectly valid, of course, but part of the purpose of the reference to Orpheus in the first part of the poem, however veiled it may be, is possibly to add slightly extra weight to the themes of the Quest for Gold and the need for a new Golden Age; and Breton can see the embodiment of these themes in the

1. op.cit., p.87.
prospectors of Nevada, who set in motion another of the chorus-like stanzas:

"Je te salue du Névada des chercheurs d'or
De la terre promise et tenue
A la terre en veine de promesses plus hautes qu'elle doit tenir encore
Du fond de la mine d'azurite qui mire le plus beau ciel
Pour toujours par delà cette enseigne de bar qui continue
À battre la rue d'une ville morte -
Virginia City - 'Au vieux baquet de sang'." (SA 111)

The first four lines of this stanza, with their image of the prospectors for gold, their idea of the promised land and their allusion to the azurite mine, in fact prefigure the poem dedicated specifically to Elisa's land, La moindre rançon, (cf. supra, pp.555-559).

Breton realizes, however, that this promised land was once the Eden of the Indian tribes, and it is from a Hopi kiva, the underground chamber used for sacred ceremonies as well as for more mundane social gatherings, that Breton draws the inspiration for the last stages of the poem. Breton is deeply moved by the experience of visiting reservations of some of the Indian peoples whose civilisation - art, philosophy, legends and rituals - seems richer and more dignified than the so-called "Civilization" of Europe, the "Civilization" Fourier regarded as merely a phase, albeit an unpleasant phase, in the evolution of mankind.

To epitomize Hopi civilization, to indicate in one image the intimacy of the relationship between the Indians and nature, Breton alludes to the celebrated Snake-Dance, whose final stage he would presumably have been privileged to witness, as its performance would have coincided with the time of Breton's descent into the kiva at
Mishongnovi:¹

"Je te salue du bas de l'échelle qui plonge en grand mystère dans la kiwa [sic] hopi la chambre souterraine et sacrée ce 22 août 1945 à Mishongnovi à l'heure où les serpents d'un nœud ultime marquent qu'ils sont prêts à opérer leur conjonction avec la bouche humaine.
Du fond du pacte millénaire qui dans l'angoisse a pour objet de maintenir l'intégrité du verbe
Des plus lointaines ondes de l'écho qu'éveille le pied frappant impérieusement le sol pour sceller l'alliance avec les puissances qui font lever la graine". (SA 113)

For several days before the festival is held people go out gathering the snakes, especially rattlesnakes which play the most important role. When the dance commences, one man teases a snake with a feather wand, attracting its attention, to enable another man to seize it just behind the head; he then puts the snake in his mouth, holding it horizontally so that the head protrudes on one side and the body on the other. A few inches of the snake's head and neck are free, so that it can squirm and struggle, though its attention is still occupied by the man with the wand. The men with the snakes in their mouths form a line and move in a procession before engaging in the dance proper.

One might argue that the closeness of the Indians to nature is reflected, too, in the occasional allusions to the local flora and fauna in the third part of the poem: "la prenante odeur de pin-pignon" (l. 173); the eagle, the rattler; whereas in the first movement, when there is a zoological motif, e.g. the manatee or "les cynocéphales de l'épicerie" (l. 67), it serves to incarnate some unpleasant aspect of "Civilization".

These motifs are, of course, an important feature of the poem's imagery, but the pattern and form of the imagery stems both from the basic structure of the poem, the different styles of the three movements and from the extent to which Breton makes use of automatic writing. As far as the latter point is concerned, it has been seen (cf. supra, p. 627) that automatic writing was a starting point of the poem; and it would probably be safe to assume that certain images in the text are automatic images. At least some bear the hallmark of automatic writing; for example, near the beginning of the poem Breton makes an observation which corresponds to views on the image expressed in the first Manifeste:

"Car les images les plus vives sont les plus fugaces". (SA 99)

He follows this at once with a couple of lines which are very similar in style to lines found in his poems and automatic texts of the 1920's:

"La manche du temps hume la muscade
Et fait saillir la manchette aveuglante de la vie".

