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ALFRED JARRY: AN IMAGINATION IN REVOLT

Volume 1

by

Jill Fell

Thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D. in French

in the Faculty of Humanities

University of Kent at Canterbury

January 1997

ABSTRACT

The prime concern of this thesis is to review the ground-breaking artistic and literary achievements of Alfred Jarry, (1873-1907) born in Laval (Mayenne) and best-known as originator of the Theatre of the Absurd through his play Ubu roi. The thesis follows his uncompromising personal campaign to break the artistic and literary moulds of the 1890's and to introduce an aesthetic of challenge. Drawing from his novels and poetry and within the context of his expertise on marionettes, it links these to his theoretical pronouncements and highlights aspects of his aesthetic code and personal philosophy which have not so far been analysed.

Parallel to his literary experiments, the thesis also tracks Jarry's contribution to the visual arts and integrates an appreciation of his graphic work into the analysis of his artistic aims and satirical intentions.

Part I of the thesis relates to movement and the fixing of movement. It contrasts the archaic ornamental outline, as an abstract representation of spiritual and emotional impulses, with the photograph and with modern attempts to measure, record and classify physical movements and emotional phenomena. Jarry's personal philosophy emerges from this debate, identifying his literary effort as a sustained campaign which set poetic and imaginative interpretations of the physical world above fixed scientific or artistic methodologies.

Part II follows his campaign into the practical arena of book design and art. An analysis of Jarry's own artistic effort is balanced against his view of others' art and his suspicion of art criticism. We shall see how he parodies traditional methods of describing art before offering his own novel alternatives.

Taking marionettes and the dance as twin points of focus, Part III brings together the motifs and arguments of the previous chapters. The last two chapters return to the question of the moving body as a vehicle of expression: that is as both potential receptacle and transmitter of a spiritual element that Jarry believed was, to a great extent, determined by form.

Jarry's mission is shown to examine the very fundamentals of language: the communication of an idea or a feeling in concrete form. The final chapter demonstrates his habit of combining "high" intellectual rigour with "low" or vulgar source material. It also analyses the dilemma expressed throughout his work, namely the artistic need to give free rein to the imagination, projecting the writer into another world, combined with the artistic duty of communicating with an audience in this one.

ABBREVIATIONS

The quotations from Jarry's works in this thesis have all been taken from the Pléiade edition of Jarry's Oeuvres complètes, as opposed to the earlier edition of René Massat. I have used the abbreviation PL to indicate this. For example (PL I 444) refers to Volume I p. 444 of the Pléiade edition of Jarry's Oeuvres complètes. In the cases of other authors' Oeuvres complètes, such as Mallarmé's, Baudelaire's and Breton's also in the Pléiade edition, I have used the abbreviation OC.

Any emboldening in the main text or quotations is my own, unless otherwise indicated. I have retained Jarry's italics or capital letters wherever he used them. These variously indicate emphasis, quotation or song. He sometimes emphasizes single words to indicate an intertextual link. Some poems are given entirely in italics, usually when inserted in a work of prose.

I have used my own titles for two untitled in-text poems, 'Mnester's Chant' in Messaline and 'Marcueil's Lullaby' in Le Surmâle, also referred to by its opening words, "*Une forme nue...*"

ALFRED JARRY
AN IMAGINATION IN REVOLT

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PREFACE

My interest in Jarry was originally sparked by Donald Watson's Twentieth-Century French Drama course during my final year at Bristol University in 1969. It is an interest which I have set aside for long periods and come back to many times. In Vienna in 1973 Hans Hinterhäuser set me on the trail of the Norwegian painter, Gerhard Munthe, dedicatee of the 'Tapisseries.' This led me to Jarry's relationship with painters in general and to his poetry. My apologies to Birkbeck College and to Patrick Pollard that I had to interrupt a part-time research degree in the early '80s. As well as the guardianship of her Jarry archive, Barbara Wright's friendship and her encouraging correspondence remained my main link to Jarry during three years spent in Poland and five in Greece. It was due to her and to Madeleine Renouard that I was persuaded and helped to start again in the '90s.

I have not attempted to encroach on biographical material except where it might throw light on Jarry's poetry, novels, criticism and graphic work which provide the focus for this thesis. My apologies also to Ubu, who has been relegated a back seat.

Paul Gayot of the *Collège de Pataphysique* has responded punctiliously to my many queries. Vidar Poulsson generously sent me material on Gerhard Munthe. Henri Béhar, François Caradec and Alain Weill have all shared their knowledge. Patrick Fréchet has sent me numerous photocopies of out of print articles published by the *Société des Amis d'Alfred Jarry*. Others have given me vital encouragement along the way.

Derek Whittaker, Art History Librarian of the University of Kent and Spencer Scott of their photographic unit have been assiduous in helping me. I am also grateful to the staff of the British Library, the Entomology Library of the Natural History Museum, the Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute, the *Réserve* and the *Cabinet de Médailles* of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, the *Bibliothèque de la Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs dramatiques* for their help, and especially to Chantal Bessot of the *Bibliothèque du Musée départemental du Prieuré*. The National Gallery of Oslo, the British Museum, the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and the *Musée d'Arts et Traditions populaires* have all kindly provided slides or photographs for my volume of illustrations.

Great credit is due to my supervisor, Roger Cardinal, for energetic and inspirational guidance on building a framework for this new, visually-based thesis, for rigorous interim criticism and for help at key moments.

To Torben, Cicely and Charles I give my thanks for sharing much of their childhood with Jarry and to William, deepest gratitude for his steady support.

INTRODUCTION

Alfred Jarry is indissolubly linked to Ubu roi, the schoolboy play that began as Les Polonais in an amateur marionette theatre and that he launched on the live Paris stage in 1896 with the explosive word “merdre.” As a new arrival to Paris in 1891 he acted as an uncomfortably questioning and subversive force among the Symbolist writers and quickly absorbed the fashionable theories circulating among the painters of the Rosicrucian, Pont-Aven and Nabi groups. Jarry created his own brand of literature, art and theatre, which sprang from this amalgam, yet was in opposition to it. The so-called science of Pataphysics, the system of Nonsense that he invented, hinged on the principles of contradiction and interrogation, principles which also steered his imagination.

This thesis is intent on presenting a new aesthetic assessment of Jarry. Although officially classified as a dramatist on account of Ubu roi, the two editions of Jarry’s Oeuvres complètes, in eight and three volumes respectively, attest to the diversity of his talents as poet, artist, novelist, and satirical journalist. His renown as a marionettist is on record as a crowd-puller among the intellectuals of Brussels as well as Paris. Less well-known is his artistic partnership with Remy de Gourmont as editor of the avant-garde magazine L’Ymagier and his sole editorship of Perhinderion, promoting an anti-realist strain and a return to mediaeval standards of excellence in the art of the Book.

Jarry’s prime and driving impulse was to seek alternatives to accepted ideas and theories. This went hand in hand with a mistrust of the unseen reader, amounting to near-antagonism. Jarry’s sharply questioning and fragmenting gaze produced peculiar, parodic forms of literature. A part of the task of this thesis is to identify these and seek the reasons behind his urge to parody and undermine; but its main intent is to provide a new framework within which to contextualize Jarry’s imaginative world and his experiments with visual and aural stimuli to the imagination.

Whether in art, literature or science, Jarry placed the individual imagination at the top of his scale of values and reserved his deepest scorn for the unoriginal. Taking this as our main guide, we have chosen six paired fields which involve the stimulating or the stifling of the imagination, fields to which he gave his determined attention and around which his thoughts on art and literature crystallize most clearly, even if in subversive form. The summarized titles are as follows:

PART I THE FIXING OF MOVEMENT

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PART II ILLUSTRATION AND ART

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PART III THE MARIONETTE AND THE DANCER

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| Chapter 5 | * <i>The Animation of Puppets</i> |
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These headings are not as disparate as they may seem, for behind each lies the problem of communicating with reader, beholder, spectator or simply one's fellow being. Jarry's work represents a perpetual experiment to ascertain the power of different media: the written word, the marionette, the religious icon, the graphic illustration, the painting, the photograph and eventually the dancer. What he is looking for is the maximum force of suggestivity, following the principles of mask- or armour-design. Building on the most recent research published in article form by the Société des Amis d'Alfred Jarry and especially the larger studies of Henri Béhar and Brunella Eruli, the thesis undertakes the task of assessing Jarry's contribution both as a "literary" puppeteer and an artist-editor on the edge of the Nabi and Pont-Aven group more comprehensively than has so far been accomplished.

Another problem that the thesis will address is the fact that Jarry's early rejection of the validity of any theory and of the role of theoretician means that his most serious and genuine statements about art, literature and ethics are extremely scattered and allusive. Taking each of the stated headings as a marshalling point we shall gather these scattered pronouncements from his fiction, poetry, satirical work and criticism in order to form a picture of his personal philosophy and to assess his role as a shaper of artistic thought. Except on matters of artistic collaboration and essential chronology, we shall avoid biographical and anecdotal detail.

This thesis will highlight Jarry's faith in the controlling power of fantasy. He expresses this in terms of "dulcinifying" his mental powers, after Don Quixote's noble and imaginary love, Dulcinea. From his own world, he takes as paradigm for the strange state of perception between waking and dreaming the near-transparent nictating membrane of the owl, what he describes as the *paupière de soie*. The overriding authority of the imagination and of genius is constantly used to overturn traditional theories and representations of reality. We shall track Jarry's distinctive method of questioning and subverting fixed and traditional forms of literature and art, that he regarded as an essential turning over of exhausted soil, without which no new artistic growth would be possible.

Jarry's lack of faith in the intelligence of his potential readership caused a reluctance to reveal himself. His struggle both to communicate, yet to conceal is therefore still a problem for any reader approaching his imaginative fiction and poetry. An examination of his texts nevertheless reveals a peculiarly strong visual element, pointing to his belief that in the effort to communicate with the unseen reader, the outline of the object described was of prime evocative importance. This belief in the secret action of particular forceful outlines, which the human psyche is programmed to recognise and which lack any symbolic character, marks a reaction against the vague, the evanescent and the indecisive typified by the aesthetic projects of Impressionism and Symbolism. The ability of words to project a variety of meanings, that Mallarmé and also Jarry applauded, implies their inability to convey a single unambiguous

message. This thesis will show examples of Jarry's technique of reinforcing his text by evoking distinct figurative outlines from nature or from antiquity, which carry the psychological impact of a much simpler message. The evocation of a sharp visual image, which would speak to the reader's primitive responses, was his insurance in case the reader's intellect could not follow the text. A dramatist by inclination, he writes for a reader-beholder, for someone who "sees" with their imagination, rather than for a textual analyst. His woodcuts and drawings of 1894 are likewise distinguished by their clear, sharp lines, reinforcing his rejection of the vague and the blurred, and what he terms the *ligne estompée*.

Drawing on recent scientific research and especially ethnology, Jarry's insistence on a visual response to the text combines Platonic thought with contemporary thinking about ancient ornament and contemporary biological studies of camouflage. In particular, he seems to favour a theory, still current in art historical teaching, which was put forward in 1864 by the English entomologist, W.H. Bates. Batesian Mimicry derives from the hypothesis that there is only a limited stock of outlines in Nature and that the human being, together with other living creatures, is programmed to respond to this limited fund of messages. Jarry uses apotropaic outlines such as the ocellus or zig-zag, peculiar to butterfly and snake, to build a "decor of fear" in his imaginative fiction and poetry, while some of his poems use typical distraction techniques to draw the reader's attention away from loci of self-exposure and vulnerability.

The carapaced figure of Ubu, Jarry's mask or comic *anti-self*, whose disruptive potential is ever present, will provide an off-centre point of reference for the theories and motifs which this thesis addresses, but not the unique magnetic core of his work. Ubu lends potent form to the Other in Jarry's work, but does not truly represent the laughing or sneering *autre moi* whom Jarry perceives in perpetual conflict with what he calls the *moi obscur*. It is this conflict between anguish and laughter which provides the emotional dynamic of his poetry and novels. Jarry gives laughter two values: the first is protective; the second liberating. What he calls

vérité bouffe plays the healthy role of bringing his most complex or poignant passages down to earth with an ingenious pun or a workaday link to practical realities, without erasing their poetic validity.

To recapitulate the thematic sequence: the thesis begins with Jarry's interest in the origins of pattern and line, his investigations into ornament theory and the earliest creations of form in art and decoration. It shows his determined focus on meaning and human expression and on the visible sign as a potent unit of communication with an energy of its own. In the second chapter his experiments in revealing the primal energy of primitive signs are set against his revulsion towards mechanised means of recording human and animal movement, which ignore the dignity or the sanctity of life. This provides a glimpse into the more sensitive reaches of his creative persona, where he places the lyrical in opposition to the mechanical and also manifests a clear belief in an indestructible spiritual essence pertaining to the individual.

The mediaeval concept of the book as an individual work of art inspires Jarry's early personal commitment to the art of the Book and high aesthetic ambitions that were not compatible with a modern commercial environment. In his graphic work, as in his writing, he applied himself to a wide variety of styles and formats, always eluding simple classification. His high commitment to the Book is set in the framework of an eccentric, uncompromising attitude to contemporary art and contemporary art criticism as whole, to which he offers truly innovative alternatives.

Chapters 3 and 4, dealing with Jarry's use of illustrations and his art criticism interlock with and reflect the themes of the other chapters. Here the imaginary and the real overlap. Each subject Jarry handles shows evidence of detailed theoretical research which he then extends into the realm of the imaginary and the absurd. His role as a radical arbiter of art, although slight, has an almost visionary quality. It runs from his eccentric *paranoiac-critical* treatment of Dürer to his support of the then marginal artists, Gauguin, Bernard, Bonnard,

Beardsley and Rousseau who are incorporated into the fictional and alternative pataphysical universe of Dr Faustroll. Personal as well as aesthetic criteria governed the choice of these and other dedicatees. Jarry judged the nature of the hospitality and companionship given in equal measure to the nature of the artistic work. The brief friendship of Munthe and Beardsley would have been as important to him as the chance to see their work at first hand.

Chapter 5 examines Jarry's marionette-based aesthetic. This combines his preoccupation with a distinct "signalling" outline and his belief in the forceful power of the spirit and forms a focal part of the thesis. Jarry anticipates the twentieth-century preoccupation with mechanised beings, but in his case the accent is on the ever-present potential for the mechanism to resist, rebel or break. He emphasises that alternative trajectories to the expected must always be kept in mind. It was his extraordinary talent as a marionettist that caused him to be embraced by the Nabis.

We shall be referring to Jarry's term *le souffle animé* and his concepts of an *ambiance figée* or *rayonnement musical* surrounding a strong personality, form or gesture. Both marionette and dancer will be shown as propelled by an outer force, but not a predictable or necessarily pleasant one. The unpredictable or exceptional, exemplified by what Jarry calls the *chute arbitraire* of the swerving atom, *Clinamen*, is essential to his literary and scientific universe. He later formulates this lack of fixity in relation to the myth of Ixion, whose repetitive torture is relieved by the fact that his wheel 'wobbles' into different worlds. This notion of 'wobbling' typifies the distortion and warping which is characteristic of Jarry's imagination and which is responsible for the prevailing grotesque element in his written style.

If we seek to place Jarry within the framework of twentieth century avant-garde movements, it is as an early inspiring force for questioning and revolt. His systematic proposal of the alternative had the effect of beginning to draw the marginal towards the mainstream. Not only was his art-critical stance of considerable importance in influencing that of André

Breton, but his emphasis on the unconscious and the visual as the resource and the aim of poetry respectively, set the bearings for Dada and Surrealist poetry, as well as so-called “automatic writing.” His editorship of the two magazines, L’Ymagier and Perhinderion displays an insistence on the highest quality and a reckless originality in terms of its accent on the primitive. Jarry’s predilection for the “pell mell” first elaborated in L’Ymagier, is set against his scorn for rigid formats and systems. These invariably attract his subversive ingenuity. Jarry’s Pell Mell principle depends on a voracious and indiscriminating appetite for facts of any kind, an openness of mind which he felt was indispensable to original thought and whose method of operation he compared to the digestive process of the ostrich. Indeed his *estomac de l’autruche* metaphor and the idea of thinking as eating, or rather randomly guzzling, will figure as another keynote of his creative theory.

This thesis addresses Jarry’s work as a serious creative novelist and poet, concerned with the way that words impact on a reader’s imagination, whether aurally or visually. His principle of allowing words to play with each other and to free them from their normal linguistic or contextual bounds is important. We shall trace a progression from his original idea of the dynamic *texte-carrefour* to his more frequent but never explicit *texte-mare* image. Jarry’s *mares*, which relate directly to his own childhood, have glittering or fascinatingly patterned surfaces which mask the presence of the wonderful or frightening creatures they contain and have clear metaphorical implications for the text itself.

We shall look at the reasons for Jarry’s early support of Gauguin, Rousseau and Gerhard Munthe, which stands out in contrast to his disregard of Edvard Munch, a key figure in the revival of the art of woodcutting. We shall show new evidence of subversive intent in his ekphrastic poetry and other gestures of protest against rigid and stale forms of art and poetry.

We include, as appendices, transcripts of two highly relevant texts which have not so far been collected in editions of Jarry’s work: the two facsimile chapters from Sebastian

Münster's Cosmographia universalis that Jarry published in the now nearly inaccessible Perhinderion and his handwritten revisions to the French translation of Peer Gynt. The one strikingly combines the heroic figure of the conquering emperor with the motif or the *mare* or *étang* as site of wonders; the other, ethical in tone, falls into the genre of Père Ubu's conversations with his conscience and portrays the Devil as investigative scientist, attempting to lay bare the site of dreams in the human body.

Part III takes a more cultural approach to this writer who derived his inspiration from "low" and popular forms of art, such as circus acrobatics, pavement clowning acts, popular ballads and puppet shows, rather than from academic art. The themes of ornament, mechanization, marionettes and the dance, were all matters of dominant concern in the literary and artistic circles of the 1890s and earlier decades. Jarry took a serious practical interest in these subjects which encapsulate his preoccupation with form, movement and the human body as a mechanism. However, his approach towards them is entirely original by comparison with that of most of his contemporaries, depending on his belief in a wayward spirit which renders the body mechanism indomitable, unpredictable and unreliable by turns. Translated into literature, his interest seems to centre on defining and separating the spiritual motor force from the material form that it inspires, a preoccupation rooted in theosophical thinking.

Analysis of Jarry's texts reveals a cynical judgement on the moral values of "civilized" society, *le bourgeois* and *la foule*. The thesis does not seek to analyse the well commented Ubu cycle, which only represents a part of his protest. We shall draw mainly on his poetry, novels and criticism to show how he uses his imagination both as weapon and defence. His outwardly obscure and "symbolist" texts and even his poetry are often secretly constructed as an attack on the official arbiters of art and the power figures in society. Jarry's texts thus take their place in a body of protest literature, already marked out by Lautréamont and Rimbaud, in which lyrical and imaginative forces are used as a weapon to wound and jar the received responses of a hierarchical, corrupt and materialistic society.

Jarry's equivocal stance is the greatest difficulty faced by any analyst of his work. His attitude to the unknown reader is often provocative and scornful. He was only interested in appealing to minds of an originality on a par with his own and his espousal of the scandalous and the marginal was not calculated to sell books. His real or affected homosexuality and misogynist pose debar many of his literary texts from being judged by conventional standards and the unwary reader can easily be drawn into traps where he is made the dupe of his received responses. The critic's task is not aided by the fact that Jarry tended to see the ridiculous side of most things that he wrote about - also that he affected to believe that opposites had equal value, cancelling the distinction between right and wrong, good and bad, thoughts and actions, dream perceptions and waking perceptions. "True" and "false" are nevertheless categories that he recognizes as valid and that we shall use.

This thesis seeks to identify typical techniques whereby Jarry seeks to dupe the reader and to identify his genuine voice. Although he held very strong views of his own which we shall be subjecting to analysis, his ostensible anti-theoretical stance ("Toute théorie étant fausse parce que théorie...") is one of the most important guides to bear in mind. Although almost an honorary Nabi, the fact that he did not set out to be the theorist for any one group, but sought out loners and marginals whose talent was evident by its sheer individuality, makes individuality and its inherent courage his main criterion of excellence. Standing in contrast to the intrinsic falseness and transitoriness of the theoretical and at the top of Jarry's scale of values, the words "eternity" and "eternal," need to be noted whenever they appear.

So we shall always proceed from the position that Jarry placed supreme value on the imaginary, set in aggressive opposition to the rational and the real. This either constituted the imposition of one's own world over the real world as in Les Jours et les Nuits, ("Toutes mes heures égales, rêve ou veille"), or a daring leap into another reality from what he calls *le bord du tremplin* - a rim over the impenetrable abyss into which the fictitious text, the picture, or

the dream can suddenly subside. We shall show that his rejection of the adult world in favour of the world of the child (albeit a male child) is one of the characterizing features of his work. This not only led him to promote the vulgar schoolboy humour of the Ubu cycle, but can be seen in his boyish reverence, reflected in Perhinderion, to great military figures, such as Alexander the Great and Napoleon and in his attachment to children's stories. The autobiographical slant of two novels, which flash back to vivid childhood and adolescent memories, also his subsequent habit of giving his central characters distinguishing marks of his own, point less to a life-long exercise in self-analysis than a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of himself as the perfect being, artist/acrobat, Christ or Nietzschean Superman, to which the figure of Ubu provides the absurd antithesis.

Despite his cryptic insertions, Jarry deliberately courts disapproval. Whereas Symbolists had fostered the cult of the androgyne, Jarry's pose is often overtly homosexual, if not vulgar. This strain interweaves with quite movingly lyrical passages that it always threatens to devalue. The plaiting of the obscene with the lyrical is a distinctive feature of Jarry's work from his early literary experiments of 1894 onwards. His substantial output of 1894 has never been published as a piece and the thesis will show how odd metaphors from his imaginative writing and his critical work illuminate each other. It will also draw on the unsigned editorial statements of L'Ymagier which are coloured by his peremptory style and seek to distinguish between his aesthetic aims and those of Remy de Gourmont. The task is eased by the evidence of Perhinderion, under his sole editorship. This should fill a small gap in the previous critical appreciation of Jarry which has tended to blend their aims and to perceive Perhinderion as a clone of L'Ymagier.

Jarry's literary effort spans the period 1893-1907, in exact equipoise between the two centuries. Despite his rejection of theory we can identify a number of dispersed but cohesive statements of belief where he is prepared to stand up and declare himself as an arbiter and shaper of artistic truth, often when reviewing the work of the writers he most respects. While

teasing out his tongue-in-cheek statements and ingenious puns, which may be almost irretrievably drowned in mock-serious pomposity, the thesis will demonstrate the nature of the artistic mission that he set himself, not only as promoter of the absurd, but as a challenger of stale artistic values, one who, in turning his back on the realistic and the conventional opened up new perspectives in the fields of illustration, criticism and imaginative fiction, subordinating all other considerations to the overriding criterion of the artist's imagination.

Although, in the course of his work, Jarry's manner swings unpredictably from the frivolous to the serious, he displays an almost missionary zeal to destroy the accepted and the known in order to create something new. Rejecting all ideas of appealing to a mediocre or average audience, he limited himself to an elite readership, which he once arbitrarily numbered at five hundred. The thesis will examine this writer's crossplay between the verbal and the visual, the fake and the genuine, the cryptic and the comically simple to expose his innovatory method for stimulating the "exceptional mind" which, he believed, deserves to be allowed the active pleasure of creating. The value that Jarry placed on imagination can be judged through the choice of the name Sengle for the central figure of Les Jours et les Nuits. Sengle derives from the Latin *cingulum*, the Roman leather belt which acts as the final layer of protection when all other armour has been pierced. But the character Sengle also believes that he can control objects through the power of his thought. To arrive at an understanding of Jarry's texts, therefore, we shall trace how his concept of the imagination, both as a power and as a last defence sprang from his resistance to a modern, science-dominated culture which increasingly threatened to harden into the stale moulds of laws based on the rational, the respectable and the traditional. This thesis sets out to investigate his revolt against the forms of art and literature, then academically acceptable in French bourgeois society and his creation of new types of literature and art which still rebuff the lazy, non-inquiring mind and demand an answering effort.

PART I THE FIXING OF MOVEMENT

CHAPTER 1 A 'VISUAL' LANGUAGE: JARRY'S USE AND ABUSE OF ORNAMENTAL OUTLINES

1.1 Introduction

If Alfred Jarry devised a formula for writing poetry which would distance him from the outworn formulae of Symbolism, a part of this formula can be found in the language of ornament, a subject of great contemporary interest and controversy in the 1890s. Haunting the Louvre and the Bibliothèque Nationale by day and the *Chat Noir* by night, he quickly absorbed the essentials of Greek vase painting and the common features between ancient and modern profile art. As a poetic resource, ornament met most of his prime requirements: it had a mysterious and ancient history into which he could dip at random; it was a branch of profile or silhouette art, on which the ancient shadow theatres were based, feeding his private passion for marionettes; and finally, its strict codification for the arcane requirements of heraldry could be perverted to serve his satirical purposes. Our discussion of Jarry's use of the ornamental line will throw up several issues to which we shall have to return in the related final chapters on his use of the themes of marionettes and dance.

This chapter will propose that ornamental art is one of the main keys to understanding Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and César-Antechrist, widely acknowledged as the most 'difficult' of Jarry's texts. That there was a key to their interpretation is indicated by Jarry's contemporary, Henri de Régnier. Régnier's long poem 'Tel qu'en songe' makes use of strongly profile-based imagery and, as a member of the *Mercure de France* circle, he was one of the best-placed writers to understand Jarry's texts. Régnier's comments on Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and César-Antechrist, implies that he knew of a key but was disappointed and baffled to find no serious message in the absurd mirror world to which it led:

La lecture de ces livrets n'était pas aisée et il fallait pour les déchiffrer en

avoir la clé, mais l'avait-on, elle vous conduisait à des absurdités volontaires et à des énigmes vides de sens.¹

We have to suspect that there was a measure of sour grapes in Régnier's assessment, and examine whether "emptiness of meaning" is a valid criticism of Jarry's work and if he deliberately introduced a self-cancelling mechanism leading to an intended vacuum. This chapter will show that Jarry was in fact deeply concerned with meaning and association and that the unexplained ornamental motifs of Les Minutes, which display an immature cultivation of obscurity for its own sake, are developed and elucidated in such mature works as L'Amour absolu, Messaline, Le Surmâle and La Dragonne. His work betrays a widely held conviction of the 1890s that archaic patterns not only meant something but that they formed a basic universal script. The simple, abstract outlines of these pattern prototypes were tentatively ascribed to an instinctive knowledge common to all men, whose message had been repeated in the decorative art of widely scattered primitive communities. That Jarry's early poetry was better understood by the Surrealists than his own Symbolist contemporaries lies in the fact that, at one level, he did not intend it to carry any more complex message than the visual signals emitted by the pattern on the rim of a palaeolithic pot. To the Surrealists, the validity of disconnected signals or objects as a suggestive, and therefore creative force was a foundation stone of their canon, whereas the Symbolists still demanded an intellectual and philosophical structure of poetry. Jarry paid lip service to the intellectuals, outdoing them at their own game, but his overriding belief in the connotative power of visual signals and their appeal to the primitive or unconscious levels in our minds remained the driving force in his imaginative writing from 1893 until his death.

1.2 The context: the state of ornament history in the 1890's - the theoreticians.

Jarry began his serious literary endeavours in 1892 in the spirit of a scientific investigation. To discover the origins of language was one of the preoccupations of the

¹ Henri de Régnier, 'Alfred Jarry' in De mon temps, Paris, Mercure de France, 1933 pp. 147-154.

day. Like others, Jarry turned his attention to the findings of ethnologists who had been researching the artistic relics of primitive or archaic communities for the previous three decades. As a voracious consumer of the latest theories and novelties Jarry would have been aware of the spate of publications on the history and theory of ornament which had been coming out since Owen Jones's The Grammar of Ornament in 1856.

It is now perhaps difficult to catch the atmosphere of excitement generated by successive discoveries of paleolithic cave paintings starting first at Altamira near Santander in 1879, followed by others at St. Acheul on the Somme and Le Moustier in the Dordogne in 1880 and then at La Mouthe in 1895. The clear magical function of these paintings, decorating deep, cold and hidden caves, set aside for worship rather than dwelling places, strengthened the interest in the occult that was already being generated in Paris by such figures as Papus, Blavatsky and Jarry's friend, the self-styled Sâr Péladan. The writings of Éliphas Lévi on the rituals of magic had great influence on Mallarmé and his literary circle. Magic was being taken seriously as a primitive tradition of great antiquity which could have validity as a rejuvenating force for art and literature. Mallarmé believed in a vestigial magic connecting modern poetry to the most ancient spells and incantations.

Meanwhile the tremendous archaeological activity dating back to Napoleon's era, not only within their own borders, but in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece, had brought to the attention of the French public a highly developed language of hieroglyphs in ancient Egyptian friezes and a sophisticated code of gesture expressed in the plastic art of Greek and Asian friezes. These had been minutely scrutinized to determine whether some original and universal code of gesture could be deciphered, binding the ancient cultures together. Whilst the range of human gesture and typical body positions had been codified since archaic times as a basis for the study of statuary, art and drama, by the end of the nineteenth century the advances in photographic technology at last made it possible to freeze the moving body and to verify the accuracy of statues and paintings. Some of the patterns on ancient

ornaments and sculpture were interpreted as schematic representations of typical human gestures. Such designs, along with the depiction of archaic athletes and dancers on Greek pottery, now became subject to a similar scrutiny. Photography provided the fascinating possibility of comparing them to the gait of a living running man, as recorded by the camera. Both could be rendered in terms of a frieze.²

A number of typical ornamental motifs adorned the schematic representations of ancient Egyptians, Hindus or Greeks on frieze and vase. These provided an intriguing field of study because of their surface similarity from culture to culture. The history of ancient ornament and of ancient decorative traditions surviving in primitive communities was studied worldwide. Scholars felt bound to prove or disprove the theory proposing a basic oneness of human intention, whatever the culture, in the use of the most common designs. Meander, chevron and fret, lotus blossom, cross and fylfot (swastika) were painstakingly copied, photographed and compared from New Guinea to Brittany, from Mesopotamia to Suffolk. The patterns of nature, expressed through varying animal profiles and markings of plumage, fur and skin were likewise studied for their fundamental apotropaic or attractive characteristics, and as the most likely model for our primitive ancestors' artistic expression.

Owen Jones's The Grammar of Ornament of 1856, was followed in 1874 by a fascinating study, Ceramic Art in Remote Ages with essays on the symbols of the circle, the cross and circle, the circle and ray ornament, the fylfot and the serpent showing their relationship to the primitive forms of solar and nature worship by the Swedenborgian scholar, J. B. Waring. It is notable that two of the main theoreticians from whom Jarry drew, Gustav Fechner and J. B. Waring, were Swedenborgians. Contemporary with his own period of maximum creativity, three other works of great importance were published, which seem to have a bearing on his creative configurations. They are W. H. Goodyear's The Grammar of the

² The classical scholar Professor Maurice Emmanuel collaborated with the photographer E. J. Marey, author of Le Mouvement, for the illustrations to his book on ancient Greek dance forms, La Danse grecque antique d'après les monuments figurés, 1895.

Lotus of 1891, which, through its carefully documented hypothesis that most decorative motifs worldwide, had been inspired by various parts of the lotus plant, provided Jarry with a perfect text for parody, also Alois Riegl's Stilfragen of 1893 and Alfred Haddon's Evolution in Art as illustrated by the Life Histories of Design of 1895.

Although Jarry seems to have drawn very little from French theoreticians, one basic text quotes Heinrich Schliemann's theory that the "nippled pots" found at Mycenae were representations of the owl as Athene, the *Glaukopis Athena* of Homer.³ (Fig. 84) Jarry frequently assimilates eyes to women's breasts, as if the breast was Nature's prototype for the eye configuration rather than the reverse. Messalina's breasts are described as "plus éternels" and "les vrais yeux de la courtisane." Haldern's invocation to the owl in Haldernablou first stresses this equivalence.

1.3 Jarry's adherence to Gauguin's theory of ornament

Among contemporary French artists, Gauguin was the most committed to the theory of a universal language of gesture and pattern, deriving from times when the pictorial hieroglyph had a uniquely religious or totemic function and art for purely decorative purposes was unknown. He carried everywhere a folder of photographs, which constituted his personal record and resource of monumental poses, drawn variously from the Borobudur frieze, the Parthenon and European painting. Of all the artists in the Pont Aven community Gauguin was probably the most travelled and had taken advantage of his period in the merchant navy to photograph and "collect" ornamental outlines from primitive cultures. Jarry seized an unexpected opportunity to spend a month at Gauguin's side in Le Pouldu in order to observe him at work and talk to him. His literary texts share Gauguin's commitment to this universal visual language, which interlocked with the gestural code of puppetry - Jarry's own area of expertise. His texts can indeed be viewed in terms of a sustained experiment in the language of ornament and of profile art and could be analysed from the visual level alone.

³ See G. Perrot and C. Chipiez, Histoire de l'art dans l'antiquité, t. VI, Paris, Hachette, 1894, fig. 376, p. 807.

Jarry's nucleic poem 'L'Homme à la Hache' of 1894 has become well-known by association with the Gauguin painting on which it was based.⁴ The three poems that he dedicated to Gauguin not only attest to his admiration for the artist but acknowledge a debt. Gauguin was not a theoretician but in the course of the month of July 1894 that Jarry spent close to him at Le Pouldu he seems to have absorbed much of the lore contained in the collection of books, documents and photographs that constituted Gauguin's chief resource. Two of these texts, Gerald Massey's *The Natural Genesis* and an eighteenth-century Turkish or Persian treatise on crafts, later published by Félix Fénéon and known as "Gauguin's Paper", provide proof of his preoccupation with astrological and ornamental signs and with myth. Jarry's literary texts and illustrations which date from 1894 display identical obsessions. The twin configurations of the Reclining Woman, that Gauguin acknowledges as a source in 'Diverses choses' and the upright aggressive warrior, represented by Orion, are particularly evident in Jarry's texts as we shall see in Chapter 4, Section 8.

In 'L'Homme à la Hache' Jarry demonstrates Gauguin's insistence on a static position, an instant of peculiar grace captured in marble or bronze and sanctified by placement on a pedestal. Jarry's innovation, as we shall see in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5, is to liberate the trapped mythical figure from the confines of the mineralized instant, decided by the artist, and allow it to continue its interrupted gesture as we see here:

Lui sur son char tel un César
 Ou sur un piédestal de marbre,
 Taille une barque en un tronc d'arbre
 Pour debout dessus nous poursuivre
 Jusqu'à la fin verte des lieues.

(PL I 210)

The poet's imagination offers two equally mobile images of speeding chariot and speeding boat, momentarily fixed by the sculptor/painter as a statue. Jarry would follow the same

⁴ See James Kearns' chapter, 'Wielding the Axe: Jarry and Gauguin in 1893' in *Symbolist Landscapes. The Place of Painting in the Poetry and Criticism of Mallarmé and his Circle*, London, Modern Humanities Research Association, 1989.

procedure with the outlines of sacred ornament, liberating the trapped intention which had inspired the fixed form.

Although he turned to his own sources, Jarry took over Gauguin's use of hieratic gesture and pose⁵ and also inserts a limited selection of well-documented ornamental profiles, such as the volute, echidna and zig-zag, into his literary texts, marking a conscious shift from the vague suggestivity of the symbol in poetry to the sharper signal of the etched pattern and the pictorial emblem. Despite his respect for Mallarmé he rejected a poetic style which depended on the intellect and which resulted in the evanescence of the poetic image. Jarry's poetry is based on a distinct and harsh silhouette. This device was already being exploited by the Belgian poet, Emile Verhaeren, doubly honoured by Jarry in his so-called "neo-scientific novel", Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien, through inclusion in Dr. Faustroll's list of "livre pairs" and also his literary treasures known as *élus*. Verhaeren, Maeterlinck and Jarry all used the precepts of Profile Art as exemplified in cave painting, primitive ornament and marionette or shadow theatre, to develop a perceptual poetry, based on a flat silhouette, rather than a conceptual poetry, based on ideas. Ever prone to exaggeration, Jarry drove the principle to its ultimate limit by animating the units of ornament and allowing them both speech and movement - a device comparable to Lewis Carroll's animation of playing cards and chess pieces.

1.4 The Reader-Beholder

The texts selected by Jarry for publication under the title Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial contain his first attempts to integrate the word as image or pattern unit with its role as a vehicle for sound and meaning.⁶ The author admits to his awareness that the selected texts,

⁵ Jarry's attempts at 'verbally drawing' his incidental characters result in awkward and improbable lines of dialogue such as the following:

Cul-de-jatte, beau du triangle de tes jambes croisées et de l'horizontalité de ton bras de fakir. (PL I 221)

⁶ The editors of the Pléiade edition register their omission of 'L'Acte prologal' of César-Antechrist from their version of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial. This text must be regarded as an integral component of both books. In chronological terms it is also important to note the early date of its composition.

written between 1892 and 1894, were of variable quality. Jarry's prefatory statement, 'Linteau,' despite its nonchalant tone is of capital importance for interpreting all Jarry's future work. It constitutes what is now termed the paratext, the contract made between writer and reader before any exchange can take place. The reader of Jarry's texts constantly needs to remind himself of the terms laid down by Jarry in 'Linteau.' Instead of trying to seduce the reader, Jarry takes the unusual stance of defying him to understand his text. He deliberately and openly sets out to mask his meaning. The act of communicating with his fellow beings is not his aim. He defines three categories of reader:

- i) the reader as writer's dupe, who cannot aspire to finding all the meanings in the text, because the writer has foreseen them all and will actually lay false trails - Jarry's words:

Tous les sens qu'y trouvera le lecteur sont prévus, et jamais il ne les trouvera tous; et l'auteur peut lui en indiquer, colin-maillard cérébral, d'inattendus, postérieurs et contradictoires.

- ii) the reader who is infinitely superior to the writer in intelligence, but who is still at a disadvantage through not having written the text himself. The barriers are still up.
- iii) the reader who (impossibly in Jarry's view) identifies with the author, but who nevertheless cannot place himself at the same unique and unrepeatable moment in history, at which the work was written.

Jarry thus starts from the position that no reader can fully understand his written texts and that there are only different degrees of misunderstanding. The inference is that the writer therefore writes for himself alone.

Jarry's decision to publish bad work alongside good, could be seen as a defensive announcement, protecting himself against potential criticism; he nevertheless justifies it in the interests of balance and completeness, claiming that the withdrawal of a weak piece would leave a gap, damaging the unity of the collection as a whole.⁷ We can therefore be certain that

⁷ "L'oeuvre est plus complète quand on n'en retranche point tout le faible et le mauvais, échantillons laissés qui expliquent par similitude ou différence leurs pareils ou leurs contraires - et d'ailleurs certains ne trouveront que cela de bien." (PL I 173)

each text included in Les Minutes has a particular role as a constituent part of the collection, which Jarry seems to have built up with the care of a goldsmith setting gems in a complex piece of jewellery. It is certainly true that his individual works cannot be fully understood without reference to the whole; for instance the *mare* image only acquires its resonance by reference to its sibling images in other texts.

Jarry's approach to writing is thus that of a methodical craftsman rather than of a poet in touch with the vibrations of the universe; and yet he is a craftsman who uses his erudition to paint *trompe-l'oeil* handles and insert trick springs and secret drawers in his creations. Once we can perceive what his methods are, his poetry becomes much easier to follow. His theatrical training, albeit with marionettes, gave him a strong sense of the visual. His poems and certain of his prose passages are carefully designed like pieces of theatrical decor to produce a particular effect. He therefore approaches his potential readers as spectators as much as, if not more than, listeners and thinkers. Jarry places the greatest importance on the connotative visual impact of his words, building up a series of strong outlines which are in themselves a kind of signal to the reader, rather as the wearing of a red cloak in Golden Age Spanish drama used to mark the beginning of a seduction scene. Some of the outlines that he favours, such as the devil-associated twin-eared owl profile, are conventionally recognized as ominous or associated with death, while others are more esoteric and require knowledge of disciplines such as Egyptology or heraldry in order to interpret their meaning at a conscious level.

That Jarry was aware of this discrepancy and anticipated the protests of the more pedantic readers who might appreciate careful labelling, literary cross-referencing and explanations of the unfamiliar is clear from the opening paragraph of 'Linteau':

Il est très vraisemblable que beaucoup ne s'apercevront point que ce qui va suivre soit très beau ; (...) il se peut aussi qu'ils ne croient point qu'elles leur aient été suggérées exprès. Car ils entreverront des idées entrebâillées, non brodées de leurs usuelles accompagnatrices. (PL I 171)

Thus we can already witness Jarry's deep belief in a language of visual suggestion. We shall examine below the difference between Mallarmé's idea of suggestive language and Jarry's. As we have said, Jarry believed in the power of an ornamental design or outline to provoke an instinctive response. Transposing the aural value of words into a visual image he compares them to many-faceted diamonds⁸ and urges his readers to think of their ears as eyes:

Qu'on pèse donc les mots, polyèdres d'idées, avec des scrupules comme des diamants à la balance de ses oreilles, sans demander pourquoi telle et telle chose, car il n'y a qu'à regarder, et c'est écrit dessus. (PL I 173)

This description looks forward to Kipling's alphabet-necklace described in Just So Stories as weighing precisely one pound seven and half ounces and accords with Jarry's earlier exhortation to respond spontaneously to the surface of the text, rather than to embark on an indefinite and painstaking exhumation. Here is Jarry's visual perception of the sentence, described as a clinking and glinting string of irregular precious stones:

La verbalité libre de tout chapelet se choisit plus tintante; et pour peu que la forme soit abrupte et irrégulière, par manque d'avoir su la régularité, toute régularité inattendue luit, pierre, orbite, oeil de paon, lampadaire, accord final. (PL I 171-2)

This mysterious and unexpected "accord" or likeness, which Jarry mentions, between different entities, such as the pattern of the eye on the peacock's feather and the shape of the gas lamp's flame, ("des lampadaires qui pavonnent") gives us the key to several passages in his literary texts which contain objects with similar profiles.⁹ He offers his readers the design as sign, nature's distinct intrinsic patterns, to which their genetically inbuilt recognition reflexes should prompt them to respond. Jarry's illustrations assemble many of the designs

⁸ As Keith Beaumont has pointed out, Jarry's words are close to Mallarmé's exhortation to the poet to let words take their own initiative, like an illuminated horde of inter-reflecting jewels:

[céder] l'initiative aux mots, qui s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries

Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crise de vers,' in Variations sur un sujet. OC 366, quoted in Keith Beaumont, Alfred Jarry. A Critical and Biographical Study, Leicester University Press, 1984, p. 302.

⁹ Mallarmé too had drawn from profile art to construct his masterly sonnet 'Ses purs ongles très hauts dédiant leur onyx...' and also 'Lampadophore.'

and patterns which he deems to provoke an involuntary response but he delivers them in the two-dimensional form pertaining to decoration. Gauguin, Beardsley, Jarry and the Norwegian artist Gerhard Munthe marked the beginning of a process wherein the decorative sign began to step out of its background ornamental role and demand the spectator's full attention. René Magritte completed the process, driving the disturbing power of the design as sign to its maximum limit by introducing inanimate ornamental signs of great potency and substance into the foreground of empty landscapes and interiors, which would normally be inhabited by people.

The importance of decorative design in Jarry's work is first announced by the heraldic escutcheon which forms the cover design of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial. The rare 'Y' - shaped charge known as *pairle*, schematically depicts the archaic raised arm gesture of supplication and lament, what Jarry calls "la plainte de nos bras dressés" and which announces the inherent spiritual character of the collection. This is also the dominant visual motif of 'La Plainte de la mandragore' and 'Le Sablier.'¹⁰ The intricate ornamental border or lintel of birds and flowers heading 'Linteau' reinforces the message. Finally Jarry gives us the visual demonstration of his sketchily stated theory on profiles by including a large number of well-known ornamental motifs in his initial illustration, 'La Croix des cimetières.' We can summarize these motifs as follows:

- i) Cross, sun and flowers, each with a hypnotic central ocellus, are in the category of strongly attractive profiles, such as leads the bee to the calyx, but also have a contrary apotropaic function as evil eye or single-celled "monère."
- ii) The serpentine arabesque or volute, emblem of life and growth, is equally deployed by Jarry for organic elements: leafy plants, birds and snakes.
- iii) Amongst Jarry's personal emblems can be seen the instruments of the Passion; a heart; the Phoenician "open hand" decoration that he calls the "main de gloire," (which according to mediaeval croyance was the hand cut from the

¹⁰ See also 'De la Surface de Dieu':

Symboliquement on signifie Dieu par un triangle, mais les trois Personnes ne doivent pas en être considérées comme les sommets ni les côtés. Ce sont *les trois hauteurs* d'un autre triangle équilatéral circonscrit au traditionnel. Cette hypothèse est conforme aux révélations d'Anne-Catherine Emmerich, qui vit la croix (que nous considérerons comme *symbole* du *Verbe* de Dieu) en forme d'Y. (PL I 731-2)

corpse of a hanged man and had magical properties).

We shall see all these motifs deployed like a theatrical decor in Jarry's poetry - but a decor which is calculated to carry magical or mystical significance by virtue of the ancient lineage of its iconic signs. Let us now focus on some of the designs, fetishes and totems which had been catalogued by contemporary ethnologists and examine how Jarry makes use of them within his work.

There are four main sources from which Jarry draws the decorative profiles incised on his literary texts. They are archaic ornament, heraldry, entomology, and Guignol. We can proceed to examine Jarry's manipulation of the first two of these. The lore of Guignol and marionettes will be treated in Chapter 5. Let us first look at Jarry's use of archaic ornament, bearing in mind the contemporary explications of its historians, J. B. Waring, W.H. Goodyear, Aloïs Riegl and Alfred Haddon.