In addition to the juxtaposing of the abstract and the concrete, which runs right through these lines, the sounds appear to have taken over from the sense, and the alliteration and the assonance help to give the lines a rhythmic quality which cannot be explained satisfactorily in metrical terms.

Closely allied to the imagery proper, if not in fact part of the imagery proper, are the "ready-mades", the variety of quotations from diverse sources, not just those from the writings of Fourier, of which a sprinkling have been seen or discussed already. Breton can take a newspaper cutting and insert it into his poem, as is the case with the following item:
"Un savant bien que muni de lunettes noires perd la vue pour avoir assisté à plusieurs milles de distance aux premiers essais de la bombe atomique". (SA 110)

This is almost an example of "humour noir", especially as it comes immediately after a line containing a statement Breton dismisses as "scientific blindness":

"Personne n'a jamais vu de molécule, ni d'atome, ni de lien atomique et sans doute on ne les verra jamais." (Philosophe)

To demonstrate in an absurd fashion the gross "unreality" of this remark, when two Japanese towns had just been destroyed by atomic bombs, Breton adds this delightfully picturesque little touch, by way of a denial of the scientists' claim:

"......entre en se dandinant la molécule du caoutchouc".

One might argue that the use of Fourier's neologisms, and, indeed, of his language in general, brings welcome acquisitions to Breton's new language of poetry; but of deeper interest are the ways in which Breton seeks to reflect in his imagery key aspects, key themes, of Fourier's philosophy. The theme of harmony is not just suggested with musical images - the "ode" of the title, "le roseau d'Orphée", the allusion in l. 136 to Fourier's new system of musical notation, "(le besoin) de faire passer la clé de sol de seconde en première ligne dans la notation musicale", and "Fourier qu'a-t-on fait de ton clavier" (l. 129) - but also with the myth of a Golden Age and Eden regained, evoked by the New World and the philosopher's stone (l. 156), and by the images of light which mark the final part of the poem, culminating in a strange association, inspired by phrases in Fourier's cosmogony, between the planet Uranus, given here its old name Herschel, and its satellites, and a queen bee in her hive, which presents very pleasantly both the
concept of "industrie attrayante" and the discovery of a new world; and this art of pure suggestion is the quality of the poem's final and significant image, archetypal in its idea but new in its expression, the image of freedom escaping and taking wing:

"Au grand scandale des uns sous l'oeil à peine moins sévère des autres soulevant son poids d'ailes ta liberté". (SA 115)

The image of wings is, of course, very reminiscent of Hugo's vision of the birth of liberty which Breton quotes on the last page of Arcane 17 (cf. supra, p. 292); yet whereas Hugo saw a single white feather falling down, freedom for Breton takes on the symbolic form of a great bird, but unlike Baudelaire's swan and albatross, a bird about to take off for its element once more.

So like Arcane 17, the Ode à Charles Fourier ends in an optimistic vein, with Breton's hope and belief in the eventual triumph of love, liberty and poetry.

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

Thus, what on first reading may have seemed a rather pedestrian evocation of the disparity between Fourier's system and society in the 1940's, a poem heavily laden with Fourierist terminology, is on closer examination an intricate network of ideas, images, hopes and lamentations, drawn not just from Fourier's writings but also from Classical mythology and Red Indian ritual. The poem begins to vibrate with new life as Breton finds new stimuli in the American landscape; one can soon begin to sense that even though the text of the Ode contains very little specific reference to Breton's rediscovery of love and re-marriage, he felt that life had begun anew for him, that the end of the war could be the first glimmer of the
dawn of a new age for mankind, not just the beginning of a new stage of his own life, a simultaneous dawn and twilight, symbolizing the ultimate fusion of opposites in a searing light and the accomplishment of the Great Work.

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The long poems do build up to a climax, albeit a different kind of climax from that of Arcane 17. In a sense they enable Breton to reconcile the flashes of inspiration of the surrealist images in the early automatic texts and poems with the more careful elaboration of the themes and ideas of the works in the "prose quartet". They merge the lyric and the epic into a bold new poetic form; they have the air of great verbal symphonies; they possess a richly symbolic quality which transcends the individual images.
CONCLUSION

We have thus followed Breton's development both as a theorist and as a poet and have seen that the theorist is, if anything, eclipsed by the poet — if one must separate these two aspects of the man. We have examined the nature of the various influences on Breton and discovered that the ideas of Lautréamont, Apollinaire, Saint-Pol-Roux and Reverdy probably helped to determine Breton's conception of the image and made him realize the importance of the need for a new and modern form of lyricism for poetry. We have set Breton's study of the poetic image against the background of similar investigations by contemporary Anglo-Saxon writers, particularly the Imagists; and in that chapter suggested that Breton may also have been influenced, whether he was aware of it or not, by certain ideas of Bergson and Remy de Gourmont. We have analysed in some detail Breton's classification of "surrealist images" in the Premier Manifeste and have attempted to relate it to his poetry, even though we felt that it is inadequate and that its value has been exaggerated: we have shown that Breton's examples were not always well chosen and that the boundaries between the different categories were often fairly fluid or even ill-defined. This led us to conclude very quickly that Breton's imagery cannot be described sufficiently in terms of lists of types and that one must rather attempt to evoke its bewildering variety, its splendid qualities of dynamic surprise and dewy freshness. To be content to define or categorize the images in purely formal terms would convey nothing of their real function. The famous remarks on the image in the Premier Manifeste certainly reveal little of the important secrets of Breton's poetry: these
have to be extracted carefully from his writings, poetry as well as prose. The relationship between image and theme is in truth more rewarding study than purely formal considerations, and such a conclusion would be supported by Breton's own critical method, which we have seen at work in his discussion of his poem *Tournesol* and of one of his "poèmes-objets". We argued that to remove Breton's images from their context is to strip them of a considerable part of their vitality, and that although Eluard may have claimed that one might regard certain surrealist images as little poems in their own right, they really need to be appreciated in the full force of their interaction with other images; an isolated chord may itself be pleasant, but it is usually heard to better advantage when played in the context of the whole piece of music to which it belongs.

Because of all this we sought to expand the discussion of Breton's conception of imagery; and thus we mentioned ways in which the close friendship and relationship between Surrealist poets and artists may have altered Breton's conception of the poetic image, so that it could not have been seen solely as a figure of speech; we considered the effects of Breton's occasional doubts about automatic writing, even though he continued to note down "phrases de réveil" until virtually the end of his days; we studied briefly his desire to bring about the "occultation" of Surrealism. In this respect we devoted one chapter to Surrealist and occultist word-play, another to the invention and practice of the "jeu de l'un dans l'autre", and showed how Breton, as he grew older, talked more and more of the analogical process, so that at times one had the impression of a struggle between the arbitrary image and analogy. The analysis of *Du surréalisme en ses œuvres vives*, however, demonstrat-
ed that the two were not, in fact, rivals and that the arbitrary image had not been entirely displaced from its position at the centre of Breton's poetics. So, despite our reservations about the classification of surrealist images in the Premier Manifeste, we were able to decide that Breton's more theoretical statements form a very useful, if not an indispensable series of guides for the study and exegesis of his poetry.

Our examination of the "prose quartet", which revolved at first around the ideas of objective chance and of desire seeking the object of its realization, revealed how Breton was able to enlarge considerably our conception of poetry and illustrate how poetry can make its incursion into everyday life. We noted the importance of private symbols in Nadja and the inter-relation of dream and reality in Les Vases communicants, which made the account of Breton's activities in his waking hours during the month of April 1931 resemble in its essentials a dream or even possibly an automatic text; we saw the connection between the theme of the encounter and the surrealist image in L'Amour fou, a connection epitomized, of course, in Lautréamont's celebrated aesthetic principle, "beau...... comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie". In that book, too, the allusion to "l'abandon des voies logiques ordinaires" pointed to Breton's preference for analogical patterns and structures, which, in fact, characterize not only his more creative writings but also some of his more theoretical texts. The chapter on Arcane 17 sought to portray Breton's suggestion of the vast reservoir of symbols the poet has to draw on, symbols which take the form of a cryptogram the poet at last succeeds in decoding, and the nature and extent of the evolution of
Breton's imagery in his prose-works into a very intricate network subject to constant metamorphosis. *Arcane 17* emerged as the true climax of the series and revealed that the imagery in a prose-work of moderate length could play as important a role and could be maintained in the same dynamic state of flux as in Breton's poems proper, transcending the concept and even the limits of surrealist images to embrace the more mysterious phenomena of legend, myth, allegory and symbol.