1.5 Zoomorphic, phyllographic and geometrical outlines used as intertextual devices

Most of Jarry's prose and poetic texts can be analysed at a visual level from the point of view of profile art. We shall take four passages to demonstrate his perceptual approach:

- 1) Haldern's invocation to his familiars, which begins Act II Scene VI of Haldernablou;
- 2) Varia's terrifying journey through a typical Breton landscape to her assignation with her son Emmanuel which forms the purportedly autobiographical chapter titled 'Odin' of L'Amour absolu ;
- 3) Messalina's descent of Lucullus' Hippodrome in Messaline
- 4) the chapter 'Sur la route de Dulcinée' of Les Jours et les Nuits.

At first glance Haldern's nocturnal familiars, which include bat, owl and spider, would seem to belong to the standard ghoulish decor of Guignol. A closer look at the language of

the invocation which leads up to the seduction of Ablou and which displays a high degree of biological detail for a literary text, shows four levels of significance governing Jarry's choice of creature, namely ornamental, sexual, etymological and scientific.¹¹ Both toad and nightjar, whose profiles appear mysteriously in other texts of Jarry's, have ambiguous characteristics of a grotesque and erotic nature.

Of the five creatures, the bat is the most ancient as a pictorial emblem. Jarry here portrays it as the essence of his beloved spiky zig-zag design, by virtue both of its wing outline and its jerky flight:

Voile d'artimon aux quotidiennes tempêtes crépusculaires; ourson ou oursin;
buis bénit, laurier aux murailles;
Arrête tes zigzags d'éclair dont l'une aile soudain se casse. (PL I 224)

Jarry's assimilation of the bat to the triangular sail is indeed validated by von den Steinen, an expert on native designs in Brazil, who shows rows of vertical triangles to represent hanging bats and horizontal triangles bats in flight.¹² Here we can also clearly see the equation of the heraldic bears described in the poem 'Au Repaire des géants' with their "échine de flamme" and the spiny sea urchins of the poem 'Le Pouls' which represent the mysterious Rayed Circle of antique ornament.¹³ We shall see this profile transposed into that of the terror-inspiring plants such as sword lilies and bracken, as given in the passage below, which line

¹¹ His strange choice of the *Mygale*, the trap-door spider and a non-web building genus, described within the web of a completely distinct species points to an etymological basis of selection. We suggest a phonetic pairing with the *Mugil*, or grey mullet, the species of fish to which a whole chapter of *Messaline* is given over, on account of the females' "salacious" mating habits that Jarry adapts from Aristotle's description in *The Generation of Animals*.

¹² See Haddon op. cit. who takes his figs. 104-5 from Karl von den Steinen, *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, Berlin, Dietrich Reimer, 1894. Rilke uses an identical motif in his Eighth Duino Elegy, associating the zig-zag flight of the bat against the pallor of the twilight sky with the pattern painted on china: So reisst die Spur der Fledermaus durchs Porzellan des Abends.

¹³ Waring points out that the Ray ornament is universal among all pre-historic European remains and that all such designs on Breton terra cotta find their prototypes on Assyrian sculptures. His Figs. 4 and 5 show concentric circles containing 'suns' on an earthenware spindle wheel found in a subterranean chamber at La Tourelle near Quimper.

J. B. Waring, *Ceramic Art in Remote Ages with the Symbol of the Cross and Circle, Fylfot and Serpent etc.*, London, John B. Day, 1874, p. 62.

Varia's path in 'Odin', later assimilated to her long-lashed, fear-inspiring eyes. The profile of the bracken frond met Jarry's requirement for ambiguity by virtue of the jagged threatening profile of the leaf and the 'beckoning finger' profile of the young tendril, which he uses in the scene of Les Jours et les Nuits where Sengle meets his Double and to which we shall return in Chapter 5.¹⁴ Both Bracken (*Fougère*) and the Venus Fly Trap, (*Drosera*), epitome of the *vagina dentata*, have parts in the 'Chant of Pernicious Plants' in Halderablou. They are implicated in Jarry's deliberate portrayal of the voracious female of the species in this drama which vaunts the theme of homosexual love. Outside the language of pattern, however, their song of volutes and ocelli only has meaning in terms of the musical notes with which they interreflect.

Il ocellera, le hibou
Son biniou
Des éventails de pleurs mordorés de son cou. (PL I 219)

The chant, whose parts are taken by several species with narcotic or morbid properties such as the poppy, the mandrake and the Fly Agaric announces the passage to dream or unreality. Jarry implicitly admits to the weakness of the language of pattern by inserting a pastiche of his early style, the poem 'Pastorale', into Les Jours et les Nuits, ostensibly written by a fellow soldier with literary pretensions. This includes references to a song connoted as spiralling smoke ("*Le chant du cheminée a bleuté sa volute*") which is how the Owl Keeper's Song begins. Sengle as Jarry, the mature writer, scornfully throws it in the fireplace.

The invocations to the nocturnal *mygale* spider, owl and toad are each based on a geometrical figure - triangular, cylindrical, rectangular and pentagrammatic: the *mygale*, described "au triangle de ta toile isocèle étagère," is probably representative of what Haddon calls "female triangles," schematic stone-age figures of women wearing a garment like a skirt. Jarry deviates from the actual non-web-building characteristics of the genus in order to

¹⁴ "Sous la caresse de Sengle, le papillon merveilleux déroula vers lui sa spiritrompe qui était une plume sombre frisée, comme les vieux arbres de la première désertion rêvée; et, vivant, il la recroquevilla comme on plie l'index pour faire signe qu'on vienne." (PL I 834-5)

establish the female gender of this creature, which, as an emblem or sign in his texts, functions as a man-eater; his *hibou* is here depicted as a cylindrical “tower”, with its eyes horizontally positioned “au-dessus du tétraèdre de ton sternum;” and the toad is abbreviated to its “pentagrammatic palms.” Likewise the nightjar’s schematic representation shows us no more than a pair of claws and angled wings. Jarry finds a way to link bird’s claws (“griffes de palmier”) and little frogs’ hands (“paumes pentagrammatiques”) through the Assyrian palmette motif, which he had already announced in ‘Vulpian et Aster’ (“Et l’éventail de leurs yeux verts palpite comme les palmiers libyens”).¹⁵ In Chapter 4 we shall show how Jarry refined his ‘geometrical’ procedure of analysis to suggest a fascinating alternative picture lying beneath the superficial representation of Dürer’s Martyrdom of Saint Catherine.

In case his ornamental word painting is not evocative enough, Jarry seeks to reinforce it with tactile impressions. He summons fur, suede and silk to his aid, a technique he would also use for his art criticism. Certainly his sensitive rendering of the owl’s nictating membrane, which we shall isolate in the next chapter as a crucial metaphor relating to the state of reverie, “Paupières de soie gris perle qui clignent comme le flux et reflux de la mer,” is more successful in lyrical terms than the severe geometrical profiles. As with all Jarry’s literary devices it is as well to look for evidence of spoof and exaggeration in his consistent use of geometrical shapes in Haldernablou. His attraction for systems and rigid codes lay in their inevitable collapse when subjected to the technique of “logical absurdity” that we shall discuss below. If the reader allows himself to be duped, too bad for the reader; let him beware.

Jarry introduced the beliefs of two contemporary movements into his writing: the one being the mystical triangle of Occultism, which of all geometrical shapes, dominates his writing; the other was the Beuron Aesthetic propounded by the Nabis, Maurice Denis and

¹⁵ See the exhaustive documentation of Riegl op. cit.. Jarry restates the motifs of the swift’s wings and the palpitating palms of the toad almost word for word in the small tableau, ‘Nabuchodonosor changé en bête.’ (PL I 714-5) See also Hunter Kevil, Les Minutes de sable mémorial. A critical edition, Michigan. University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1976 p. 747. Kevil discerns an obscene subtext in both passages.

Paul Sérusier, which was based on the so-called *saintes mesures* taught by Father Didier Lenz of the Benedictine Abbey of Beuron. Didier Lenz claimed to have reduced the art of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks to basic mathematical principles, making a parallel with the simplicity of Gregorian chant.¹⁶ There is no doubt that Jarry enjoyed manipulating these interlocking beliefs which fused so neatly in literary terms and lent a complex mystical aura to his work. Whether he believed them himself is another matter. They could also provide a convenient ‘mask’ to mystify and distract the puzzled reader, the victim of Jarry’s game of Blind Man’s Buff, from erotic and obscene connotations which exist in equal proportion to the ornamental. Jarry will not let himself be drawn as to which is the ‘real’ text, falling back on his dictum from ‘Linteau’: “*Le rapport de la phrase verbale à tout sens qu’on puisse y trouver est constant; en celle-là, indéfiniment varié.* [Jarry’s italics]

At this juncture it is worth recording the passage of ‘Odin’ which Jarry dedicates to sharp-profiled plants. We mentioned the work of the great Austrian ornament historian, Alois Riegl. Like Waring’s, Riegl’s thesis depends on his belief that ornamental motifs could be reduced to a few basic outlines, but unlike Waring he based these outlines on those of distinctive plants, endemic to the countries which had developed art and architecture to a high degree. Rival of the Egyptian lotus as a model for the early decorators was the Greek Spiny Acanthus plant in Riegl’s view. Jarry interprets the motif as a fear-inspiring one and transposes it onto a Breton landscape, using the typical moorland plants of gorse and bracken to assemble a prickly ‘decor of fear’, depicted as sprung traps and ambushes through which Varia has to pass.¹⁷ We should remember that at the time of writing this novel in 1897 he had just spent a year working at close quarters with the Nabi scene painters and, during the production of *Peer Gynt*, with Munch, a master of visually oppressive, fear-exuding backgrounds. His written style has moreover become much more concise and polished since

¹⁶ See Maurice Denis, ‘L’Esthétique de Beuron,’ in *Théories, 1890-1910*, Paris, Rouart & Watelin, 1920, pp. 183-6.

¹⁷ This has been termed “corps-paysage” by Patrick Besnier in his study ‘La Bretagne dans quelques oeuvres d’Alfred Jarry,’ cited in Noël Arnaud, ‘De Messaline au Tzar de toutes les Russies,’ *L’Étoile-Absinthe*, nos. 1-2, p. 54.

the complex invocations of Haldernablou:

Varia ne rencontra, dans son chemin descendant, que des plantes et des bêtes.

Toutes redoutables.

Sur le plateau, avant le versant, les *janiques* dont les fleurs d'or sont montées, pierre pour métal, en épingles d'émeraude.

Les genêts plus bénins, mais artificiellement fortifiés d'abeilles.

Les épines émoussées par le soleil renouvelées par les grandes lances des feux aux cendres d'engrais. (...)

Aux épines et aux flammes, la colline accentuant aigu sa chute, succédèrent les glaives des glaïeuls, des herbes tranchantes et les lacets de racines compliquées. (PL I 934-5)

All these sharp jagged profiles lead up to the idea - the atavistic fear which, Jarry would say, every human carries within him - of wolves in pursuit, and to the imagined picture of their jagged fangs which, entomological research had suggested, was one of a limited repertoire of terror-inspiring profiles that Nature has at her disposal.¹⁸ The two fanged wolves which exist in Varia's imagination alone are finally assimilated into the dangerous 'biting' eyes of Emmanuel which exert complete power over her:

Varia comme à un réveil, retrouve, avec quelque effroi, les deux loups de diamant noir, et qu'il n'y en a jamais eu d'autres, sous les deux sourcils d'Emmanuel. (PL I 937)

¹⁸ "Le masque du fulgore *n'imite pas* une gueule de saurien. Il en procure une variante à l'échelle des insectes (...) Il ne s'agit pas d'une réplique, mais d'un original aussi ancien que la tête du crocodile (...) Je suggère que les moules ou archétypes dont dispose la nature sont en nombre fini. Je veux dire qu'une certaine inertie ou une certaine avarice, si rien ne vient à la traverse, économise spontanément le nombre des modèles, y compris celui des masques terrifiants."

Here the Surrealist aesthete Roger Caillois remarks on the similarity of the fear-inspiring profiles of the crocodile and the lantern fly and, following entomological research, argues that the one did not develop from the other, but represents a prototype. In La Dragonne Jarry makes the same point about the Lion Ant and the lion: "C'est le lion qui s'honore de singer la fourmilion." (PL III 464) The phenomenon known as "Batesian Mimicry" where a strong creature apparently mimics a weaker one was described by the entomologist H. W. Bates in Proceedings of the Entomological Society, London, 1864, p. 14. and later cited by E.B. Poulton, 'The terrifying appearance of *Laternaria (Fulgoridae)* founded on the most prominent features of the Alligator', Proceedings of the Entomological Society, 1924, pp. xliii-xlix. Cf. Roger Caillois, Méduse et Cie, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 154.

Jarry here traces an elegant semiotic progression from plant spines, which are sheer inoffensive decor, in his words, but whose nagging profiles or masks (*loups*) signal terror (“*La peur dont on ne peut se distraire*”), [Jarry’s italics] to the true predator of European man and archetypal villain of the Red Riding Hood myth, and finally to the hypnotic power which the predator exerts over its natural prey, epitomized by the gaze of a naked man over a clothed woman. He makes a step by step case for ornament as terrifying profile, this time stripped of subversive schoolboy jokes and neatly bound together by the three-fold associative power of the word *loup*.¹⁹ In *Messaline*, in his chapter, ‘Le Pêcheur des mugils’ which is based, from memory, on Aristotle’s *The Generation of Animals*, the wickedly sharp teeth of grey mullet are likewise compared to the lashed, ferocious eye, but here with more emphatic sado-erotic connotations than the earlier text:

La bouche lourdement lippue, triangulaire et qui se fermait comme s’inclut un coin - Vectius en ouvrit une de l’ongle, et ce fut cette lèvre frétilante qui le regarda au lieu des yeux morts: car les dents clignaient au lieu des cils. (PL II 130)

We shall see this interchangeability of eyes and mouths several times in Jarry’s texts but particularly in the erotic motif of the myrrhine ornament of *Messaline*, connoted both as greedy, gulping mouth and staring eye and whose significance will be discussed below.

The second important configuration for the eye, used with careful intent by Jarry, is the ocellus. This configuration was later analysed by Roger Caillois in the following terms:

Il convient de se souvenir ici que tout cercle fixe est naturellement hypnotisant. Le contempler longuement trouble, paralyse, endort. Qu’un anneau clair et brillant autour d’un centre obscur et comme vide lui fasse en outre figurer un oeil, c’est assurément une source supplémentaire de trouble et d’effroi, une possibilité accrue de fascination et de vertige. Cette ambiguïté s’ajoute à l’effet purement optique et, chez l’homme, met en branle l’imagination.²⁰

¹⁹ The third meaning relates to the Greek-derived generic name of the puffball mushroom or *lycopode* (literally wolf’s foot) which Varia tests with her foot, thus setting the suggestive sequence in train.

²⁰ Caillois, op. cit. p. 127.

Caillois' belief in particular configurations acting as triggers on the imagination derives from the nineteenth century research that he cites and which inspired Jarry. The ocellus constitutes the magnetic configuration that plunges Sengle into a hallucinatory state and here draws him forwards to a lethal embrace with his apparent Double, his so-called brother, Valens:

Quand Valens était présent tout entier dans la chambre, son âme était un grand papillon brun-bleu, les ailes plus élevées vers les coins extérieurs, qui palpitait du vol couplé de ses sourcils et de ses cils, découvrant et recouvrant la miraculeuse ocellure de ses yeux qui étaient deux mares noires. (PL I 834)

Although we can recognize a typical Symbolist analogy between the dark hypnotic eye and the fatally attractive pool, the ingredient which brands this passage as peculiar to Jarry is the detailed grounding not only in scientific fact, but the writer's personal memories. Jarry is not evoking some exotic butterfly, which is the product of his imagination but is here describing the characteristics of the Great Peacock Moth, a typical feature of warm summer nights and to which the entomologist J. H. Fabre devoted one of his best-known studies.²¹ It is worth reiterating that one of the peculiarities of Jarry's style that distinguishes him from the Symbolists is his avoidance of the vague and his scientific insistence on exactitude. He will therefore reject any large, general metaphor in favour of a particular thing from his personal universe - a particular toy, like the *culbuteur chinois*, a species of beetle or a particular type of puppet. Jarry sends out signals to the specialized reader, who shares his interests. The recognition of the **thing-as-metaphor** authenticates the narrative, drawing the reader into complicity with the author. By the same token Jarry deliberately cuts himself off from a more general readership and commits himself to exclusivity. We shall return to the above passage which contains the significant *mare* image, blinking like a beacon from the passages that relate to a true experience and where the author is actually prepared to signal this fact to the alert

²¹ "Qui ne connaît ce superbe papillon, le plus gros de l'Europe, vêtu de velours marron et cravaté de fourrure blanche? Ces ailes, semées de gris et de brun, traversées d'un zig-zag pâle et bordées de blanc enfumé, ont au centre une hache ronde, un grand oeil à prune noire et iris varié, où se groupent, en arcs, le noir, le blanc, le châtain, le rouge amaranthe."

J. Henri Fabre, *Souvenirs entomologiques*, 7e série, Paris, Ch. Delagrave, 1881, p. 339.

reader. We will therefore regard *mare*, not only as a significant image in Jarry's texts but with the extra lexicological function of a code word meaning "PAY ATTENTION".

1.6 The myrrhine emblem as grotesque feminine sign in Messaline

Jarry's belief in the power of the ornamental sign (and especially the repeated sign as pattern) as a medium of suggestion is proved by his re-use of the 'terrifying decor' for the chapter 'Le Priape du jardin royal' of his novel Messaline, which he based on the notoriously insatiable Roman empress-prostitute. Using fact to enhance fiction, Jarry creates a fictitious night-time scene where he is able to deploy the extraordinary myrrhine drinking vessels documented by Pliny,²² as the terror-inspiring eye ornament - the cross or star within the circle and that Jarry compares to star sapphires.²³ He portrays the rows of myrrhines as myriad upon myriad of hysteria-inducing eyes which follow Messaline's panic-stricken attempt to descend the steep steps of the empty Roman arena. In this chapter Jarry creates a fantastic landscape of decadent brilliance to equal any in literature, but we shall also be arguing in a later chapter, that his portrayal of the arena itself represents the final development of his idea of what the literary text should be.²⁴

With characteristic punctiliousness, Jarry takes pains to trace the origins of what in

²² Cf. Pliny, Natural History, XXXVII, 78., tr. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann and Harvard University Press, London and Massachusetts, 1938-50.

²³ Waring was convinced that the circle and cross symbol related to ancient planetary worship stating as follows:

There appears indeed to be some mysterious or unknown law connected with it, so universal is it and so certainly does it proceed from any attempts at decoration.

His summary further affirms the universal meaning of these symbols:

In the circle we have the emblem of infinite and universal life; in the crux commissa, the reproductive powers of life in material nature, in juxtaposition; and in the crux immissa the same powers in combination. Taking this view of their hidden meaning, we believe that these symbolic figures will be easily understood in every varied and modified form in which they may occur.

Waring *op. cit.* p. 73. and p. 80 respectively.

²⁴ This passage represents a masterly piece of grotesque literature. In the fantastic garden imagined by Jarry, flowers and myrrhines mirror each other and are interchangeable ("des tulipes insondables et des amarantes infinies imitaient des murrhins.") Although not entirely without erotic overtones, Lewis Carroll's flamingo-croquet hoops have a comparable grotesque character and function to Jarry's myrrhines but lack their macabre clinging and oozing properties.

Aristophanes' texts is no more than a rude word.²⁵ Pliny describes the opaline myrrhine as a naturally occurring precious stone, which exudes a perfume of its own. Its surface can be warty like the human skin. It therefore represents a disparate combination of semi-organic and grotesque features and those of the carved artificial ornament. As we shall see, through his own observations relating to the shape of the leaf and which are biological rather than mythological, Jarry also links it to the Lotus, described by its chief documentator, the ornament historian, W.H. Goodyear, as a fetish of immemorial antiquity and well known to the Brahmans, Buddhists and modern theosophists as an emblem of fecundity.

The reader may be somewhat confused as to whether Jarry intends the myrrhine vessel to represent the vulva, the eye, the mouth or all three. In fact he purposely blurs the distinctions and encourages an idea of interchangeability between these parts of the body which, each in their own way, have the property to 'devour.' Michel Arrivé rightly objects to a further confusion in Jarry's comparison of the myrrhines to a host of one-legged, one-eyed birds ("compagnie d'oiseaux cyclopes sur une patte") combining the phallic with the feminine.²⁶ (Jarry's verbal image in fact duplicates a plate from Aldrovandrus' Monstrorum historia reproduced in L'Ymagier, depicting a hermaphrodite monster, whose mermaid hips and thighs are fused into a single birdleg). (Fig. 63) Lexically linked to the goddess, Myrrha and to myrrh, the myrrhine's morbid and sexual connotations place it in direct opposition to the *pal*, just as Messaline, as Empress-Prostitute and feminine principle is placed in opposition to Mnester as Priapus. Compared by Jarry to a Parasol Mushroom, it exactly duplicates the form of the lotus leaf, prototype of many a pattern, "bell-shaped and standing erect out of the

²⁵ The modern reader needs to be alerted to the colloquial and obscene meaning of myrrhine, whose literal meaning of "myrtle wreath" was a common Greek euphemism for the female sexual parts. The bawdy dialogue between Kinesias and Myrrhine in Aristophanes' Lysistrata was written in this vein. Pierre Louÿs refers coyly to 'Myrrhinê' as "non traduite" in his spoof collection of poetry, the so-called "translations" of Les Chansons de Bilitis, by the fictitious German academic, G. Heim (*geheim* = secret). Louÿs's book can be more confidently classified as spoof than the carefully and eruditely layered text of Messaline. Cf. Kenneth Mcleish, The Theatre of Aristophanes, London, Thames & Hudson, 1980.

²⁶ Arrivé comments:

Drôle d'oiseau, qui symbolise à la fois le phallus et le sexe féminin!

Michel Arrivé, Les Langages de Jarry. Essai de sémiotique littéraire, Paris, Klincksieck, 1972, p. 110.

water,” itself like a flower, as described and copied from life by W. H. Goodyear in a much-reproduced illustration²⁷. (Fig. 18) Jarry’s description, which has strong poetic cadences and to we shall return in Chapter 6, runs as follows:

Les étoiles de feu des murrhins - quelques-uns fêlés et béants ça et là sur la pelouse de marguerites bleues, d’immortelles et de tulipes, les autres à leurs places, pareils à des champignons au parasol révolté par un souffle des abîmes ou par trop vouloir s’épanouir - ouvrent des yeux de convoitise ou des bouches avides de boire.

Jarry is in fact quite explicit about the femaleness of the myrrhine emblems, which, in true grotesque tradition, break free from their static ornamental role and follow Messaline as rats the Pied Piper and, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 6, represent a paradigm for the letters of the text itself:

Et celles qui roulèrent l’accompagnèrent de marche en marche, gémissant joyeusement de leur fêlure et d’arriver comme l’impératrice, avec un sexe de femme en présence du dieu. (PL II 104)

In a subsequent chapter Jarry emphasizes that the myrrhine amounts to the emblem, albeit involuntary, of the Empress, by pinning one to her cloak. He meanwhile persists with the baby bird analogy, which, we shall see, has its origins in the hungry *lettres-corbeaux* of the poem, ‘Végétal,’ and here manifests the eerie clinging capacity, that we mentioned earlier, as well as an aptitude for concealment:

Ce soir-là donc, chez l’Asiatique, un murrhin mignon, comme tombé du nid, s’était cramponné à sa traîne de toutes ses griffes un peu faussées; et comme elle n’avait jamais remis ce manteau depuis, elle aperçut seulement la pierre rose éclaboussée de lait longtemps après qu’elle eut jeté le manteau, (...) (PL II 122)

Jarry lends the same unwelcome and uncanny adhesive properties to the roses of Lurance in Le Surmâle which take over from the myrrhines the role of grotesque motif in the later novel,

²⁷ W. H. Goodyear, The Grammar of the Lotus. A New History of Classic Ornament as a Development of Sun Worship. London, Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1891, fig. 87.

although there they represent Marcueil and his aggressive sexual intentions. It is remarkable that Jarry's pre-1900 work contains no mention of myrrhines, given his clear fascination with the word and its lexicological history. It seems that he first took it from Lysistrata and then, alerted by Rabelais' use of the word, turned to Pliny the Elder's Natural History in order to furnish it with scientific and historical validation. In view of his ostensible scorn for members of the female sex, there is evidence of an unusual persistence here to follow an odd Latin offshoot of the vulgar Greek word for the female sexual parts and to put his own connotative stamp on it. Following the eccentric linguistic theory outlined in his article 'Ceux pour qui il n'eut point de Babel', Jarry accepts the word *murrhin* itself as signifier for the female sex, but rejects the object (the myrtle wreath), from which the obscene word is traditionally supposed to derive, as the unique source. Turning to a Latin source he provides an alternative philological parentage leading into a wonderfully decadent landscape with far richer associative and visual potential than the well-worn cliché of the leaf crown. His nonsense logic leads him to a forest of petrified vaginas, in honour of the ever-rigid vulva of Messalina, celebrated by Juvenal, from whom Jarry quotes at the beginning of Messaline.

As Messaline is sadly empty of illustrations, we can only point to an earlier and very schematic configuration that Jarry uses as a female emblem. This is the heraldic design of vair in his woodcut, 'de vair à QUATRE HÉRAUTS porte-torches' (Fig. 5). Vair or ermine is represented by lines of open bells, alternately up- and down-turned. This is what Jarry means by the wonderfully contradictory term "le vair des cloches", evoking fur-muffled bells,²⁸ (PL I 286) and whose outline, to the initiates of ornament, imitates that of the lotus blossom as depicted by Goodyear, tacitly declaring its femininity by contrast to the vertical lances and upright torches of the 'heralds'. Any student of archaic Greek profile art, on which we know that Jarry drew heavily, will also identify the bell form with the distinct bell-shaped skirts of women depicted in ancient Greek religious dances. (Fig. 78) Unpublished in his

²⁸ Giving concrete form to this image. Meret Oppenheim's famous fur cup in her sculpture, Fur Breakfast of 1936 attests to its potency.

lifetime, this illustration is one of Jarry's most cryptic and satirical²⁹ It can only relate to the short and equally cryptic Act II Scene III of César-Antechrist, bearing the same title, but is mysteriously excluded from the *Mercure de France* edition. In his woodcut depicting César-Antechrist, where he indulges in a crude pastiche of heraldic conventions, Jarry divides the decorated lining of César-Antechrist's cape into a section of the 'female' *vairy* pattern and a section of 'male' rows of triangles, known as *chevronny*, visually signifying a hermaphroditic identity. (Fig. 57)

Continuing in the same vein and adopting a perspective which is both misogynistic and ironic, Jarry also presents the sacred Scarab of César-Antechrist as a feminine emblem. It declares itself to be "La Pince et les Tenailles" of the same ilk as the Phonograph and the Love-Inspiring Machine of Le Surmâle, which grip their loved ones' heads in a fatal metallic embrace. Here are Jarry's words in praise of the Scarab, whose whirring and humming wings represent a kind of pre-verbal communication:

Tu es un scarabée qui trembles comme un cerf à l'hallali; tu es un scarabée qui pleures
comme un cerf au couteau servi; tes fines antennes courbes frémissent au vent, et
j'attends que des mots bruissent à travers tes élytres, dans le sens des banderoles de
la brise.³⁰ (PL I 276)

The outline of the scarab's antennae duplicates the outline of the *mygale*'s voracious jaws and connotes a view of woman as nothing more than a pair of murderously athletic thighs. Jarry reinforces this view in L'Amour absolu, through his relation of a purportedly autobiographical passage, in which the child, Emmanuel Dieu, witnesses his mother enlacing his elderly father's neck in a stranglehold. Jarry's scientific emphasis on the strength of the muscles involved detracts from its authenticity as a genuine personal memory:

²⁹ Jarry packs as many decorative motifs as will fit into this tiny composition: lotus blossom, lotus bud, scroll, fleur-de-lys, triangle, ramshorn, heart and 'bat.'

³⁰ Jarry's work contains many intertextual echoes of Lautréamont. Here we can perceive a distinct reference to the Scarab of 'Chant V', "Le scarabée beau comme le tremblement des mains dans l'alcoolisme." This is also one of Jarry's acknowledged literary *trouvailles*, listed in 'Du Petit nombre des élus', (PL I 666).

Le garrot cataleptique (on sait l'anormal développement du pectiné et des trois adducteurs des cuisses des femmes, et qu'elles se différencient de l'homme, *en outre*, par le muscle psoas, que n'a qu'un mâle sur dix-huit) est fatal et inévitable que son paradigme de fer. (PL I 956)

Although just pre-Freud, the account of the child witnessing the lovemaking of his parents smacks of a classic psychological case history leading to the Oedipus complex. The chapter containing this passage, 'La Souricière d'amour' is constructed as one of Jarry's satirical traps to enmesh the over-zealous textual analyst who is unable to take the text at face value. At the same time, the reader cannot avoid being struck by Jarry's determined portrayal, from 'Le Phonographe', written in 1894 to the Love-inspiring machine of 1902, of the female as a lethal mechanical lure, vice and trap. It is true that these are machines and not women, but we shall see that he rarely relaxes an unforgivingly sneering vision of machine-as-woman and woman-as-machine. Even in his final poem, 'Le Mousse de la Pi-ouït', which is in the genre of the vulgar ballads written for the Pantins puppet theatre, the ship's boy is sucked into the *chaudière ventre* of the steam boat (machine-woman in a hostile world) and has to be returned to the protecting arms of his mother. (PL III 518-21) In an article of 1902, 'De quelques romans scientifiques,' Jarry reviews the novel *Ignis* by Didier de Chousy, (PL II 520) which portrays a world ruled by woman-as-vacuum-cleaner. De Chousy perhaps provided the inspiration for the Flying Machine of *Le Surmâle*, configured as trumpet and giant sister of the later phonograph, which mysteriously appears attached to the final carriage of the train and, through the power of its spinning motion, sucks the five-man bicycle team towards it like a vacuum cleaner or carnivorous flower.

J'appris que le dernier automobile (...) avait été "lâché", puis remplacé par une machine volante en forme de trompette. Elle tournait sur elle-même et se vissait dans l'air au ras du sol devant nous, et un vent furieux nous aspirait vers son entonnoir. (PL II 221)

Jarry's parodic depiction of the Flying Machine as yoni and the six-man bicycle team as lingam has gone unremarked, but can be related to an early humorous portrayal of the Sacred

Phallus as a team-driven vehicle in the form of a trireme. (PL I 212)

Parasol Mushroom, trumpet or goblet - the graphic configuration is similar and in Messaline and Le Surmâle constitutes Jarry's satirical 'rune' for the voracious female.³¹ In his earlier illustration Les Oiseaux d'or it is easy to identify the urn outline which also represents the heraldic 'vair' in his schematic frontal rendering of the Scarab with outturned antennae. (Fig. 20) The Scarab's attribute of tears also links it to the little myrrhine goblet which Messaline detaches from her cloak to offer to her lover, in Jarry's unequivocal words:

C'était une des coupes que la course de l'impératrice avait traînées sur les gradins;
et, aussi patente que l'écartement des doigts qui la présentaient, sa fêlure pleurait, telle
la clepsydre des heures d'amour. (PL II 122)

That is Jarry's last word on the myrrhine, connoted as fabulous cup, water clock and antique feminine emblem and rehabilitated from its role as a mere obscenity. A gem of ambiguity and erotic potential in his collection of arcane words, Jarry binds it to Messalina alone and never again uses it outside the framework of Messaline, the novel.

Jarry's repertoire of semiotic ornaments includes some of the main geometrical, zoomorphic and phyllomorphic prototypes which had been described by the foremost ethnologists of his time. The rows of misshapen myrrhines, however, reflect a very personal vision and demonstrate his literary method. He follows a very individual procedure, combining the semiotic burdens from two or three sources. On the one hand the word *murrhin* is charged with obscene connotations from Aristophanes, signifying the female sexual organs and raises the suspicion of ineradicable schoolboy smuttiness in Jarry's intent; the fact that the word also denotes a rare mineral described by Pliny excites Jarry's curiosity more. The myrrhines' historical role as objects of great value collected by Claudius moreover gives

³¹ The trumpet, confusingly, has the function of sphincter in César-Antechrist, as we see here:

LA TROMPETTE: MIROIR TERRESTRE ET LIMITÉ, ANNEAU FERMÉ DE VIL SPHINCTER, LA
TERRE SOUILLERA L'OËIL BOLIDE DU CAMÉLÉON BERCE. (PL I 287)

The capital letters would seem to indicate a quotation, similar to "NE FAIS PAS DE PAREILS BONDS" in Scene VI, taken from Les Chants de Maldoror.

an unequivocal right to introduce them into the narrative. Jarry's innovation is to transform Pliny's brief factual account of Claudius' collection of myrrhines into a fantastic and mobile decor, what he calls "une horreur splendide de prodige." As we shall see in Chapter 3, section 7 and again in Chapter 6, it would seem that he conceives the rows of myrrhines in the Roman circus as a metaphor for the unformed, disobedient yet demanding potential text, to which he assigns a female gender and which he sees as the writer's task to bring under the control of his artistic imagination, a force which he elsewhere portrays as essentially virile - a pushing or speeding forwards, believing that the text should be completed at a single draft.

1.7 Le Véritable portrait de M. Ubu as visual pun.

Continuing with Jarry's method of "rehabilitating" curiosities from the literary texts or even the illustrations of other writers let us now examine the configuration of Le Véritable portrait de M. Ubu. Of all Jarry's representations of Père Ubu, which gradually evolved from the facial and physical features of his maligned physics teacher, Monsieur Hébert, "Le Véritable Portrait" is the most strikingly 'monstrous' and memorable. Coincidentally or not, it can be instantly analysed according to the well-known ornamental motifs that we have been discussing and is representative of Jarry's method of cutting and pasting from a variety of images in order to make one of his own, a method which Brunella Eruli identified when she sourced a part of the Ubu roi poster of 1896 to a sixteenth-century incunabulum of the man-eating Bigorne monster and a kneeling man in the Bibliothèque Nationale.³²

Ubu's not quite spherical body, obliquely viewed with the 'solar' spiral offset to one side, is identical to the view of a particular Greek vase illustrated in one of Waring's plates. The rudimentary potlegs have been added by Jarry but cannot be regarded as articulated.

³² The legend to this picture runs:

Cy finissent les dictz de Bigorne la tresgrasse beste. Laquelle ne mange seullement que les hommes qui font entièrement le commandement de leurs femmes.

Incunabulum, Lyons, 1537, Fonds Rothschild, Bibliothèque Nationale.

Brunella Eruli, Jarry. I Mostri dell'immagine. Pisa, Pacini Editore, 1982, pp. 33-4, n. 66 and Fig. 10.

The outline of the head is here not piriform, but corresponds to the ambiguous lotus bud of Egyptian decorative art.³³ This apparent mask, which is Ubu's head, happens to duplicate the form of those worn by the Spanish Inquisitors, connoting cruelty and torture. (Fig. 32) In the animal world this profile also corresponds to the snout of the crocodile as seen from above, which Haddon designates as primitive man's schematic model for the arrow³⁴ (Fig. 23) and which Bates classified as a "terrifying profile" through his studies of Brazilian Lantern Flies. Although Ubu's general shape corresponds to the body profile of 'obese priest' or 'paunchy bourgeois' in the repertoire of the puppet theatre, those key physical indicators of human personality, the face and hands, are hidden, suggesting sinister and inhuman qualities. From the text, we know that Ubu's inhumanly long arm ends in the *croc à merdre* or hook, used so successfully by J. M. Barrie as a terror-inspiring device in his play, Peter Pan of 1904. In Jarry's poster for the actual *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre* production of Ubu roi the crude outline and scimitar shape of the *croc à merdre* betray a non-occidental model, which may once again have been provided by Haddon, specifically his illustration, 'Fish hooks of New Guinea'.³⁵ (Fig. 24)

In seeking to raise the figure of Ubu from the status of despicable bourgeois or grotesque teacher to that of mythical monster, Jarry needed to find a suitably striking 'primitive' and hybrid profile. With this 'collage' of primitive decorative designs, whose original authors had pressed the outlines of crocodile snout, lotus bud, gourd and curving thorn into useful service as arrow, water jug and fish hook, Jarry created the unsettling profile of Ubu, intending it to twang an uncomfortable chord in the deeply buried recognition responses of our primitive selves. Whether his choice of outlines is frivolous or not he obstinately follows Platonic theory that the spherical vessel is the most beautiful form to the human eye. Here is the start

³³ Cf. Riegl op. cit. Fig. 10 and p. 52.

³⁴ Haddon, op. cit. Fig. 3 and pp. 20-24.

³⁵ The arm rolled up as fishing line or predatory lizard's tongue seems more appropriate to Ubu's role as money-grabber here, than to Arrivé's assimilation of Ubu to Doublemain on account of his doubly articulated "rowing" arms or to John Field's view of Ubu's arm as intestine cited in John Richardson's biography of Picasso. We shall see that it also has an utilitarian role as 'jug-handle.'

of Ubu's eulogy to himself, contained in Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial as early as 1894:

La sphère est la forme parfaite. Le soleil est l'astre parfait. En nous rien n'est si parfait que la tête, toujours vers le soleil levée, et tendant vers la forme; sinon l'oeil, miroir de cet astre et semblable à lui. (PL I 186)

Validated by both Rabelais and Gustav Fechner, two of Jarry's important sources, we shall come back this theory in more detail in Chapter 3. With Le Véritable Portrait, Jarry was indeed attempting to demonstrate a "language" of ornament - a signifying outline like a Chinese ideogram. The combination of Ubu's "beautiful" spherical form and "fear-inducing" pointed head perhaps represents what he would later refer to as "l'horriquement beau".

1.8 The perversion of the heraldic sign in César-Antechrist

The peculiar yet exact science of heraldry provided a perfect target for Jarry's destructive instincts. Emblematic, and with its own esoteric vocabulary, it took his fancy, both for its arresting visual characteristics and its arcane code. Some of the heraldic charges could even be adapted to form letters of the alphabet. The heraldic surface text of César-Antechrist provided great potential for grotesque distortion both visually and lexically. Jarry joyfully exploits it as a field for lewd innuendo. He was also captivated by the differences in meaning that could be achieved by varying the angle or position of a straight line across the background field. In his repertoire of signs only the *bâton* of Guignol had such varied potential and he seizes the opportunity to import this dynamic prop as an autonomous, mobile charge into the frozen heraldic landscape. The stage instruction for the entrance of the so-called *Bâton-à-physique* is "pal ou fasce de gueules, roulant sur ses extrémités" indicating an instrument endowed with the uncanny capacity of perpetual motion like the Mexican jumping bean. According to Jarry's personal colour code, its red hue (*gueules*) denotes its identity as an inflamed male sexual member and relates it to the Sacred Phallus of Messaline, characterised by Jarry in terms of "son vermillon obscène et rituel." Although the entrance of this object

would be commonplace in a comedy of Aristophanes, its public appearance on the French nineteenth century stage was unthinkable.

César-Antechrist represents a grotesque literary genre of its own within the realm of nonsense. Jarry successfully lulls the reader with the soporific drone of pedantic and dry textbook language, blinding him to the mischievous twist which the text takes into a world of sexual innuendo.³⁶ The reader feels secure within a framework of mathematical terminology and erudite academic argument, whose superficial sounds remind him of schoolroom or lecture theatre, where he is the passive listener. In the realm of mathematics or heraldry the reader feels no real pressure to understand, allowing the author, as supposed expert, to expound his theories. He thus fails to notice when the argument suddenly takes an improbable and unreal tack, dragging him into a nonsense or taboo world which he had no intention of entering. Jarry uses recognized respected totems of academia and aristocracy, such as the mathematical sign and the heraldic shield to camouflage his intent, but under his diabolical guidance the signs come to life, displaying grotesque and disturbing sexual characteristics.

Michel Arrivé's detailed semiotic analysis has gone a long way towards deciphering the particular charges deployed by Jarry as *dramatis personae* in César-Antechrist, *Orle* as anal sphincter, *fasce* as phallus, but fails to contextualize the text as a genre.³⁷ He points out the rarity of some of Jarry's heraldic characters, such as the intricately decorated charge of *trescheur*, chosen for its similarity to the letter 'O'. At the visual level, Jarry's innovation was to endow certain heraldic charges with graphic significance, causing them to glow and flash like neon signs to convey their message. Thus the shields bearing *Chef*, *Trescheur* and *Pal* are able to form the word, 'TOY'. (Fig. 11) The ambiguous *Fleur-de-lys*, shown by Riegl

³⁶ Julia Kristeva's study of the "Menippean" genre of literature and the subversive novel from Heraclitus and Juvenal, through Rabelais to Beckett and Joyce gives a helpful context of analysis for Ubu roi, César-Antechrist, and Messaline. Although not specifically named, Jarry should be included with Lautréamont in her category of "auteurs en marge de la culture officielle."

Julia Kristeva, Συμειωτική: recherches pour une sémanalyse, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1969, pp. 164-9.

³⁷ Arrivé op. cit. pp. 119-149.

and which Jarry describes as “une trinité phallique”, reappears in *La Dragonne*, as decoration for the corpse of the grotesquely named heroine, Jeanne Sabrenas, a motif to which we shall return in Chapter 5. In *César-Antechrist*, puppet-like, it is given a speaking part, as is the equally ambiguous *Corne du héraut*. Jarry follows the procedures of a compulsive nonsense practitioner, defusing or making any dangerously sexual connotations appear ridiculous.

The nonsense context of *César-Antechrist* has never been appreciated. Jarry's resurrection of the Sacred Phallus of primitive ceremonies within a nineteenth century drama, was so innovative that it has still to find a producer, prepared to adapt it to stage or cartoon film. Jarry feigned to recognise the trapped phallic form within the straight line of the horizontal, oblique or vertical heraldic charge and enlivens his drama by releasing it. He remains firmly within his declared realm of ornament and emblem, hailing the phallus as “emblème bourgeon de la génération.” Assimilated to the persona of César-Antechrist, and named *Bâton-à-Physique*, Jarry gives life to the archaic totem, restoring its plastic potential and endowing it with the energy and dynamism of a tumbling acrobat, called here “demi-cubiste” after the Greek word for acrobat, “kubistitir.” (Figs. 80 & 81) He introduces it with a fanfare of erudition and neologistic verve as follows:

Phallus déraciné, *ne fais pas de pareils bonds!* Tu es une roue dont la substance seule subsiste, le diamètre du cercle sans circonférence créant un plan par, sa rotation autour de son point médian. La substance de ton diamètre est un Point. La ligne et son envergure sont dans nos yeux, clignant devant les rayures d'or et vertes d'un bec de gaz palloïde. (...) *Ne fais pas de pareils bonds*, demi-cubiste sur l'un et l'autre pôle de ton axe et de ton soi! (...) (PL I 339)

The *Bâton-à-Physique*/Phallus thus arrives on stage with an armoury of complex geometrical and literary credentials (of which the corrupted neologism, *cubiste* is one) assembled by Jarry to dignify his creation and to dazzle his readers.³⁸ Apparent inventor of the word *cubiste* fourteen years before it was re-coined by the art critic, Louis Vauxcelles in 1908, Jarry points to Plato's *Symposium* as his source. From this he plundered the figure of

³⁸ See Thieri Foulc, ‘Mnester ou l'art du sphéricubiste,’ *Europe*, mars-avril, 1981, pp. 120-5.

the mythical hermaphrodite, whose eight-limbed locomotion is compared by Plato to somersaulting tumblers, that he terms *kubistontes*. Zeus cut them in half and threatened to do so again.³⁹ Jarry's bounding *Bâton* or *demi-cubiste* represents the one-legged, twice-cut being implicit in this threat. The idea of slicing, here combined with the idea of contorting and spinning of the body, has extraordinary implications for the future movement of Cubism, unrelated to the simple cube, considering that Jarry's coinage was a pure fluke.⁴⁰

Jarry's second textual "borrowing" is the sentence: NE FAIS PAS DE PAREILS BONDS!, taken from Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* and a quotation which he uses as the Physick-Stick's theme tune, bequeathing it a ready-made identity, that of God's lost and errant giant strand of hair, whose gruesome act of flaying an unwitting young man in a brothel lends the *Bâton* precisely the quality of primitive savagery which Jarry sought. In releasing the phallus-as-emblem and giving it the role of a free independent entity in his texts, Jarry 'purifies' it of obscene and erotic connotations and restores it to its sacred status as terrifying deity. The novelty of *César-Antechrist* is that Jarry transfers the Phallus from its usual connoted status in ornament or text to the dominant and highly visible status of protagonist. The inhuman, leech-like, rapid end-to-end locomotion ("sur l'un et l'autre pôle de ton axe") of this grotesque scarlet monster with no head or feet is disturbing and threatening. It ruptures the 'safe,' rigidly classified landscape of heraldic escutcheons, where the revolving of the pillory, the slow balletic movements of the charges and Saint Pierre's single step forward and back have been the only movements. The *Bâton-à-Physique* as Phallus represents both physical and creative mental energy on a cosmic scale. On a far grander scale to *L'Homme à la Hache*, whose gesture of swinging his axe reaches only to terrestrial limits ("la fin verte des lieues"), the *Bâton* assumes the characteristics of the Egyptian god, Amoun, and projects its creative seed (which has nothing to do with human reproduction) into the stellar system. Jarry's following pompous eulogy would have it:

³⁹ "La droite cherchera le gauche, et l'homme fendu longitudinalement sautera sur une seule jambe." PL I 291

⁴⁰ See Jill Fell, 'Alfred Jarry's alternative cubists' in *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, Pt. 2, no. 17, June 1995, pp. 249-269, which may need modification in the light of a later finding mentioned in Ch. 6 n. 8 of this thesis.