In the final part of this thesis, the part devoted to Breton's poems, we again brought out the importance of the fundamental Surrealist themes and principles: "le hasard objectif", "la beauté convulsive", "le merveilleux", "le rêve", "l'amour", "la quête", to name just the most obvious ones. In it we examined the function of the surrealist images, we saw that apparently arbitrary and even hermetic images may at times shed light on Breton's sentiments, we witnessed the way in which quintessential qualities of Breton's poetry appear in the early collections and how they are transformed and expanded in the later "epic" or "symphonic" poems. This leads naturally into another extremely important point, namely the fact that although Breton may have set out to undermine the notion of "genre", he utilized and explored various different poetic forms: what one might call "avant-garde" or experimental poems, dream-narrations, automatic texts, prose-poems, short poems in "vers libres", long poems; and this is partly responsible for the great diversity of Breton's poetry. We have evaluated the significance of the connection between the discovery of automatic writing and the creation of the desired new and modern lyricism, conceived of in terms of a "dépassement spasmodique de l'expression contrôlée". We
have approached Breton's poetry both at the level of the recueil and at the level of the individual poem. We have studied Breton's collaborations with fellow-poets, beginning with the very first collection of automatic texts, Les Champs magnétiques.

Developments which took place round about 1930 — a tendency to write to, or at least an impression that Breton was writing to predetermined subjects and themes, the allying of products of subconscious thought with subjects decided by the conscious mind — did not displace the surrealist image from its position of prime importance in Breton's poetry and poetics and, indeed, helped to achieve yet another fusion of erstwhile opposites and led to a reconciliation of the passive reception of images and the active search for, and perception of, analogies.

The wish to bring about the "marriage of opposites" pervades many of Breton's poems as well as much of his thought. It led to, and partly accounts for, a great number of images in which there are elemental fusions and images which erode the frontiers between animal, vegetable and mineral; it is also responsible, to some extent, for the importance attached by Breton to the principle of metamorphosis and even perhaps for the presence of the resurrection-theme, since the latter, of course, contains a movement from death to life and this, in turn, could be taken as a token of the ultimate triumph of the Surrealist imagination. We witnessed, especially in Le revolver à cheveux blancs, how the imagination was not only allocated pride of place among the faculties but also emerged as an important theme, and how this was accompanied by Breton's restoration to favour of the concept of inspiration.

Such remarks, however, over-simplify the situation and possibly
disguise the fact that in his search for clues to the veritable nature of Breton's genius the critic must wander through a forest of symbols, signs, indices. The theme of the quest, therefore, becomes as crucial for the critic as it was for the poet; and Breton's significant thoughts on the image themselves tend to be expressed in the form of flashes of insight, brief shafts of light, no more no less. Although Breton was undoubtedly a fine stylist in prose and had an extremely lucid mind, the logical and systematic presentation of facts or arguments was not his characteristic or favourite approach: in the enunciation of his thoughts, he preferred to try to recapture or reflect their pristine force, he preferred to convey the suddenness of their revelation. So, one could compare Breton's style, in his poems and his prose alike, with the flight of a butterfly: it flits naturally from topic to topic, as his fancy takes him. Breton's style suggests, in fact, a natural automatism, and his poems, which are far more elliptical than his prose, are full of short cuts and even of the odd short-circuit, an expression justified by the allusion to a "différence de potentiel" in the comments on the image in the 1924 Manifeste.