Jarry's following pompous eulogy would have it:

Tu es saint, tu es l'emblème bourgeon de la génération (...) spontanée, vibron et volvoce dont les images gyroscoposuccessives révèlent à nos yeux, hélas trop purs, ta scissiparité, et qui projettes loin des sexes terrestres le riz cérébral de ton sperme nacré jusqu'à la traîne où les haies d'indépendantes pincettes des chinois Gastronomes illustrent la Vierge lactée⁴¹. (PL I 339-340)

Jarry's idea of a projection or expansion of a powerful form beyond its visible outline into the furthest corners of the universe, like the ripples emanating from the impact point of a stone hitting water, is implicit in this idea of the man-made totemic phallus outreaching its terrestrial confines by virtue of the mystical energy inherent in its form. This was not a new idea and as we said above can be related to both Aristotle's idea of "sensible forms" which emanate from objects and imprint themselves on the wax-like receptacles of our senses like a signet ring⁴² and to the Platonic doctrine of "visual fire," the *eidola* or *simulacra* which are similarly understood as material emanations propagated by objects, subtle but substantial images which forcibly impress themselves on our senses. As a mature writer Jarry develops his idea much more lucidly in his article, 'Du mimétisme inverse chez les personnages d'Henri de Régnier.' Basing his arguments on recent research into insect camouflage, he here talks about indefinitely expanding silhouettes which match the forms from which they emanate:

Ils ne marchent qu'au milieu d'un halo qui épouse leur silhouette et la grossit. (...) Que chaque facette du coin d'univers où ils se plaisent se souvienne d'eux, comme d'un thème, parce qu'ils *sont*, cela prolonge à leur entour un rayonnement musical. Au bout des rayons, car l'esprit humain n'est pas assez vaste pour embrasser et suivre une divergence à l'infini, il y a la limite des forces: une couronne. (PL II 415-6)

We see clearly the idea of a force of identity, a *charisma*, projecting out of the outline of the

⁴¹ Mnester's Song also attributes the mythical power of extending his form to the Emperor Caius Caligula: Il était assez souple pour s'étendre jusqu'aux astres du ciel. (PL II 113)

Jarry is here evoking the stock circus figure of the "rubber man" but one whose elasticity knows no limits.

⁴²Aristotle, *De Anima*, II, 12. 424 a, tr. Hugh Lawson-Tancred. London, Penguin, 2nd edn., 1988, pp. 187-8.

form in Jarry's perception, and can assume that he would imagine this phenomenon to apply equally to the form of a person or to an object with a significant outline such as gladioli and the bracken leaves (*fougère*) connoted as bunches of swords in *L'Amour absolu*, then later assimilated to Varia's lashed eyes, which "piquent à distance" and which act as a protective palisade.⁴³ (PL I 951) The theories of Charles Henry and especially his *Théorie de rayonnement* had moreover had considerable impact on writers and artists, none more than Jarry's mentor, Félix Fénéon, who had applied his theories to his critical appreciation of Seurat, and Paul Valéry, with whom Jarry exchanged ideas on radical scientific theories.⁴⁴ Henry's concept of "rhythmic lines" is near to Valéry's arguments about *lignes de force* that he extrapolates from Leonardo's Treatise on painting and to which we shall be referring in more detail in the next section.

Jarry does not explicitly state the sources for his theory, (as he announced he would not in 'Linteau') but one can sense his satisfaction in joining his knowledge of the ancient theories of perception to contemporary research into insect mimicry - an area of particular interest to him. Although the Surrealists knew many of Jarry's texts well, Roger Caillois and Dalí seem to have arrived at a similar theory of forceful or fear-inspiring configurations by their own respective routes, basing their ideas partly on entomological research into the recurrence of particular forms and attitudes in distinct species, which fall into an uncanny pattern of mimicry: the lantern fly with its inappropriate 'crocodile' mask and the bent posture of the mantis, emulating human prayer, as we shall see below.

1.9 The release of form.

Throughout his texts Jarry transmits a belief in the trapped creative energy, which he, as

⁴³ André Breton almost certainly borrowed Jarry's image when evoking Nadja's "yeux de fougère" which both beckon and warn at the same time.

⁴⁴ For Valéry's correspondence with Henry on his *Essai de généralisation de la théorie de rayonnement* see Robert Mirabaud, *Charles Henry et L'Idéalisme scientifique*, Paris, Librairie Fischbacher, 1926. See also Joan Ungersma Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1988 for a concise summary of Henry's theories.

author, is striving to release from the constricting sheath of the fixed word as grapheme or phoneme, or from whichever pigeonhole or convention that human orderliness, tradition and inhibition has tidied it into. His term for this energy is *la forme soufflée*. He first mentions it in the following appraisal of Charles Filiger, whom he credits with releasing the essence of form from its containing sheath:

C'est un *déformateur*, si c'est bien là le conventionnel nom du peintre qui fait ce qui EST et non - forme soufflée dont il le dégangue - ce qui est conventionnel.
(PL I 1024)

We see the two concepts conjoined again in his beautiful description of the cremation of the Asiatic Tree-tender, connoted as the mythical Phoenix passing through the process of death and rejuvenation:

La flamme ferma tous ses doigts sur le cadavre voilé, qui parut un oeuf d'or, ainsi que le cocon se fonce jusqu'à ce que son hôte, à bout de fil, s'endorme momie dans la salle la plus reculée, où il se sait arrivé, de son labyrinthe. Puis elle s'ouvrit et s'épanouit haute et somptueuse comme le souffle exhalé, le souffle inhalé, le souffle dispersé, le souffle élevé et le souffle réuni de tous les arbres, de tous les livres, de toutes les statues et des gemmes et des étoffes, et se leva comme tout l'Orient capté sous le crâne jaune et le ventre gonflé de l'Asiatique. (PL II 101)

Here we have Jarry's most lyrical evocation of the spirit connoted as fire, escaping from its hard stifling case, the *étui sec* as Jarry calls it, and which also recalls the ornamental sheaths in which the Mandarin Chinese conserve their long nails, in this, the final sentence to the chapter:

Les longs ongles de la flamme hors de leur étui sec soulevèrent sur un pavois - ainsi les plumes des oiseaux se hérissent au temps d'amour - le sac d'amiante gonflé de vide, de poussière d'os, et d'âme, et l'éblouissement de plumes fabuleuses prit sur lui et porta là-haut, selon le rite, *le corps de son père* vers le soleil oriental. (PL II 102)

Although we see the distinct nail-form of the flame, as in Mallarmé's sonnet, Jarry conveys a strong sensation of released creative energy, life and love, as the Asiatic's bulging asbestos shroud soars upwards like a balloon - but not the struggling balloon of 'Le Sablier,' which is

dragged down by its heavy ballasted basket and prevented from its upward escaping flight. Jarry crafts a consummate metaphorical linkage here which relates this episode to the soul as Psyche, emerging and flying from its silk cocoon, set within the oriental context of sericulture. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the obsessive idea of the human being as insect pervades even his most lyrical writing. In this he anticipates the obsessions of Kafka and Dalí.

The idea of shape existing as an idea without the matter to concretise it was first formulated by Aristotle and Plato, then elaborated by Leonardo da Vinci in his Treatise on Painting. In Chapter 4 we shall look at Paul Valéry's reappraisal of Leonardo's theories in his Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci of 1894, a text which Jarry almost certainly read. Citing Leonardo's belief that the air was full of lines intermeshing and crossing which constituted each object's true form, without any overlapping or merging, ("L'aria e piena d'infinite linee rette e radiose insieme intersegate e intessute senza occupazione l'una dell'altra rapresentano aqualunque obietto la vera forma della lor chagione"), Valéry formulated his idea of *imagerie mentale* and of *images-réponses* which could travel into dream and credited Leonardo with the knowledge of psychic experiments. Valéry talks of "l'émission d'une image" and of "une relation concrète entre des phénomènes" or more exactly "les images des phénomènes."⁴⁵

In his drama using heraldic forms and colours which fade or glow or subtly change, Jarry here uses César-Antechrist's voice to express this similar vision of the equivalence of forms and ideas:

A mesure qu'avec la lumière se précise le sol terrestre, **la matière crasse envahit la subtile**, et les formes, seules réelles idées, meurent, naissent ou changent, et tout cela est la même chose. [My emboldening] (PL I 292)

⁴⁵ "L'air est rempli d'infinies lignes droites et rayonnantes, entrecroisées et tissées sans que l'une emprunte jamais le parcours d'une autre, et elles *représentent* pour chaque objet la vraie FORME de leur raison (de leur explication)." [Valéry's translation]

Paul Valéry, Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci, in Oeuvres I 1192.

Jarry's idea here expressed, even though it probably has its roots in Pythagorean theories, is of capital importance for the rest of his work. The vision of base matter invading the ether is actually the reverse of Valéry's, who seems to say that etheric forms impose themselves on matter. But both Caillois and Dalí later incline to the view adopted by Jarry. Caillois departs from his scientific argument to posit that a magical effect is at work as he here explains:

Il peut être satisfaisant de donner une racine commune aux phénomènes de mimétisme tant biologique que magique et à l'expérience psychasthénique, puisqu'aussi bien les faits semblent en imposer une: *cette sollicitation de l'espace* aussi élémentaire et mécanique que les tropismes et sous l'effet de laquelle la vie paraît perdre du terrain, brouillant dans sa retraite la frontière de l'organisme et du milieu et *reculant d'autant les limites dans lesquelles selon Pythagore, il est permis de connaître, comme on doit, que la nature est partout la même*.⁴⁶

Caillois' *sollicitation d'espace* seems close to Jarry's idea of a *palais d'espace* or solid surrounding frame projected by strong personalities or forms, "qui figent l'ambiance à leur forme" and "[qui] ne marchent qu'au milieu d'un halo qui épouse toute leur silhouette et la grossit." (PL II 415) Jarry quite clearly implies that strong forms appropriate extra space to themselves. To Caillois' similar but more recent idea the American theoretician of aesthetics, Rosalind Krauss, has linked Amédée Ozenfant's concept of primal spatiality, which consists of a ready-made form:

Its "mould" is the grid of abstract geometry such that when matter leaches into it, it flows into the meshes of *form*. Thus the visual and the formal are the same, and it is the revelation of this similitude that is the genius of art: "When the artist succeeds in creating some such miracle, it may be he is unveiling the abscissa and coordinates of the perceptible universe: or alternatively, those of our deepest depths: which comes to the *same* thing."⁴⁷

Jarry's words: "Et tout cela et la même chose" and Ozenfant's would seem to be based on the

⁴⁶ Roger Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire,' *Minotaure*, no. 7, juin, 1935, pp. 5-10 (Caillois' italics).

⁴⁷ Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* tr. John Rudker, New York, Brewer, Warren and Putnam, 1931, quoted in Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, The MIT Press, 1994, p. 158.

Pythagorean theory of sameness in Nature, which only Caillois has acknowledged. In Chapter 5 we shall have reason to come back to Jarry's idea of "Reverse Mimicry" where he posits the existence of "expanding forms" which impose themselves on space and indeed require extra space for their aura or charisma ("c'est eux qui figent l'ambiance à leur image et font un palais d'espace autour d'eux"), as opposed to camouflaged forms which are swallowed by space and which accept what Caillois calls "un mode d'existence réduite." This idea, elaborated only once in the article, 'Du mimétisme inverse chez les personnages de Henri de Régnier,' is one of the main foundation stones of Jarry's personal aesthetic code and underpins some of his most powerful imaginative writing. It is most clearly demonstrated in his novel, *Le Surmâle* in the person of Marcueil, who presents first a "weak" cryptic form and then a "strong" form.

1.10 The release of the word from fixed meaning

Whether spoken or written, words are themselves moulds or masks and are therefore entitled to be considered in the category of ornament. As we have said, Jarry nevertheless strove to release words from being yoked to any single definite meaning, granting them the right to assume any associative meanings which the imagination might bestow on them. He made an art of using ambiguous words and constructing similar sounding groups of words which could be interchanged despite the difference in their conventional meanings. "Mains de gloire" and "mandragores" are an obvious pair which he exploits in the prose poem 'La Plainte de la mandragore' and whose link is explained in a later article by Gourmont;⁴⁸ less so are "tintamarres" and "tain de mares" where the focus switches from the auditive to the visual sensation. In his article, 'Ceux pour qui il n'y eut point de Babel' Jarry insists on the profound linguistic significance of the pun:

⁴⁸ A footnote to the term *Main de Gloire* explains:

Par une suite de dérivations plus ou moins logiques, ce mot vient tout droit de *mandragore*, du latin *mandragora*, lui-même grec. La forme de *Main de Gloire* étant venue en usage fit imaginer une "main de gloire" poignet coupé d'un supplicié. Il y a un très beau conte sur la main de gloire dans les *Histoires tragiques* de Belleforest.

Remy de Gourmont, 'Le Miracle de Théophile,' *L'Ymagier*, no. 5, oct. 1895, p. 12.

Nous allons revenir sur la signification profonde et schématique des calembours.
 Quand les mots *jouent* entre eux c'est qu'ils reconnaissent leur cousinage.
 [Jarrry's emphasis] (PL II 441)

The playfulness of words is a quality which Kristeva calls *carnavalesque* and ascribes to the "Menippean" genre that we have previously mentioned. Jarrry's associative technique is best exemplified in the chapter, 'Les Propos des Assassins' of Les Jours et les Nuits from which the following fragments of dialogue are taken.⁴⁹

- Tu es un pied, et un cor au pied, donc tu es un madrépore, madrécoraux, madré cor au pied! Conclus, tu ne comprends pas, tu es un cor au pied.
 (...)
 Oh! les clous! les clous verts! ils me pénètrent...
 (...)
 O des clous, ce n'est pas du verre, arrachez les clous, ô les petits clous,
 clou-clowns, Footit... (PL I 821-9)

Jarrry's ideas on associative thinking, which led him to write this dialogue as a controlled linguistic experiment under the influence of hashish, derive partly from the theories of Gustav Fechner, the nineteenth century German theoretician of aesthetics, cited under the pseudonym of Dr. Misès in his article on Filiger. Fechner's resistance to fixed meanings and forms appealed to Jarrry, as did his argument that the visual form was equivalent to the heard verbal description by virtue of the associations to which each was inextricably joined in the mind.⁵⁰ Jarrry's persistent recourse to stark profiles and visual outlines in his literary texts points to his belief that a more powerful and varied set of associations emanate from a visual form than from a fixed phoneme. He nevertheless argues with apparent enthusiasm for a hypothesis

⁴⁹ The associative technique was developed into a game of great seriousness by the Dada group for the composition of poetry. André Breton's Les Champs magnétiques plays with similar word patterns.

⁵⁰ "Im Uebrigen weiss man ja, dass sich die Bedeutungen (der Formen) nach Verschiedenheit der daran gemachten Erfahrungen so gut ändern als die der Worte nach Verschiedenheit der Conventionen. Und haben sich die conventionellen Bedeutungen der Worte einmal durch Gewohnheit festgesetzt, so haften sie eben so fest daran, als die Naturbedeutungen an den Formen."

Besides, we already know that meanings (of shapes) change according to the uses to which they are put, just as words change according to differences in convention. And once the conventional meanings of words have become established through force of habit, they cling to them as strongly as the essential meanings of shapes. My translation from Fechner's chapter 'Verhältniss zwischen Poesie und Malerei aus dem Gesichtspunkt des Associationsprincipes,' op. cit., pt. I, p. 137.

formulated by the speculative historian, Victor Fournié (1844-1900) which imputes a sole meaning to each sound, whatever the language, "*pour qui sait lire, le même son ou la même syllabe a toujours le même sens dans toutes les langues.*" (PL II 441-2) Jarry's sympathies lay with Fournié's conviction that all languages sprang from a single source language.

One of the strongest benign personal influences on Jarry was that of the writer, Marcel Schwob, dedicatee of *Ubu roi*, a scholar of the language of mediaeval beggars and expert on European fairy stories. Jarry's translation of R.L. Stevenson's *Olalla* was done at Schwob's specific suggestion. Schwob chooses to enunciate his belief in the importance of freeing language from a fixed code of spelling in his article on Stevenson as follows:

Il me paraît que tous les écrivains du XVe et du XVIe siècle usaient d'une langue admirable alors qu'ils écrivaient les mots chacun à leur manière sans se soucier de leur forme. Aujourd'hui que les mots sont fixes et rigides, vêtus de toutes leurs lettres, corrects et polis, dans leur orthographe immuable, comme des invités de soirée, ils ont perdu leur individualisme de couleur (...) L'écrivain qui rompt l'orthographe traditionnelle prouve véritablement sa force créatrice.⁵¹

Schwob's beliefs are indicative of a general thrust among young poets, begun by Jean-Pierre Brisset in 1883⁵² and carried forward by Gustave Kahn, to listen to the sounds of words, to allow them a certain childish playfulness and to depend less on received meaning. Some of Jarry's obscurer passages which resist rational textual analysis, yield to a rough auditive interpretation.⁵³ Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem, 'Jabberwocky', was a prime example of the

⁵¹ Marcel Schwob, 'Robert Louis Stevenson,' *La Revue hebdomadaire*, 2 juin, 1894, repr. in *Spicilège*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1896.

⁵² Although Jarry never cites Brisset, I believe André Breton is right to put Brisset at the start of an impulse which leads first to Jarry's Pataphysics and then to Dalí's paranoiac-critical method as he does here:

Envisagé sous l'angle de l'humour, l'oeuvre de Jean-Pierre Brisset tire son importance de sa situation unique commandant la ligne qui relie la *pataphysique* d'Alfred Jarry ou "science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux linéaments les propriétés des objets décrits par leur virtualité" à l'*activité paranoïaque-critique* de Salvador Dalí ou "méthode spontanée de connaissance irrationnelle basée sur l'association interprétative-critique des phénomènes délirants."

André Breton, *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966 & 1972, p. 222.

⁵³ In *Messaline Mnester's* Chant yields a possible suggestive sequence: terre à Baules>terrible>Taurobole; my own highly speculative auditive appraisal of Claudius' reverie suggests the names of the Moulin Rouge dancers, Grille d'Égout and La Goulue, with the juxtaposition of "vertigineux dégoût...leurs goulots...Burdigala." (PL II 110 & 116-7) If correct, it implies an intentional link between the vertigo of uncontrolled reverie and that of wild dancing as well as the pounding waters of the Tiber described at the surface of the text.

movement which trusted to sound rather than sense, as is the so-called “mirliton” verse, peculiar to the marionette theatre. In his article, ‘Ceux pour qui il n’y eut point de Babel’, Jarry writes of his marionette theatre partner, Franc-Nohain, in this vein:

Franc-Nohain sait, à merveille, déterrer les racines des mots. Quand il écrit “Escargot, Escarguerite” il le déduit logiquement de “Margot, Marguerite.

(PL II 443)

Our aim has been to show Jarry’s belief in the primitive associative power of sounds and outlines and his belief in an almost magical force emitted by the archetypal outline, which can be understood across cultures, and which historians of ornament had attempted to classify. This amounts to a belief in visual resonance, akin to the associative resonance of sounds. Jarry was adamant that words should not be clamped to a fixed and limited meaning, but should be turned this way and that, reshaped or distorted slightly, to exploit their full associative power and their shimmering playful relationships or *cousinage*.⁵⁴ For as he says in ‘Linteau,’ “la diversité des sens attribuables est surpassante.”⁵⁵ Whether the following passage justifying the title of *L’Ymagier*, which stresses the changeable and magic nature of words, was written by Gourmont or Jarry is deliberately left unclear. It expresses a joint editorial view that words should be allowed a freedom of their own:

Ymagier n’est pas plus étymologique que *Y*, adverbe venant du *ibi*. Et qu’importe! quelle que soit leur forme, les mots n’en sont pas moins les complaisants miroirs des choses et les sources au fond desquelles les idées se laissent entrevoir. Les mots

⁵⁴ Jarry’s happy-go-lucky linguistic philosophy is entirely at one with that of the present-day linguistic theoretician, Gérard Genette:

Dans bien des cas (...) le même vocable bénéficie de deux ou trois associations qui finissent par le recouvrir dans sa totalité. On pourrait alors s’amuser à disposer côte à côte, comme dans un dictionnaire, (...) le vocable-objet et les noyaux inducteurs de sa motivation (...)

VERGLAS verre, glas

WATERLOO water, l’eau

Gérard Genette, *Mimologiques*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1976, p. 367.

⁵⁵ Jarry had a particular affection for Rabelais’ story of the thawing words, which he evokes in the important ‘Consul Romanus’ chapter of *Les Jours et les Nuits*, as follows:

Le vieil enfant soufflait au fond de l’eau pour faire des bulles. Sa bouche expira l’air selon divers gestes, il parla vers la vase, les paroles remontèrent en oscillant et elles firent de petites explosions, comme les mots boréaux d’azur et de gueule que dégela Pantagruel. Il ahanna les mots abstraits des contractions de ses joues bretonnes:

“Barailherez”, il bâilla, et il ne monta pas de bulles, mais se circoncrivit de petites rides.

“Streffiadur... huanad... halan.”

(PL I 779)

sont comme le manteau de BRISEIDA, fille de Chalchas, fait d'un drap enchanteur
 "par migromance et par merveille" et,

Si n'a soz ciél bestes ne flors
 Dont l'en ni voie portreitures,
 Formes, semblances et figures.

Roman de Troie⁵⁶

Words seen as the mirrors reflecting the objects that they signify and as wells, at the bottom of which ideas can be dimly discerned, would seem to coincide with Jarry's concept of the *tain des mares* that we shall discuss below - the reflecting surface that conceals a seething mass of creatures at various stages of their development. The above definition also coincides with the theory of Cratylus that each object received a name pertaining to its natural character and which reflects that character.⁵⁷ The variability of the meanings of words through history was clearly a constant theme running through Jarry's conversations with his two mentors, Gourmont and Schwob. We have just referred to the concept of words changing their dresses, like women or rather sorceresses; Schwob refers to them in terms of masks or of signs, which point to a mystery:

Comme les masques sont les signes qu'il y a des visages, les mots sont les signes qu'il y a des choses. Et ces choses sont les signes de l'incompréhensible.⁵⁸

We shall see in the final chapter that, whereas in César-Antechrist Jarry had used heraldic jargon as a mask for an obscene subtext, in Messaline he reverses the procedure and uses an obscene superficie as a mask for a profound philosophical statement about the writer's or the artist's sacred mission. The bounding apparently "phallic" dancer, linked by the word *cubiste* to the earlier text, which Jarry told Apollinaire was "of little importance," bears a message of huge and tragic significance in a scene that I believe is constructed according to Jarry's personal interpretation of Mallarmé's view of the writer as sacrificial dancer.

⁵⁶ L'Ymagier, no. 5, oct, 1895.

⁵⁷ See Genette, op. cit., p. 11.

⁵⁸ Marcel Schwob, 'La Différence et la ressemblance' in Spicilege, op. cit. p. 150.

Schwob's formula: words > signs > things > the incomprehensible is one to which Jarry would hold as his literary guide to the end of his life. The frail construct of human theories, of language and of representational art overlay a fundamentally incomprehensible universe in his view and was only there to be questioned, tested, overturned and constantly replaced. Visible reality is equivalent to anything perceived in hallucination or dream and much of Jarry's literary effort was directed at proving the validity of dream perceptions, as we shall now see.

1.10 Surface texture manipulated as a grotesque device.

We have looked at some of the individual decorative motifs used by Jarry in his literary texts but we have not yet discussed his use of surface texture. We shall be discussing his own illustrations in the next chapter and his use of the sidegrain woodblock, under Gauguin's tutelage, where the image appears against a ground of swirling woodgrain, an undoctored organic surface, suggesting the dark forces of nature. This combination of the organic and the artificial is a device which intensifies the sensation of the grotesque, and was subsequently exploited to full effect by Max Ernst to provoke conscious hallucination. In Jarry's literary texts we can see his fascination not so much with a rough grainy surface, as a scaled or petalled one (although his insistence on the lumps and warts on the surface of the myrrhines is intended to exaggerate their grotesque aspect). Jarry deploys the reptilian scaly pattern at moments when he wants to plunge the reader into an atmosphere of hallucination.

Working chronologically, we first see Jarry's fascination with this pattern in a discussion on emblem during his Filiger article, where he points out the beautiful emblematic quality inherent in even the most ordinary plants, such as the cabbage:

Quelle splendeur de plafond décorante que les pétales de scarabée d'un chou, rose métallique, infinis concentrés, filigrane de reliquaire de cuivre... peinture de moine avec des couleurs venues en écailles de pays étranges, étendues respectueusement aux sarcophages - comme la mort colle les yeux qu'on ferme - d'éternité pour l'éternité.

(PL I 1025)

In the following passage we can see how Jarry deploys the organic scaled surface to achieve a potent hallucinatory effect in the dream world of Purgatory, where Balkis, wife of Solomon, hopes to deceive the ferryman, Doublemain, himself a scaled monster from the plates of Aldrovandrus' Historia animalium, (Fig. 19) and whose face is turned away from her:

Et je n'ai point vu d'abord le marais, semblable à la robe d'un paon vert, à cause des myriades pressées des yeux de lentilles, et je n'ai point vu la face de mon guide, non plus qu'il n'a vu la mienne. Son dos m'est apparu lamé de bronze, ou couvert d'écailles très semblables à des feuilles de myrte, comme sont celles de la couleuvre.
(...)

Et avec le mouvement je perçus l'eau et la fin de la croûte de lentilles, à quoi succéda une glace plus mobile.

Des êtres tels que des oeufs de mercure solide écrivaient et décrivaient tous les nombres et le signe de l'infini, glissant leurs éclairs sur la tôle de sable. (PL I 911)

Balkis is here 'watched' by a myriad host of lentil-like eyes, (Jarry plays on the double meaning of *lentille* whose unsettling effect is enhanced by the fact that she can only see the back of the ferryman's head and not his eyes.) The symmetrically patterned indeterminate plant mass⁵⁹, which covers both the bog and the water surface with its treacherous crust is a masterly grotesque dream motif, combining beauty, instability and the repulsiveness of slimy vegetable matter. The scaly pattern of the bog surface is at the same time unnaturally repeated on the skin of the semi-human ferryman. Thus the landscape and the central figure are all uniformly scaled - a texture which echoes the mass of round forms in Beardsley's The Fruitbearers. Indeed Jarry uses it as a conspicuous device to signal the transition from reality to hallucination as here, when Messaline leaves Valerius' garden and ascends the spiral passage towards her quest for Priapus:

Et la dernière tenture, végétale ou métallique, qu'elle souleva, entre deux troncs d'une avenue, rejoignit hermétiquement sur son entrée toutes ses écailles; et il n'y eut plus

⁵⁹ This seems not to be an actual drug-induced dream quickly written down by Jarry, on the lines of 'Les propos des assassins,' but based on careful observation of the myriads of tiny round leaves characteristic of wild watercress, which can completely mask the water surface.

aucune possibilité de retrouver d'issue, qu'un escalier vers une voûte.

(PL II 100)

In this scene Jarry endows scales with the sinister attributes of secret machinery, set to entrap the unwary intruder, as they seamlessly close behind Messalina, barring her retreat. The motif is immediately reused, this time in the form of the plunging semi-circular steps of the Roman circus, as a pattern which confuses her ability to perceive a direct line of descent and forces her into uncontrolled, hysterical flight.

Convinced of their hallucinatory power, Jarry returns to the motif of scales again and again. Mnester's body mask of golden crescent-shaped scales is therefore carefully chosen for its bewitching effect, although the scale as *συνεμειον* or emblem signifies both his relationship to the moon and to the carp-leaps of his dance. As we shall see in Chapter 6, this is a perfectly accurate cultural reference to the late nineteenth century practice of using scale costumes in conjunction with the effects of the electric light to enhance the performances of acrobats and dancers.

In a biological context scales represent an intermediate stage between the soft, continuously ageing skin of human beings and the hard imperishable metal of the statue; in the growing process of snakes, the skin is constantly cast and renewed, so that the scales are always fresh and gleaming. As a child who used to keep lizards under his shirt, the intimate sensation of the cool scaled body moving against his own skin, was a memory he carried over into his literary texts. In his art criticism Jarry uses the lizard as metaphor for a precious object - a treasure whose colours seem to glow, even in the depths of the darkest caves.⁶⁰ His affection for the fish, as cunning, swift-moving and acrobatic opponent, whose beauty lies in its sudden flashing jump, is also well-known. It is possible that the scale pattern tends to be

⁶⁰ "Guillaumin a rajouté à ses oeuvres connues une série de vues de la Creuse: arbres roux frisés, mamelons fermant le ciel de leur pelote ronde partout couverte têtes d'épingle en pierres précieuses; une des plus belles le Moulin Brigand (Crozan), avec un arbre au fond qui miroite comme un lézard dans une grotte." (PL I 1017)

generated in hallucinations.⁶¹ It would certainly fit in with the theorist Owen Jones's⁶² idea of ornament as "repose" in that it allows the eye to slide effortlessly and fluently along it like the passage of a snake itself. With his attention to the effects of pattern, lettering and textual design, Jarry would have realized that, apart from the straight line, the scale pattern offered the least impeded passage to the eye - a surface of symmetrical and restful uniformity.

As we shall see, this is not the effect that he himself sought to convey in his woodcuts and ink drawings. Here Jarry followed Gauguin in seeking the roughest and least symmetrical textures, to suggest the wild and chaotic sources from which shapes spring. In Gauguin's case the swirling grain of the wood formed the background to the unrestricted sexual impulses of an innocent society or to the tangible presence of the spirits of the dead. In Jarry's case the jagged, irregular hatching represents the elemental earth or water over which his strange monsters preside and the creative imaginative chaos which produced them.

1.12 The illusionist ornamental garden and labyrinthine spiral as hallucinatory devices

The novel Messaline formed a part of Jarry's continuing experiment in hallucinatory and illusionist devices. This so-called "novel of imperial Rome" was heavily researched for local colour by Jarry, which led him to a study of gardens and of Roman gardens in particular. What was especially attractive about this motif to Jarry was the combination of an extremely formal structure with the wild and unstructured (the *beau désordre* of English gardens) and the deliberate inclusion of illusionist effects. Following the garden historians of the eighteenth century including Rousseau, Jarry also introduces an exotic Chinese accent to

⁶¹ During the 1890s the effects of drugs such as mescal (the dried flowering tops of the peyote cactus) to produce vivid hallucinations were of great interest to writers and artists. Havelock Ellis published his account in July 1897, 'Mescal: a new Artificial Paradise' recording effects such as fish floating in the air in a gold wire cage, quite similar to those recorded in Jarry's 'Opium.' A Dr. X, consulted by Malcolm Easton during his investigation of Beardsley's sources of inspiration, noted:

The constant syncretic linkage and conjunction of opposites; ordinarily immobile surfaces which shifted like sand; the covering of surfaces with spots, reminding him of red blood corpuscles; surface networks and arborizations; the obsession with masks.

Malcolm Easton, Aubrey and the Dying Lady, A Beardsley Riddle, London, Secker & Warburg, 1972.

⁶² See Owen Jones, The Grammar of Ornament, London, Day & Son, 1856.

Claudius' gardens, perfectly in tune with the adjustments that had been made to Versailles in the eighteenth century. He is at pains to establish the authenticity of his apparently fantastic vision as follows:

Ce buis en formes de bêtes, c'était l'esthétique ordinaire des jardins romains, mais, chez l'Asiatique, poussée, par des architectes aux yeux bridés, jusqu'à ses limites même franchies... (PL II 98)

Jarry's descriptions are borne out by Jurgis Baltrusaitis's study of illusionist gardens in Aberrations,⁶³ the companion work to his Anamorphoses. Jarry's own interest in anamorphosis and double configurations will be shown in Chapter 4. The principal architect of the garden, known as Valerius the Asiatic, is a Mandarin Chinese, exaggerated to the point of caricature, with "whip-like" pigtail, long, encased fingernails and built up shoes. The introduction of this character into a "Roman" novel may seem strange but is entirely in keeping with the artifice of including several cultural strains into the garden, viewed as universe in miniature.⁶⁴

The garden is presented by Jarry as an aspect of the grotesque and as a piece of optical trickery. The Asiatic has taken the art of topiary to extreme levels, depicting mantichora and stags, elephants and unicorns, which loom eerily against the moonlit sky. The odd mixture of extreme formality, wilderness and misshapen grotesquerie reinforces the atmosphere of dream. Here Jarry draws a careful analogy between the overgrown hippodrome of Lucullus and his significant image of the transitory, unreliable *mare* that he places in opposition to the ordered and mechanical, as we shall see in Chapter 2:

Et comme l'acquéreur moderne, dans une banlieue, d'un tout petit parc, laisse dessécher, s'il a d'autres soucis, le bassin des poissons rouges, l'Asiatique n'avait point fait attention à cette mare derrière ses futaies, et par la même négligence qu'il

⁶³ Jurgis Baltrusaitis, Aberrations. Quatre essais sur la légende des formes, Olivier Perrin, 1957, pp. 97-126.

⁶⁴ Brunella Eruli borrows the term *collage* from the visual arts to describe Messaline's innovative literary genre which pastes together ill-matching cultural references acting as "detonators" on each other and opening up new perspectives. The novel is thus sited within a perpetually shifting context. Brunella Eruli, 'Le Monstre - La Colle - La Plume,' La Revue des sciences humaines, July - Sept. 1986, pp. 51-66.

aurait permis aux herbes folles d'y enchevêtrer leur paraphe, il avait abandonné à perte de vue au creux du cirque de cent mille places, au caprice ordonné des jardiniers.
(PL II 102)

Jarry's *mare* is an important intertextual memory-image which links certain texts representing his Breton childhood. In particular these are 'Le Sablier,' 'Le Tain des mares,' 'Le Récit de Roboam,' and 'Le Priape du jardin royal.' It is not difficult to pick up the message that the author is pointing to a childhood omission of his own with this oddly placed reference to a suburban goldfish-keeper with "other things on his mind" who allows the pool to dry up.

The appearance of the *mare* image often heralds the passage to hallucination in Jarry's texts. Also characteristic of dream in this chapter is the mysterious, labyrinthine decor, replete with signs, which appear to mean something, yet are meaningless and perplexing to Messalina who searches more and more frantically for the vanished object of her desire, the glass ball of Sidon, described as "ce paroxysme de la beauté d'un jardin."

Here we can see how Jarry builds up the motifs of the sign as unintelligible hieroglyph and of the labyrinth:

Et le buis signait sur les xystes, de haut en bas, leurs noms mystérieux.

Cà et là, dans une alternance régulière avec les plus belles statues grecques et les idoles de l'Inde et de la Perse des plus riches matières et les dieux chinois au plus gros ventre, des ifs imitaient des amphores, et une file spirale d'arbustes nains, rabougris par une marâtre cisaille, recroquevillait le corridor d'un labyrinthe au coeur d'une muraille sèche masquée de l'éternel buis étagé.
(PL II 98)

In this highly visually charged passage, Messalina and the reader are led past a series of unfamiliar and exotic objects ever deeper into an atmosphere of unreality. In his aptly named chapter 'Sur la route de Dulcinée' Jarry uses the word "recroqueviller" of the beckoning finger, indeed the finger which beckons towards hallucination. (PL I 835) The labyrinth as inexorable beckoning finger, signified by the curled line or spiral, is an important image wherever we may find it in Jarry's texts. The reader begins to believe he is inside a living,

breathing labyrinth - “un couloir en nasse où on est forcé de marcher,” as evoked by Jarry in ‘Odin,’ his previous evocation of a dream labyrinth, where the corridors of dream are likened to the tightening, suckered tentacles of an octopus, (“le gant tout en muscles qui est la pieuvre, fourrée de pustules”).

The labyrinth and spiral motif is sustained through the final four chapters of the novel’s first part, portraying a dual aspect. For the two male figures, Valerius, the gardener and Mnester, the dancer⁶⁵ (who both betray features of the author) the labyrinth is a secret place of safety, recuperation and renewal. As we saw above, in describing the cremation of Valerius, Jarry draws a link between the swaddled Egyptian mummy whose spirit is about to set off on its journey and the wrapped silkworm, preparing for metamorphosis. As we shall see in Chapter 6, Mnester, too, rests against the obelisk at the centre of the circus, like a chrysalis attached to a twig in order to gather the energy for his dance.

In his final novel, La Dragonne, Jarry uses the spiral form again in ‘La Bataille de Morsang’ as if the battle were a kind of formal patterned dance, to protect Erbrand Sacqueville, at its centre or “still point”, from being hit by bullets:

Donc le champ de bataille ressemblait trait pour trait - les traits, légèrement incurvés comme des sabres et les bases des temples antiques étant les trajectoires - à un simple et honnête cyclone. Or, on sait que le centre d’un cyclone - qu’il soit de vent ou de balles, et le vent “domestique” ne sert qu’à “lancer dans le monde” les balles - ce centre est la bonace. Cyclone est cercle. La mort y est centrifuge. La mort est toujours centrifuge, ce qui explique l’inexplicable longévité de Dieu et de quelques hommes. Le cyclone est un trou avec de la mort autour. Erbrand Sacqueville se sentait, comme son allié Éliade, chez lui dans ce fourreau. (PL III 467)

Cocooned, so to speak, in the centre of the spiral, Erbrand Sacqueville is safe. By contrast, the female, portrayed by Jarry as predator (wolf, stoat or hunting spider) attempting to enter the sacred spiral - in both L’Amour absolu and Messaline, herself falls prey to its

⁶⁵ In Chapter 5 we shall show the secret “puppet” identity that links Valerius and Mnester, the one a Chinese shadow puppet and the other a mechanical toy, known as *le culbuteur chinois*.

bewildering effects and succumbs to panic. We shall be referring to this phenomenon again in Chapter 5 in connection with the motif of thread, life-giving adjunct of the marionette and pertinent to the Minotaur's maze.

As we have said, Jarry frequently expresses the act of creative thinking in terms of physical movement, or venturing forwards. This movement is often resisted by the air itself, sometimes reinforced by darkness, portrayed in terms of a solid barrier as in his portrayal of Messalina passing from courtyard to courtyard in her night search for the god Priapus:

Et tant de portes, de ciels ouverts succédant soudain à des cryptes, que
Messaline ne sut plus si une paroi ou l'air nocturne lui opposa son opaque mensonge
d'ivoire. (PL II 99)

Similarly, the start of the narrator's journey as perceived through the sense of touch in the passage, 'Le Tact,' from Les Cinq Sens is described in terms of a muscular effort:

Roulé dans une serviette comme dans un petit linceul la momie d'un singe, je
l'emporte à travers l'ombre visqueuse dont mon passage écarte les rideaux mous. Et
les muscles doivent se faire plus forts pour marcher dans cette obscurité, qui repousse
les corps comme l'eau le liège. (PL I 206)

Dr. Faustroll and Bosse-de-Nage, setting out on their adventure across literary Paris, have to pass through moving throngs of imaginary people and Jarry evokes an almost Munchian vision of drifting anonymous human forms. The effort of their embarkation and the writer's involves the audible tearing of the silk-like membrane between the real and the imagined world:

Nous nous insérons entre les foules d'hommes ainsi que dans un brouillard dense, et le
signe acoustique de notre progression était l'acuité de la soie déchirée. (PL I 675)

The writer's sensation that air is a resistant material accounts for his idea that we shall develop in Chapter 5, that physical forms or profiles leave their defined impression within the

air, like an intaglio in wax and that the outlines of a potent form, expand outwards like sound waves or ripples in the universe. These are the “species” or “sensible forms”, which, according to Aristotle, emanate from objects and imprint themselves on our senses. Leonardo da Vinci’s ideas as propounded by Valéry are a variant of this, as are the later theories of Roger Caillois and Salvador Dalí, that we have discussed. We shall quote Caillois’ argument on behalf of the compelling anthropomorphic form of the Praying Mantis, since it articulates the views implicit in Jarry’s texts, although for Mantis we should read Mandrake:

Certains objets et certaines images bénéficient, par suite d’une forme ou d’un contenu particulièrement significatifs, d’un plus grand pouvoir lyrique que d’autres, pouvoir valable pour de très nombreux individus sinon pour tous, de sorte qu’il semble faire essentiellement partie de l’élément considéré, et pouvoir par conséquent, autant que lui prétendre à l’objectivité.

La mante religieuse m’apparut présenter par son nom, sa forme et ses moeurs, à un rare degré cette capacité objective d’action immédiate sur l’affectivité, si utile pour résoudre le problème de la communication lyrique des synthèses de l’imagination.⁶⁶

Caillois thus upholds the validity of Jarry’s belief that an outline or form by itself can produce a valid lyrical effect on the reader’s imagination and emotions without any descriptive or metaphorical trappings.

1.13 The bicycle wheel as dynamic “Rayed circle”

Although he expresses it as *carrefour*, the form of the spoked wheel comprises the very foundation of Jarry’s creative thought. Jarry’s ideas on language doubtless benefited from exposure to Mallarmé’s, and especially his concept of a “centre de suspens vibratoire”, as he outlines in ‘Le Mystère dans les Lettres’:

Les mots, d’eux mêmes, s’exaltent à mainte facette reconnue la plus rare ou valant pour l’esprit, centre de suspens vibratoire; qui les perçoit indépendamment de la suite ordinaire, projetés, en parois de grotte, tant que dure leur mobilité ou principe, étant de ce qui ne se dit pas du discours: prompts tous, avant extinction, à une réciprocité

⁶⁶ Roger Caillois, ‘La Mante religieuse,’ *Minotaure* no. 5, 12 mai 1934, pp. 23-26.

de feux distante ou présentée de biais comme contingence.⁶⁷

Jarry's crossroads gives an everyday concrete form to Mallarmé's "throbbing centre of suspense." We shall be returning again to this sentence where he encapsulates the configuration of his personal vision of suggestivity, "Suggérer au lieu de dire, faire dans la route des phrases un carrefour de tous les mots." (PL I 171) Jarry's earliest published statement thus declares his departure from the idea of a linear text and from a rectangular page. Instead he insists on the configuration of a nuclear hub or magnetic centre around which a **circular** text revolves, or rather which attracts the words towards it centrifugally into a kind of crucible where they can enrich each other by association and then radiate away again. This configuration is the same as that of the Rayed Circle of ancient ornament, of whose universal significance as the energising power of some forgotten divinity J. B. Waring was convinced.⁶⁸ It is also the configuration of the human eye, which Jarry variously describes in terms of a vibrating fan, swaying palm fronds and the golden rotating axles of chariot wheels. From the first, Jarry interchanges the amazing form of the eye itself with the text that it reads. Just as he would later challenge the conventional perception of a watch as round,⁶⁹ he rejects a rectangular perception of a book and prefers to conceive it in three-dimensional form, either with the pages arranged in an even fan, as if whirring backwards and forwards of their own accord, or as cylindrical vessel.⁷⁰ In either case the reader is able to dive in at any point, and the reader-diver is a metaphorical link which Jarry himself makes. To some extent book and eye therefore reflect each other, just as the book and the author reflect each other. As we shall see in the final chapter, Jarry's most powerful evocation of the

⁶⁷ Mallarmé, OC 386.

⁶⁸ Waring op. cit. pp. 9 & 62.

⁶⁹ "Pourquoi chacun affirme-t-il que la forme d'une montre est ronde, ce qui est manifestement faux, puisqu'on lui voit de profil une figure rectangulaire étroite, elliptique de trois quarts, et pourquoi diable n'a-t-on noté sa forme qu'au moment où l'on regarde l'heure?" (PL I 669)

⁷⁰ "Et la lubricité au fond de cette eau du volume cylindrique des livres de mon père et de mon aïeul, ébranlé sur place par les bêtes luisantes des mares, qui le soulevaient par instants, portées vers la surface par la bulle qu'elles respirent, et l'abandonnaient pour un peu d'air vital. J'ai voulu prendre le livre, alors la mare s'est desséchée, la glace a palmé les intervalles fourchus des glaïeuls, les bêtes de l'eau ont foui la terre."

(PL I 915)

circular text⁷¹ is expressed in Messaline where the glittering dancer represents a mobile glyph within the space of a circus arena, whose alternative identity as *mare-document* he had carefully announced in 'Le Priape au jardin royal.'

Jarry's personal definition of Being depends, after all, on Self-perception ("non pas percevoir ou être perçu, mais que le kaléidoscope mental irisé SE pense.") (PL I 342) Jarry transposed his idea of the *roue-œil* into his concrete, domestic world. Not only did he keep a pair of chamaeleons, whose characteristic independently rotating eyes are recorded in Haldernablou, but his bicycle too was treated as an almost sacred object. He mounted his on the wall of his room. The wheels could be said to represent a vast pair of eyes, or irises, which no doubt accounts for the fascination inherent in Marcel Duchamp's sculpture of a single Cyclopean bicycle wheel. Moreover the speed of the vehicle, when ridden, transported Jarry into a world of rapidly passing forms and colours, possessed of almost hallucinatory intensity. He speculated on the possibility of inventing a mechanical extension of the human skeleton ("prolongement minéral de notre système osseux") *like* a bicycle:

Il (l'homme) devait se servir de cette machine à engrenages pour capturer dans un drainage rapide les formes et les couleurs, dans le moins de temps possible le long des routes et des pistes (...) et l'esprit peut d'autant plus aisément après cette assimilation recréer des formes et les couleurs nouvelles selon soi. Nous ne savons pas créer du néant, mais le pourrions du chaos. (PL I 770)

This rapid assimilation of forms and colours is a cornerstone of Jarry's artistic code and based on his belief in the creative unconscious part of the mind. We shall be returning to it in future chapters. He had first elaborated his ideas of visually skimming the landscape in a small review of 1896 that he wrote on the *Cyclo-guide Miran illustré* where he specifies his source for the delightful idea of the bicycle as an extension of the human skeleton:

Les Rosny ont déjà appelé le cycle un nouvel *organe*; c'est surtout un prolongement minéral de notre système osseux, et perfectible, étant né de la géométrie.

⁷¹ One of Gauguin's main source texts which would have formed a point of reference in his discussions was Massey's The Natural Genesis, in which a linguistic link is drawn between Babels, the ancient round towers and *Byblos*. The Book in circular form, Massey claims, then reflects the movement of the stars above. Gerald Massey, A Book of the Beginnings, Vol. II. The Natural Genesis, London, Williams & Norgate, 1883.

Jarry here emphasises the importance of banishing rational thought from the skimming process:

L'émotion esthétique dans le soleil et la lumière, les impressions visuelles se succédant avec assez de rapidité pour qu'on n'en retienne que la résultante et **surtout qu'on vive et ne pense pas**. [My emboldening] (PL II 580)

Jarry's early statement from 'Etre et Vivre' that Living is the carnival of Being and his belief that, despite the supreme value of genius, living at full stretch was more important than thinking, is reiterated in the above piece and adhered to by the writer himself.