Although critics have always commented on the importance of the images in Breton's poetry, the secret of his better, and more attractive, poems is to be found in the fact that Breton solved, for himself, for his purposes, the problem of poetic diction: he could never be content with lines that did not possess that quality of "convulsive beauty" which he made one of the foundations of Surrealist aesthetics.

With almost each reading of the briefest poem by Breton something new is disclosed, casting fresh light on its interpretation.
and even on the poet's mannerisms and preoccupations. Breton's poetry is basically an expression of the fleeting, the delicate, the ethereal and the wondrous. The "espaces blancs" between the words are important always, not just in the so-called elliptical poems of Mont de Piété: there is simply a movement from an overtly elliptical technique in many of the poems in that first recueil to a much more latent and a much more discreet form of ellipsis in the subsequent Surrealist poems. In his poetry Breton begins to accomplish his aim of letting words "make love"; he was prepared to give words their freedom and, rather paradoxically, this desire is perhaps suggested better in the little "proses" of Constellations, written at the end of his career, than in Mont de Piété, where the poet almost seems afraid to exploit this latent freedom, for there he steps very gingerly in the field of homonyms.

This reveals the usefulness of a chronological study of Breton's writings. One can detect a progression in the imagery from the initial impression of near chaos in Les Champs magnétiques to the more cunningly distilled metaphors of Constellations. There is some continual and gradual modification of the nature of the imagery, if not necessarily of the types of images, in Breton's poetry, a modification both thematic and stylistic.

Occasional delightful images, like "la rosée à tête de chatte" and the less well known "J'habite au cœur d'un de ces chardons/Ô tes cheveux sont des poignées de portes sous-marines", really make the reader believe that they were clutched like birds on the wing from the mysterious realm of the subconscious. They seem to possess a visionary quality, a revelatory aura, sometimes even an oracular power: and what they reveal are possibly concrete
or semi-concrete manifestations of the forces of surprise and desire. They have their roles in the play of objective chance, for in their coupling of disparate and distant realities, in their juxtapositions, they parallel at the verbal level the workings of "le hasard objectif" in Breton's life; and, as we have seen, "le hasard objectif", through its bringing together of the external and the internal, the conscious and the unconscious, has close affinities with symbolism. Moreover, such images reflect the fact that Breton's eyes and ears were ever open to the world and to "le merveilleux" the poet is able to find lurking in even the most unlikely nooks and crannies; they are the agents whereby Breton transforms reality into poetry; they are the vital instruments in the creation of new myths and the revival of old ones, not just Classical myths but also, and more important, the myths of primitive and emerging peoples and Celtic, Arthurian and French legends.

In the imagery of the prose-writings Breton works out fully what he is wont to leave as brief sketches in his poems, so that one finds at times in the former the complete and generally complex development of what could well be expressed as an arbitrary image in the poems.

However, in his prose and his poems alike, Breton deploys a subtle blend of arbitrary and more conventional images, he builds up multiple images which may serve to evoke implicitly the concept of the alchemy of the verb: Breton's imagery creates an atmosphere of magic. As he grows ever wiser in his techniques, his "persona" suggests increasingly the poet-magician, quite clearly in Constellations, but also, if less explicitly, in the epic poems. Admittedly, this impression is built up first of all by the presence of patently
hermetic motifs, by the marriage of fire and water, by the quest for gold, but one gradually detects that in the whole corpus of Breton's creative writings there is implicit the belief that "la haute poésie" is itself a brand of alchemy, transmuting words through new combinations into the expressions of some mysterious essence or experience. Though the image of "light in the darkness" is a dominant right from the early days of automatic writing, it becomes increasingly evident that it is in the evocation of love regained, especially when it is set against the background of cosmic forces, that Breton can best reveal this conviction that poetry is an alchemic art, in which the best ferment is the new and surprising image; and we recall that the concept of an alchemical or magic transformation was, of course, fundamental to Symbolist aesthetics.