The procedure of scooping up forms and colours at speed looks forward to the creative methods of the Futurists and especially to the automatism practised by the Surrealists, at which we shall look again in Chapter 5. Much closer chronologically to Jarry, however, are the arguments of Henri Bergson as enunciated in his lecture of 1900, 'Le Mécanisme cinématographique de la pensée.' Bergson insists on the discontinuous nature of human perception and knowledge:

Nous prenons des vues quasi instantanées de la réalité qui passe, et, comme elles sont caractéristiques de cette réalité, il nous suffit de les enfile le long d'un devenir abstrait (...) Nous ne faisons autre chose qu'actionner une espèce de cinématographe intérieur. (...) *Le mécanisme de notre connaissance usuelle est de nature cinématographique.* (...) Discontinue est l'action, comme toute pulsation de la vie; discontinue sera donc la connaissance. Le mécanisme de la faculté de connaître a été construit sur ce plan. Essentiellement pratique, peut-il servir, tel quel, à la spéculation?⁷²

The process of gathering these perceptions, which Jarry believed should be done at speed, is therefore important. Bergson condemned the photographic experiments that we shall follow in Chapter 2, which were based on the belief that movement could be captured by means of a linear recording. He believed that our relationship to the objects we observe was kaleidoscopic in character, implying a random jumbling and reassembling of forms, which tunes in with Jarry's ideas of 1897 and before. This is Bergson speaking again in the same

⁷² Henri Bergson, *Oeuvres*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963, pp. 753-4. [Bergson's emphases]

passage:

C'est entre notre corps et les autres corps, un arrangement comparable à celui des morceaux de verre qui compose une figure kaléidoscopique. Notre activité va d'un arrangement à un réarrangement, imprimant chaque fois au kaléidoscope, sans doute, une nouvelle secousse, mais ne s'intéressant pas à la secousse et ne voyant que la nouvelle figure. (...) *Le caractère cinématographique de notre connaissance des choses tient au caractère kaléidoscopique de notre adaptation à elles.*

We can certainly relate Bergson's theory to Jarry's innovative ideas on the design for the title pages of his two first books, where one could say that the letters of title, author and publisher are almost thrown on to the page, to be arranged and rearranged by the reader at will.

Bergson's concept of the random *secousse* or jolt is also interesting to relate to Jarry's idea of the unpredictable wobbling of Ixion's wheel, which slips into other worlds.

Two of Jarry's most original creative fantasies are based on his perceptions as a cyclist. The first is 'La Passion considérée comme course de côte' and the second is 'La course de dix mille milles' from Le Surmâle. The latter piece reveals a particular attentiveness to form and movement and speed. We shall return to these characteristic obsessions of Jarry's in our final chapter.

1.14 Conclusion

We have surveyed Jarry's use of pattern and certain outlines to signify fear, attraction and even hypnosis, and also at his innovative device of fracturing traditional forms in César-Antechrist with a view to releasing the original daimons which inspired them. This would also be his method in his use of words. Given that he is a subversive writer, it is of great importance to assessing his artistic method and purpose to try to grasp what he sees as having existed outside form, that is, what the raw materials of the artist might be.

If we view Jarry's figure *L'Homme à la Hache* in the same light as the Fairy Feller of Richard Dadd's painting, as a paradigm of the Artist as Destroyer-Creator, then the initial lines

of the poem can be interpreted as the visual and aural impressions of Chaos itself - the formless, opaque fog ("brouillards") and the wild arhythmical clattering or rumbling inherent in the word "tintamarres".⁷³ In his essential maleness, Jarry's god-like, bronze 'Feller' differs radically from the graceful, androgynous native, described in Gauguin's Noa Noa. In part, the Feller can also be said to represent Gauguin the artist, carving works of genius out of the raw wood ("taille une barque en un tronc d'arbre") - giving form to the formless and conjuring shapes out of the asymmetrical patterns of the woodgrain.

Jarry's work evinces a profound knowledge of the history of ornament and, at one level can be seen as a continuing experiment to deploy the ancient outlines, deemed sacred by our ancestors, to provoke an atavistic response in his readers, even though he is attempting this through the secondary medium of the written text. Although the tone and quality of his writing underwent considerable changes during the ten or twelve years of his creative effort, his preoccupation with the outlines of ancient patterns is strongly discernible from Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial collection of 1894 to 'La Bataille de Morsang' of 1903. This implies a profound belief that the written text could not succeed as a provocative and striking form of communication without the support of a basic visual component to seize the reader's imagination. The success of Ubu as an icon of his time greatly depends on the haunting outline, buried piecemeal in man's unconscious, that Jarry put together from his most ancient utensils, the gourd or jar, whose bulbous shape he chose to conserve his life-sustaining water, and the arrow (perhaps modelled on the dynamic lines of the swift-moving and terrifying predator, from whose habitat it had to be gathered) with which man hunted and attacked his enemies. Chapter 3 will propose the message that Jarry intended his various silhouettes of

⁷¹ We can interpret Jarry's "tintamarres" in terms of Mayakowsky's "dull roar" and Jarry's "César" as Mayakowsky's concept of the artistic "ego", quoted by Kristeva as follows:

Where this basic dull roar comes from is a mystery. In my case, it's all kinds of repetitions in my mind of noises, rocking motions (...) On the one hand, then, we have this rhythm; this repetitive sonority (...) this struggle between word and force (...) On the other hand, we have the "ego", situated within the space of language, crown, system: no longer rhythm but sign, word, structure, contract, constraint.

Jarry's axe is our emblem or sign, one of man's most basic utilitarian and fighting instruments, before he turned the blade to artistic use.

Vladimir Mayakowsky, How are Verses Made? tr. G. M. Hyde, London, J. Cape, 1970 pp. 36-7, quoted in Kristeva, op. cit. pp. 28-9.

Ubu to project. Meanwhile in Chapter 2 we shall proceed to examine modern attempts to freeze movement through the medium of the photograph, rather than through the abstract rendering offered by archaic ornament. Would photography and the growing power of mechanical instruments appeal to Jarry's scientific curiosity and bent for innovation?

CHAPTER 2 THE ANALYSIS OF MOVEMENT: JARRY, *GNOME HARPISTE*, CONFRONTS MODERN SCIENCE

“Pleurant, je voyais de l’or et ne pus boire.”

Arthur Rimbaud, ‘Larme.’

2.1 The Context: chronophotography and theosophy

The previous chapter sought to show how Jarry drew on the work of the ornament theoreticians of his day. This chapter moves from his interest in the animation of ornament to its logical antithesis, namely the recording of movement. The comparatively new science of photography made it possible to subject to detailed visual analysis what was viewed as one of the great mysteries of the universe. The camera was prized as a more efficient instrument than the human eye for its ability to seize and freeze the evanescent moment and turn it into a permanent record. France was ahead of the world in the art of photography and as early as 1856 the photographer Gustave Le Gray produced the first successful photograph of a breaking wave, ‘The Great Wave, Sette’. The scientific study of movement nevertheless penetrated several disciplines and it needed a collaborative effort to draw together the various fields of expertise. The breakthrough was made by a physiologist who settled on the heart as one of the most mysterious sources of the life force and determined to record its movement by means of physical models. In 1863 Étienne-Jules Marey published his pioneering work, Études physiologiques sur les caractères graphiques des battements du coeur et des mouvements respiratoires, based on a graphic system of recording performed with a cylinder and stylus, known as chronometry. Marey then became excited by the work of the English photographer Eadweard Muybridge which helped him to perfect chronophotography, reproducing a phased sequence of movements by using several cameras. As we have seen, his expertise was sought in other academic fields, resulting in collaborative works such as Emmanuel’s La Danse grecque antique. This showed sequential photographs of live models performing ancient Greek dances in an innovative attempt to bring Greek dance movements to life, in imitation of the painted representations on archaic Greek vases.

As Jarry was strongly biased towards science himself and had hesitated between science and literature when choosing his career, his interest in the science of movement and the technical advances in recording it has been misconstrued as positive. But the petrifying function of the photographic plate represents the reverse of what he had sought to do in releasing the captive forms of ornament and so these efforts attract his utmost antipathy. His innate revulsion towards this procedure and towards the mechanical becomes ever clearer, but, as he realized, poetry alone is not an appropriate weapon to halt its advance. Satire is. In setting the lyre and the machine against each other Jarry puts himself in the place of the *gnome harpiste* evoked in 'L'Autoclète.' This *gnome harpiste* is an early manifestation of Faustroll, as much erudite *gnomos* as the mischievous imp or troll of folklore. When the imp plays the lyre, the character of poetry changes from a passive, if reconstructed echo of the vibrations received by the poet, to a barbed instrument of protest. Jarry's protest is covert and coded. Subjected to patient concentration and research, many of his 'serious' and most lyrical pieces reveal a satirical cryptic signature woven into the fabric of the text, as we shall see below. In that these coded messages would only be recognized by a very few initiates, the elitism of his poetry is strangely at variance with his dramatic theory, which calls for the depersonalization of drama through the use of masks to cover the actor's individual traits. Jarry thus goes against his own precepts and threatens the wider poetic potential of his work by allowing the inclusion of hidden satirical elements. They arouse restless unease in the reader, who can never be sure of his interpretation. Jarry's following prefatorial statement indeed attempts to deflect the reader from the potentially vain task of identifying every shade or layer of meaning:

La dissection indéfinie exhume toujours quelque chose de nouveau. (...) Tous les sens qu'y trouvera le lecteur sont prévus, et jamais il ne les trouvera tous. (PL I 171-2)

This author thus restricts the reader to a surface reading of the text and orders him to be satisfied with that. Bearing this prohibition in mind, let us then proceed.

Jarry's literary texts certainly bear witness to the contemporary preoccupation with the science of movement. It is true that he makes no direct attribution to Marey's work, although mention is made of a predecessor, Claude Bernard, who described vasomotivity (PL I 796). Jarry was the first poet to set up a system of resistance to the onslaught of the machine aesthetic. In appearing to espouse it, he continuously undermines it. The high value that he placed on imagination, led him spontaneously to doubt the final validity of Marey's results. His own Pataphysics, "the science of imaginary solutions," is the edifice that he erects in opposition to the results of the laboratory. He stated categorically that he, personally, could not conceive of any other type of imagination than the scientific ("nous ne comprenons d'ailleurs point d'autre imagination") (PL II 434). What is not clear from a superficial reading of his texts and also because of his homage to the "imaginative" science of Faraday and Lord Kelvin is the intensity of his abhorrence towards "brutal" scientific experiment directed at living creatures. The Devil depicted as scientist in Peer Gynt reflects his own view, as do these words of Peer Gynt's in Jarry's hand-written adaptation of Act V "Quels répugnants personnages par ces hommes de science."

E.-J. Marey's early experiments therefore reflect the brutish aspect of scientific experiment in Jarry's perception but we can discern the ideas and observations of very different thinkers to Marey reflected in his work, which combine philosophy, the occult, biology, lyricism and imagination: the first is Henri Bergson, whose concepts of *espace* et *durée* were the topic of the day and who lectured on movement and memory and the likely patterns of brain movements; the second is J. Henri Fabre, whose massive nine-volume work, Souvenirs entomologiques is not only a deeply researched scientific opus, but a literary masterpiece of great power. Combining science with lyricism, Fabre's observations of insect habits became a cult work. His minute descriptions of insect movements perhaps overlap with some of Jarry's own observations and are certainly appropriated by him. The human being as insect is a distinct motif in Jarry's work, but he isolates memory and personal experience as the indestructible components which set human beings apart from insects, these being subject, as

Fabre repeatedly demonstrates, to an unalterable instinctual drive. Maurice Maeterlinck followed Fabre in the genre with his La Vie des Abeilles, which Jarry enthusiastically reviewed.¹ Behind the ideas of these modern experts lies the huge body of occult science propounded by the seventeenth-century German mystic, Jakob Boehme, whose elements Jarry had absorbed through his association with the theosophical group within the Salon du Rose+Croix and through the works of the widely read occultist writer, Éliphas Lévi. Jarry's poem 'Le Sablier' draws together several 'meanings' adhering to the visual motif of the triangle, amongst which Boehme's 'occult triangle' is significant, as we shall see below.

Jarry's lyrical work shows an essentially Romantic spirit at bay, his eyes wide open to mechanical and scientific orientation of the coming century and sceptical of crude attempts to map the living body and the human psyche. He responded by delivering a poisoned satirical jab to the tightening grip of materialism and convenience and left behind a cryptic lament to the death of myth and spiritual values. Contrary to the understanding of the Italian Futurists, his most ardent fans, Jarry did not embrace the mechanical era; he understood its dangers and subjected it to his most bitter satire. His merciless analytical gaze, which reduces human sexual intercourse and the private act of dying to their mechanical components, parodies the science-obsessed physiologists and photographers who believed they could record truth on a glass plate. He shows up the voyeurism inherent in their practices. His literary technique indicates his belief in an invisible, intangible personal intactness which refuses to be dismembered, photographed or measured. In Les Jours et les Nuits, Roman d'un déserteur, he defines this as follows:

Il y a deux instincts de conservation, le noble et l'ignoble. L'instinct noble est l'instinct de conserver son moi et de maintenir son individualité impénétrable aux forces extérieures.
(PL I 763)

¹ Jarry took evident delight in his portrayal of the Queen Bee as the ultimate manifestation of the *Femme fatale* or *castatrice*:

L'extraordinaire "vol nuptial", où la reine revient de zéniths ensoleillés et inaccessibles, rapportant à son flanc, comme un trophée, le sexe du mâle empenné de toute la banderole de ses entrailles d'amant donné tout entier.
(PL II 619)

The theosophical term for this quality, as coined by Dionysius Freher, the eighteenth century German theosophist and Boehme commentator, is *invisible quintessence*. Jarry's choice of name for the hero of Les Jours et les Nuits has not so far been linked to this definition. As mentioned in the Introduction, Sengle derives from the Latin *cingulum*, a Roman leather belt, whose role was to act as the final layer of protection when all other armour has been pierced. A part of Jarry's defiant stance towards authority and especially military authority derives from a fierce desire to preserve his individuality intact and undamaged. The attack by the army regime on his personal time, his personal hygiene, his self image and even his childhood memories constitute a deliberate erosion of individuality which Jarry stands against, mentally absenting himself from his physical surroundings and in fact "deserting."

The precepts of theosophy, which Jarry's stance reflects, were in opposition to the spate of experiments on both sides of the Channel, competing with each other in the effort to capture the exact, isolated moments which made up a fluent and complete movement. These included all athletic activities in the case of men; the flight of birds and insects; the gallop of the horse. Speed had previously provided a veil of mystery and magic which stimulated the poetic imagination (and which would be celebrated by future avant-garde movements such as Orphism and Futurism, and by the Imagist poets). Jarry made his private protest at its lifting. Bergson too had previously denounced these efforts as misguided.

It was particularly the studies conducted on the movement of the heart and the movement of the brain that Jarry opposed which reduced passion, grief and romantic love, the great motor forces of poetry, to the level of mundane physical or biological processes. This chapter aims to show how his work veers towards the ironical or deeply satirical whenever a mechanical aesthetic enters the framework and how he inserts an ingenious parodic intertext into his poetry. By using satire as a weapon, Jarry clearsightedly challenged the apparent triumph of the mechanical over the mythical, the romantic and the occult and sought to salvage some poetic integrity from the fracas. The machine aesthetic also moulds his personal

philosophy and leads him to positions strikingly similar to those of the philosopher-art historian, Siegfried Giedion² and of Julia Kristeva.

2.2 Être et vivre: the Blinking Eye as paradigm of Being and symbol of the Symbolic

Of equal importance to Jarry's prefatory statement to his reader, as contained in 'L'Inteau,' is his brief and early statement of personal philosophy, Être et Vivre of April 1893, published in L'Écho de Paris. This emphasizes his commitment to dreaming and half-conscious states as being much more sensitive to a variety of sensations than the wide-awake open eye and superior to the camera aperture which was being hailed as the ultimate instrument of 'accurate' perception and a faithful recorder of the visible surface world. An admirer, if not a disciple of Mallarmé, Jarry nevertheless needed to redefine Symbolism for himself in order to carve a new path. It is fascinating to see that his 1893 definition of the symbolic comes much nearer to Julia Kristeva's present day definition than to Mallarmé's.

Playing on the happy phonetic similarity between *symboles* and *cymbales*, Jarry takes a pair of blinking or nictating eyes as symbols of Being as follows³ :

Symboles de l'Être: deux Yeux Nyctalopes, cymbales en effet appariées, de chrome circulaire, car identique à soi-même. (PL I 343-4)

In a parallel text in Haldernablou he describes the owl as "Nyctalope aux caves cymbales" and compares the action of blinking to the rising and falling of the tides (*le flux et reflux de la mer*). Kristeva's definition of the thetic phase as threshold between two heterogenous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic, elucidates Jarry's metaphor. She claims that the second includes part of the first and that their scission is thereafter marked by the break between

² The work of the art historian, Siegfried Giedion, author of Mechanization takes command. A contribution to anonymous history, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1948 and of his wife, Carola Giedion-Welcker, author of a monograph on Jarry and whose study Anthologie der Abseitigen, Bern, Bümplitz Benteli, 1946 includes him, gives a valuable perspective on his views.

³ A night bird's nictating membrane is a thin inner lid under the main eyelid which allows it daytime dozing in a state of semi-vigilance. The transparent lid lifts at the slightest disturbance and allows the bird to 'peep' for possible danger without fully waking up.

signifier and signified. Her argument continues as follows:

Le terme de *symbolique* nous paraît désigner de manière adéquate cette unification toujours scindée, produite par une rupture, et impossible sans elle; (...) si le *συμβολον* est un signe de reconnaissance, c'est parce qu'il y a eu coupure en deux d'un "objet" dont chacun a emporté une partie; il est le rapprochement des deux bords d'une coupure comme **les paupières des yeux**; il est aussi, et en conséquence, tout rapprochement, toute mise ensemble, qui sont contrat, c'est-à-dire consécutifs à des hostilités ou les supposant; il est enfin un échange, mais échange d'hostilité aussi.⁴

Jarry's metaphor of the blinking eyelids of an owl, whose abstract representation like the slits in an African mask, we can see in his drawing Life-in-Death, (Fig. 13) is intimately linked to the action of waves passing over the sand. In the two following passages there is a sensitive attention to colouring too, implying a faint but fantastic rainbowing in the equivalence of runnelled sand, veined eyelids and pearls. His evocation of the artist Maxime Maufra's Breton seascapes here clearly links the action of the opening eye with that of the ebbing sea unveiling the iridescent beauty of the sand.

Rappelons pourtant la grève profonde (...) le sable couleur de paupières que l'eau découvre de son couvercle à coulisses. (PL I 1019)

This purely descriptive statement is associated with his invocation to the owl in Haldernablou:

Hibou (...) aux paupières de soie gris perle qui clignent comme le flux et reflux de la mer. (PL I 225)

The natural ebb and flow of the sea is a recurring personal memory evoked in Jarry's literary texts, set against the artificial and insensitive movement of man-made machines. As we shall see below, it is, in turn, connected to his talismanic image of the marsh pool (*mare*) which appears or disappears according to rain or drought - a metaphor of a shifting, uncertain reality, real enough when there, but liable to vanish like a mirage. The rising and falling tide is associated with a rare reference by Jarry to the ache or spasm of love. As most of his dense literary texts make no reference at all to love, except cynically, we should pay special attention

⁴ Julia Kristeva, La Révolution du langage poétique, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1974, p. 46. [my emphasis]

to this passage from L'Autre Alceste, where Roboam/Jarry arrives in a pensive state at the edge of a marsh:

Plein de ces pensées, je suis venu vers le marais, et, comme dans les songes d'été, on court, dans un spasme douloureux ou amoureux, sur le sable sec, vers le reflux à qui le flux ne fait plus équilibre de la mer, et l'on chasse devant soi la déroute des petites vagues blanches murmurant sauve-qui-peut, je n'ai point vu le marais, mais un peu d'eau dans une prairie près d'un petit rocher entre des herbes desséchées...

(PL I 914-5)

Jarry therefore connects the state of reverie in this limbo region, sometimes liquid, sometimes solid, with that of love. We shall see below that this same passage goes on to evoke the precious image of the *mare*, diamond-hard memory and prime stimulus of the author's creative fantasy. *Marais*, *mer* and *mare* are united in this passage which clearly indicates their intimate association with each other and with memory in Jarry's literary universe.⁵ The *mare* image is intertextually linked to the chapter 'Selon une trajectoire' from Les Jours et les Nuits, registered as "la mare squameuse de lentilles," where the writer, no longer a free, individual child, is encumbered by overlarge uniform and an unwieldy gun and marching, as part of a battalion of anonymous soldiers, across the treasured landscape of his childhood, scarring and defiling it. The chapter slips in and out of daydream as the writer strives to superimpose his treasured memories over a too brutal present. Stylistically the chapter see-saws between harsh staccato *reportage* of the laborious military exercise taking place and descriptive sequences of the landscape filtered through the brightly-coloured gauze of memory - through the silken eyelid. Let us take two examples. Here is the hard-pressed soldier forcing his pace in order to get the exercise over:

Les respirations bruissent, et Sengle involontairement presse le pas, pour en finir. Le terrain plat où le halètement persiste jusqu'à la permission du "pas de route."

⁵ The poem 'La Régularité de la chasse' uses the phonic power of the spoken word, here 'la mer de moire mauve,' to suggest a similar word, here 'mémoire.' Jarry seems to indicate that memory has a salving power and can reach out like a hand to rescue the mind from tumbling into madness and death.

La bouche de la tombe encore ouverte à faim;

Mais ma main mince mord la mer de moire mauve.

(PL I 199)

The poem changes its rhythm and takes on slow cadences from this point.

Now the brightly-coloured, indolent scene from childhood interposes:

Les talus avec les haies rousses et la mousse bleue, où il poursuivait les grillons avec un couteau pour boucher le trou derrière eux, quand il était libre. La rivière où glisse un patineur libre. Par delà les peupliers, une croix ancienne qu'il a cherché longtemps, comme en rêve, la sachant là avant de la découvrir (...)

Against the cold and sticky trudge through winter mud ("la vase enlisante") the speeding, free-wheeling bicycle reinforces the impression of flight and freedom:

La descente sur les rochers qui sont une route où la bicyclette vibrait dans ses fourches, avec la peur d'une charrette obstruant en bas, et la route comme une piste vers les villages et les rivières. La ferme à la girouette extraordinaire, un pal à travers un coeur percé et le dragon chinois tournant après sa queue. La mare squameuse où glougloutent les bulles des dytiques bordés et des grands hydrophiles couleur de poix.
(PL I 762)

Jarry's observation that the combination of speed, vibration and potential danger led to a heightened state of awareness and was a source of artistic inspiration is one of his distinctive landmarks and we shall be developing this theory in Chapter 6.