Indeed, as one works through Breton's poetry, one feels more and more that the appellation, "Surrealist poet", is not entirely appropriate for him. Certainly, as the acknowledged leader of the Surrealist movement, as one of its finest poets, as one of the discoverers of automatic writing, he is a Surrealist poet; yet through his both latent and manifest exploitation of dream, his use of signs, analogy, metaphors relating dissimilar things, juxtapositions, his perception or creation of a private network of symbols, he evolved a twentieth-century form of both Romanticism and Symbolism, which combines the best aspects of both those movements with an essential freshness and originality of vocabulary and vision. Breton's Surrealism, despite its shock tactics, despite its avowed break with the past, follows on naturally from Romanticism and Symbolism; it occupies an almost logical place in the evolution of French
poetry; it is a modern and personal form of Romanticism and, more particularly, of Symbolism. There are certain constants in modern poetry, and not just in French, from at least Romanticism onwards, which Surrealism, and Breton's form of it especially, does not abandon. As we have seen in the case of Surrealism and Imagism, despite very important basic differences, there are also points of contact and similarity. The use of automatic writing probably put critics on the wrong track; they were at first more aware of the ways in which Surrealist poetry appeared to differ from earlier poetry. Breton's choice of terminology when he compiled a list of surrealist images in the Premier Manifeste likewise helped to mask the presence there of certain very basic kinds of images, the symbol being perhaps the best example, hidden as it was beneath the cloak of the phrase, "the image with an absent or missing term". Breton's surrealist imagery is not, when examined closely, really as different from the imagery of earlier generations of poets as many critics may have led us to believe. Despite the presence in Breton's poetry of vast numbers of images which could be placed in certain categories of his famous classification of surrealist images, the interest, the attraction and the beauty of his imagery reside more in the discreet and private symbolism he creates and employs. The real originality and freshness of Breton's poetry lie in his success in evolving a new type of poetic diction and of poetic rhythm, his use of a new vocabulary for poetry which weds modern specialized, technical, scientific terms to the more traditional language of poetry; from this union the new terms derive their novel symbolic, and at times mythical, significance.

Although Guy Michaud, when he was writing the epilogue to his
Message poétique du symbolisme, saw Surrealism as the "victime de son ambition démesurée", seduced by two opposite temptations, "le rêve et la politique", and "incapable.... de faire la synthèse de la poésie et de l'action", he stressed in his final paragraph, in a prescription for the poetry of the future, the poetry which would succeed that of the Symbolists, the importance of the reconciliation of poetry and science, and of a need to rediscover unity of thought and action and the unity of the conscious and the unconscious:

"C'est libérer ses ressources les plus profondes, sa sensibilité primitive, et toutes les traces d'une pensée analogique; car il y a dans cette intuition première des symboles, non toute la vérité, mais l'embryon de toute vérité. C'est ensuite prendre conscience de ces richesses retrouvées; savoir lire à travers les images individuelles spontanées ou les grands mythes collectifs, l'ordre du monde; appeler à l'aide, pour une analyse et une critique rigoureuse dans le cadre d'une conscience ainsi élargie, toutes les forces de la science et de la raison. C'est enfin, ayant capté les forces inconscientes, savoir les transmettre et rendre au langage une partie au moins de ses pouvoirs. Alors la poésie, cessant d'être un jeu gratuit de mandarins, pourra redevenir un guide efficace."  

Although the emphasis might not be placed here exactly where we would wish and although the odd point may not quite be appropriate, these words resume extraordinarily well the achievement of André Breton and help to set the seal on our view of him as not just a Surrealist poet but as the man who took French poetry on beyond Symbolism, in the sense in which it has always been understood, to its most significant twentieth-century development. Without wishing to achieve the "parfaite musique" sought by the Symbolists, Breton's best poetry, whether it is located in the short poems of L'Air de l'Eau and Constellations or in Arcane 17 or in

2. id., p.642.
Pleine marge, Fata Morgana, Les États généraux, the Ode à Charles Fourier, is a veritable symphony of themes, images and symbols.
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