By choosing the owl's blink as a paradigm of Being, Jarry identifies the state of Being (as opposed to Living or Thinking) with the borderland between sleeping and waking, theme of Les Jours et les Nuits.⁶ What Kristeva calls the point of fission or rupture appears in Jarry's early texts either as *horizon*, the slender box-lid or eyelid line of closure between earth and sky, which shuts out the beyond, or as *rivage*, the constantly shifting division between sea and land, at one moment solid and visible, at another engulfed by the tide, liquid and treacherous. In Jarry's poem, 'L'Homme à la Hache,' the words *horizon*, *rivage* and *vagues* are clear signposts that we have entered the in-between world of fantasy.⁷ The cryptic poem, 'Pèlerin,' which opens 'Les Paralipomènes,' also paints a surreal and shifting nocturnal

⁶ This is reinforced by the image of glued down or grown together eyelids as a metaphor of Death as here in the 'Récit de Roboam':

J'ôtai mon faux visage de la [main] gauche, regardant les oeillères qui comme les yeux de ma face se fermaient, et collaient et soudaient leurs cils. (PL I 916)

⁷ As we shall see in Chapter 4, Gauguin gave the Tahitian title of Matamoe (whose literal meaning is "closed eyes" but which he translated as "Mort") to a second smaller portrayal of the *homme à la hache* figure, in which the tropical landscape predominates, perhaps representing paradise.

landscape where sand, moon and a hinged, but locked horizon (“horizon gardant ses dons”) mock the figure of a pilgrim, dragging a single clog on a chain who is trying to find his way between seraglio and church, dogged by broken or sniggering clocks and dials, which have failed in their function of measuring instruments. (PL I 230-1) Jarry sets his positive vision of *Etre*, an unextinguishable essence which is on a par with *Éternité*, against a depressing Beckettian vision of *Vivre*, described here as the noisy, helpless spinning of a beetle on its back:

V i v r e est acte, et ses lettres n'ont que le sens du délire d'un hanneton renversé.
(PL I 342)

Jarry's definitions of *Etre* and *Vivre* more or less correspond to the Platonic definitions of *Being* and *Becoming*. For Plato *Being* is changeless, eternal, self-existent and apprehensible by thought only; *Becoming* is ever-changing, never truly existent and the object of irrational sensation. The one is in the Ideal sphere, the other in the Phenomenal. The concluding paragraph of Jarry's *Etre et Vivre* nevertheless comes down in favour of Living at the expense of both Being and Thinking and points to the philosophy that he himself would follow:

Quoique l'action et la vie soient déchéance de l'Etre et de la Pensée, elles sont plus belles que la Pensée quand conscientes ou non elles ont tué la Pensée [sic]. Donc Vivons, et par là nous serons Maîtres.
(PL I 344)

Jarry's encoded philosophical view of his own existence can be deciphered from the strange graphic arrangement of the title pages of both *Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial* and *César-Antechrist*. (Fig. 38) In advance of Marinetti's “words in freedom,” Jarry gives us “letters in freedom.” All the normal rules of left to right and top to bottom typesetting are thrown into question. Several of the letters are also given a dual function, following both mediaeval and modern conventions. The letter ‘V’ therefore doubles as ‘U’ and the letter ‘J’ as ‘I.’ Amongst other messages, out of this whirling debris of large and small letters we can salvage Jarry's personal alternative to *Cogito ergo sum*:

JE ME REVE.

If Jarry really believed that he was dreaming himself, then he would have considered himself exempt from all conventional social codes of behaviour. The idea of a dreamed self fits with his parenthetical evocation, in a review of Rachilde's novels, of *un autre monde*, which is not elsewhere but here:

Plusieurs (...) même Wells, qui est un grand homme, s'efforcèrent d'induire ce qui se passerait dans un autre monde *si l'on y allait*.

(Et ce qui se passe dans un autre monde, *si l'on y est?*)

(PL II 434)

So, bearing in mind Jarry's affirmation of the value of the waking dream, expressed in terms of the transparent *paupière de soie* as the very epitome of continuous Being, we move from the delicate blink of the owl to the camera shutter.

2.3 Pulse-beat and sphygmograph; face and photograph: recording the unrecordable.

The obsession with measuring and recording is one of the outstanding features of the 1880s and 1890s - a drive to achieve the scientific measurement of the impalpable: elusive, invisible elements such as the psyche and spiritual forces. Although Jarry counted a Kodak camera among his few possessions and keenly followed scientific and mechanical advances, he rated this frantic effort as doomed and absurd. As we shall see, his texts and illustrations repeatedly attest to this, none more so than this following tribute to the scientist Lord Kelvin:

Il n'y a rien de plus fantastique dans la fiction que l'aventure, racontée *ex cathedra* et communiquée à diverses sociétés scientifiques par Lord Kelvin, l'aventure de l'observateur, sinon mort, sinon **dépossédé de la notion d'espace et de temps**, quoi qu'il en soit ayant perdu son centimètre et sa seconde de temps solaire moyen, et les reconstituant, **dans l'éternité**, au moyen du spectre de la lumière jaune.⁸ (PL II 520) [my emboldening]

⁸ See Ch. XXXVII of *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* in which Faustroll retrieves his missing centimetre measure from the spectrum of yellow light through the sum $5,892 \times 10^{-5}$, which is the wave length of yellow light in the spectrum according to Lord Kelvin. (PL I 726)
Cf. Sir William Thomson, *Popular Lectures and Addresses, Vol. I, Constitution of Matter* 2nd (enlarged) edn. London, 1891, translated into French and published by Gauthier-Villars in 1893.

This extract from Jarry's article "De quelques romans scientifiques" pursues his concepts of *hors du temps* and *hors de forme*, to which he alludes in "Etre et Vivre." Faustroll's telepathic letter to Lord Kelvin takes up the theme which is developed to the full in "Commentaire pour servir à la construction pratique de la machine à explorer le temps." Jarry here quite clearly declares his allegiance to fantasy - boundless and Protean - as against the limiting contemporary obsession with measuring and recording. This matter-of-fact extract from his *Lettre télépathique* to Lord Kelvin shows Faustroll in a hypothetical state, out of space and time and in a state of immobility and disorientation:

Songez à la perplexité d'un homme hors du temps et de l'espace, qui a perdu sa montre, et sa règle de mesure, et son diapason. Je crois, Monsieur, que c'est bien cet état qui constitue la mort. (PL I 726)

Let us compare this with Edgar Allen Poe's poetic rendering of the same state in his poem 'Dreamland':

I have reached these lands but newly
From an ultimate dim Thule -
From a wild weird clime that lieth sublime
Out of SPACE - out of TIME.

Although there may be an allusion to Poe's poem through the use of capital letters, Faustroll's bland indifference to any concrete geographical location ("Étant donc simplement NULLE PART ou QUELQUE PART, ce qui est égal") comes much nearer to that of the Cheshire Cat in Carroll's absurd world of Wonderland, as this well-known piece of dialogue demonstrates:

ALICE: Cheshire Puss, would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?

CAT: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

ALICE: I don't much care where -.

CAT: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.

ALICE: - so long as I get *somewhere*.

CAT: Oh, you're sure to do that.

Alice's departure from a nowhere/somewhere place is succeeded by her arrival in a zone of stopped time caused by the Hatter's broken watch which condemns the party to eternal teatime. Whereas Jarry compares Faustroll's situation to that of death, Carroll relates the inability to define oneself in relation to space and time as madness. Should we therefore regard the desire to measure, record, situate and take one's bearings as a positive demonstration of life and sanity?

Marking an amazing development in the recording of movement, the first public demonstration of the cinematograph took place at the Grand Café, Boulevard Capucines on 28th December, 1895. It was the invention of Louis and Auguste Lumière of Lyons, manufacturers of photographic materials and was based in part on the Théâtre Optique of Émile Reynaud and in part on Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope. Within months it was being used throughout Europe and the United States. Jarry gives approval to this new machine but professes a strange lack of curiosity in it. His indifference is indicated by the statement in Les Jours et les Nuits that Sengle (Jarry) could not be bothered to go and see it:

Et il semblait évident à Sengle, quoique trop paresseux pour être jamais allé le voir fonctionner, que le cinématographe était préférable au stéréoscope. (PL I 770)

The measuring of movement by stereoscope was performed by Marey, who around 1890 had placed a brilliant point at the base of the lumbar vertebrae of a man walking away from the camera whose gait was recorded as two mysteriously swooping and curving lines. (Fig. 33) Jarry's stated preference for the cinematograph follows an important statement on the assimilation of forms and colours that will be discussed below which includes his crucial pronouncement, "Nous ne savons pas créer du néant, mais le pourrions du chaos."

Jarry's preference for the random, the chaotic and the pell mell - a handful of this and a

handful of that, - represents a significant stepping away from the highly ordered artistic geometry or poetic form which one wing of contemporary thought, represented by Paul Sérusier and Jean Delville, still favoured, (and to which Bernard returned), towards the automatism and spontaneous creativity which characterizes many twentieth-century movements.

The cinematograph indeed represented the chaotic throwing out of images, similar to the action of the *Machine à Peindre* described in 'Clinamen' and of Jarry's 'holy' *Bâton à Physique*. Louis Lumière's idea of making his machine "reversible", capable not only of taking cinematographic views, but projecting them as well would have been enormously appealing to Jarry, in the light of his later description of his own Time Machine. It seems that Jarry was content to regard the cinematograph as a clever invention, but, as several of his articles attest, still turned to the *bateleurs* of the fairgrounds, with their long folkloric tradition of acrobatic tricks, and to the live circus for his own entertainment.

We should like to advance a new hypothesis regarding Jarry and the research of E.-J. Marey. We have mentioned that Jarry had studied Marey's collaborative work with Emmanuel on Greek dance. Marey's descriptions of open-heart experiments on horses,⁹ his illustrations of harnessed and corseted buzzards tied to machines and the contrived experiments with models of severed hearts clearly haunted him and cast a shadow on his writing, particularly evident in 'Le Sablier.' Why then is Marey's actual name so glaringly absent from Jarry's texts? This will soon become apparent.

Jarry's interest in the scientific experiments recording movement was threefold:

- 1) as a manipulator of stringed marionettes, he was concerned with the convincing representation of individual gestures and gaits;

⁹ "Lorsque Hales appliqua le manomètre aux artères d'un cheval, il constata que la pression du sang dans ces vaisseaux décroît graduellement, à mesure qu'on fait perdre du sang à l'animal en produisant une hémorrhagie. Nous avons voulu répéter aussi l'expérience de Hales et nous sommes arrivé à des résultats absolument semblables. Sur un cheval auquel nous avons fait des hémorrhagies successives, le pouls prit de la fréquence à mesure que le manomètre accusait un abaissement de la tension artérielle moyenne." Marey, *La Physiologie médicale de la circulation du sang*. Paris, Adrien Delahaye, 1863, p. 211.

- 2) as a self-trained athlete (cyclist, fencer and canoeist);
- 3) as a writer, the fragmenting of movement into its parts spurred him to experiment with fragmenting words visually and sliding them around as in a picture puzzle, to force them into unusual relationships with each other.

Although Jarry had himself photographed cycling and fencing, we have seen that he was more interested in the power and nature of thought than in outward physical processes. The name and ideas of Bergson, who in 1900 would lecture on the “Le Mécanisme cinématographique de la pensée,” crop up frequently in Jarry’s texts and captivate him far more than those who were grappling with the physical manifestations of movement.¹⁰

Jarry’s unease towards the mechanical recording of movement also extends to the portrait photograph, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Bereft of mobility and powerless to meet the eye of the beholder, he finds it less communicative than the blank surfaces and empty eye sockets of a mask, onto which one can at least project one’s own visions. In his poem, ‘*Je ne sais pas si mon frère m’oublie,*’ Jarry laid stress on voice as the truest vehicle of personality rather than the treacherous features of the face, itself a mask:

*J’ai son portrait devant moi sur la table,
Je ne sais pas s’il était laid ou beau.
Le Double est vide et vain comme un tombeau.
J’ai perdu sa voix, sa voix adorable.* (PL I 768)
[The whole poem appears in italics]

In two of his texts, ‘Le Phonographe’ and ‘O beau rossignolet,’ to further emphasize the power of the voice, he portrays the phonograph as a dangerously compelling, Sibylline instrument with the power to control the human being. The power of both music and rhythmical oratory on the human psyche had been recognized since Plato and before. Late nineteenth-century ethnographical research by J. G. Frazer and others had further

¹⁰ Marey nevertheless belonged with Bergson to a small group organized by the Psychological Institute of Paris to study psychic phenomena, which met to investigate the “manifestations of yet undefined forces” through “strictly scientific research.” This would seem not far removed from Jarry’s Pataphysics.

demonstrated the role of rhythmical chanting in primitive societies as a trance-inducing device in shamanistic ceremonies. Here Marcueil, unable to stop performing the sexual act through his own will, attempts to break the machine to whose 'voice' he is in thrall:

Il comprit, dans un éclair lucide, que s'il ne faisait pas taire (...) tout de suite là-bas sur la table cette voix impérieuse qui était maîtresse de ses sens hyperesthésiés, de sa moelle et presque de son cerveau, il lui faudrait posséder encore, et son sexe ne pourrait pas ne pas la posséder, la femme en train de mourir que ses bras n'avaient pas lâchée. (PL II 258)

Portraying the crystal loudspeaker of the phonograph as a shining serpent, Jarry reverses the roles of snake charmer and snake, so that the machine has power over the man, foreshadowing Marcueil's eventual death in the grip of the Love-inspiring Machine. These two macabre scenes quite clearly demonstrate Jarry's ethical unease with what he saw to be a gradual renunciation or handover of responsibility to mechanisms with no capacity to make moral choices. Although the machines that he portrays fulfil two very different activities: singing and killing, the mechanically reproduced, unstoppable voice is as different from impulsive, joyful song as execution by pressing a button is from its bloodier, but more direct antecedents.

Jarry's texts betray knowledge of pulse-measuring machines known as sphygmometers. Marey invented his sphygmograph to measure the form and frequency of the human pulse, inscribed on a smoke-blackened cylinder in 1860, which was the successor to Vierordt's and Hérisson's sphygmometer. First we encounter the blackly comic description of Ubu's personal impaling stake as a "joli pal nickelé, portatif comme une canne à pêche," which not only entirely matches Marey's illustration of his sphygmograph (Fig. 34) but ironically echoes his boast that he has made it portable.¹¹ Marey seems not to have realized how he was lowering the enormous scientific stature of his invention to the level of a cheap advertisement for some household utensil or indeed a fishing rod. Jarry's second probable reference to

¹¹ "Le but que nous avons poursuivi dans la construction de notre *sphygmographe* est le suivant: enregistrer les pulsations d'une artère, non seulement avec leur fréquence, leur régularité et leur intensité relative, mais avec la forme propre à chacune d'elles. Ces résultats n'avaient été obtenus par aucun des appareils imaginés jusqu'à ce jour. De plus, nous avons cherché à faire du *sphygmographe* un instrument portatif." Marey, op. cit. p. 183.

scientific experiments on the heart is contained in his insistence on the *squeezing* of the heart in 'Le Sablier.' It seems likely that this is a veiled reference to the piezometer, (*piesein* = to squeeze), invented in 1850 by Alfred Volkmann,¹² on whose experiments Marey built.

Although sinister in tone, Jarry's 1895 poem "Le Pouls" seems to represent the defiant mythico-poetic challenge to contemporary physiologists' subjection of the human life force, debated by philosophers since Plato and Aristotle, to the mindless and thus inferior powers of machines. The poem is enunciated by the *Corne en terre rouge du héraut*, whose full title is intended to evoke the vases of archaic Greece and whose shape denotes the Horn of Plenty, but also the Phallus, distinguished, as always, by the colour red. Jarry's ostensible intent is to celebrate the mythical potency of Eros and Thanatos - Love and Death, which modern science was threatening to cheapen and eventually extinguish. Technically "Le Pouls" is a very cleverly constructed piece which refers to ancient fertility rites. The pounding rhythm and the cross-lingual pun, *pouls/πouls*, equating pulse and foot, refers to the stamping fertility dances of archaic agricultural communities in Greece and looks forward to the entrance of its bounding and revolving phallic counterpart, the Physick Stick in 'L'Acte héraldique.' 'Le Pouls,' seems to be designed as a companion piece to 'Le Sablier,' affirming primitive life forces and growth, (*pouls* being also the aural equivalent to *pousse*,) whereas 'Le Sablier' is a funerary poem, celebrating life's ebbing. Like the second part of 'La Régularité de la Chasse,' 'Le Pouls' is a concrete poem, but based on the form of the ignoble foot and born of Jarry's determination to mock fixed poetic frameworks. The pounding lyrical rhythms seem genuine, but they are carefully crafted and amount to a parody: The poem needs to be seen as a whole and we quote it in full, italicized, as it appears in Jarry's text:

*Pouls dans le vent, pouls dans la mer, pouls sur la nuit qui fuit!
La toux du pouls de mes artères bruit.
Les cornes des piliers forent leurs graminées
Comme les cors vrillés d'Ammon d'en haut sonnés.
Cloisonnant ton coeur de son marteau doux*

¹² Cf. François Dagognet, *Etienne-Jules Marey: A Passion for the Trace*, tr. Galeta and Herman, New York, Zone Books, 1992, p. 28.

*Bergère d'Ammon, d'en haut tonne et bruit
Sur le vent, la mer et la nuit
Le*

Pouls.

*Les oursins ronds ont hérissé leurs crins.
Les chevaux de mer de leur crinière de fer se creusent les reins
Et la rafale tonne et tord les cors et les cornes.
Voici le vol griffu des hippocampes au lieu des cornes d'Ammon.
Lourd sur le vent, lourd sur la mer, lourd sur la crête
Des bruits
Tapi dans les feuilles comme grimpe un menteur loup-garou
Le*

Pouls.

*Pouls dans la vie et sur la mer hors de la nuit,
Hors du sommeil et par le bruit.
Mort pointillée en repos qui survit
Où soupçonne et bout et tonne partout
Le*

Pouls.

(PL I 277-8)

The erotic motifs such as the bristling marine creatures and the crouching werewolf, also the technique of an insistent hammer rhythm equating the pounding of the blood with that of the elements, both carrying the text and at its surface, are deliberate. Jarry intends to evoke the ecstatic stamping dances of the Maenads at the time of spring. There is, however, an attempt to lead the alert reader to a shadow meaning through his irrelevant reference to *Sciapodes* just before. These are the mythical creatures who use their feet as parasols, whose name derives from the Greek, $\Sigma\kappa\iota\alpha$ = Shadow; $\Pi\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ = Foot. Given this clue, we can see that the the graphic *jointure* between one verse and the next is indeed the shape of a foot making a step. Once alerted to this shadow meaning, we may also discern a pun on the name, Hérisson, inventor of the sphygmometer, lurking behind the sea urchin metaphor, also to Marey's experiments analysing the locomotion of sea-horses and shrimps, to which Jarry alludes in a stage direction of Haldernablou, "*Écrevisse coryphée en l'aquarium supérieur.*" (PL I 218) This in turn leads us to a carefully laid punning clue to Marey in 'Le Sablier', discussed below.

Here we see that although Jarry appreciated a pure imaginative lyrical impulse in others, he found it difficult to conjure the poetic Muse himself without digressing into non-poetic, cryptic paths. He made up for this deficiency by being a clever technician and mimic and had the integrity to exclude from Les Minutes several poems, using the same metre and images, written in the style of Verhaeren, Elskamp or Kahn. It is significant that it was precisely Verhaeren, Kahn and Jarry who were singled out as forerunners of a new poetry by Marinetti and the Futurists. The device of the verse's foot, expressed graphically, is genuinely comical, however the peculiarly bitter humour that Jarry more and more needed to express sat ill with poetry. He wrote few lyric poems which were wholly untainted. The desire to gainsay or undermine the emotional, nostalgic and romantic part of himself (what he later referred to as the *moi obscur*) seems to have been overwhelming. In the main we therefore have to look for parts of poems, some included in Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and some scattered within the texts of his novels, which provide rare glimpses of an involuntary poetic sensitivity which continues to resist his compulsive habit of laying anti-poetic booby-traps.

2.4 The heart of 'Le Sablier': myth and parody.

'Le Sablier' is usually seen as a culminating seal to the Minutes de Sable Mémorial collection, in that it draws together all the motifs contained in it, both morbid and sexual. Jarry offers the fairly simple equation of sand/time = blood and depicts the upper vessel of the sandglass as the poet's heart. The lower vessel is broken. Therefore the sands of time and the poet's blood, together with his memories and perhaps his inspiration, are simply spilt.¹³ The ambiguity of the word *sable*, which also denotes the colour of mourning, heraldic black,

¹³ The allegorical motif of the broken hour-glass exactly answers Richard Stamelman's definition of poetry expressing loss as follows:

A poetry that attempts to express the bereavement and loss of death, (...) represents not the absent loved object but the brutal, unchanging reality of its death, of its disappearance as a quality defining all other qualities in a life. In particular, it affirms that nothing can ever take the place of the lost being: that no word, no figure no poem, no consoling speech or language can ever ultimately close the bottomless chasm that has now opened at the center of existence. The closure of a text - its drive towards a complete synthesized meaning, its assertion of symmetry and unity, and its confidence in mimetic representation - is therefore perpetually thwarted by the infinite openness of loss which allegory alone can express.

Richard Stamelman, Lost Beyond Telling. Representations of Death and Absence in French Poetry, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 68-9.

only emphasizes the overwhelming character of this poem as a poem of grief and loss, commemorating the sudden death of the poet's young mother and severing his bonds with childhood - the iridescent glass bubble of glowing precious memories which could be set against the dull routine of everyday adult life.

Sand is a recurrent motif, with changing and sometimes mysterious characteristics which appears at highly significant points in Jarry's poetry. As "le sable de l'oubli" the French word connotes forgetfulness more strongly than the English "sands of time", despite its obliterating function, as expressed in the final line of Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias', "The lone and level sands stretch far away." Confusingly for the reader, Jarry associates sand both with the blackness of obliteration as here in La Dragonne:

Ses doses [d'alcool] étaient trop formidables pour qu'elles ne glissent point sur ses cellules comme un fleuve se perd et se filtre à travers un sable éternel et indifférent.
(PL III 454)

and, in terms of the individual grains, with pure, crystalline, indestructible qualities as here in Messaline:

Et des saisons et des saisons avaient renouvelé des courses de charrues triges et quadriges, avant qu'elles eussent fini de soulever l'ancien sable de cristal mêlé à la terre noire de leurs sillons.
(PL II 103)

A shifting and elusive material, associated with desert wind storms and mirages, sand, for Jarry is also a soft matrix material like wax which registers imprints, yet these imprints are quickly wiped away. Here he compares the subtle, half-material, half-spiritual quality possessed by potential saints and martyrs, to that of sand:

Le pied divin les marque des sept étoiles béatifiantes, ou sinon eux, matière trop subtile pour qu'on y écrive autrement que sur le sable, l'air déjà trop mobile aussi peut-être autour de leur face.
(PL I 967)

By virtue of being uncountable, sand shares the characteristics of eternity, Jarry's ultimate measure. In particular Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial, and the text of Messaline throw up

these opposing metaphorical characteristics.

Within the motif of 'Le Sablier' container and contents bear equal importance. From the later perspective of Surrealism, the underlying idea of André Breton's Les Vases communicants will be evident and helps to throw light on Jarry's cryptic intentions. Breton drew his inspiration from Galileo, who set up an experiment to show that the surface of the liquid in several communicating vessels maintained the same level. In Breton's vision the two urns represent dream and wakefulness, balancing each other, constantly spilling into each other and contributing to each other's intensity. Jarry's double vessel is a more complex amalgam of Symbolist inter-reflectiveness - the whirling lighthouse beam (*phare tournant*) of his focused concentration picks out every single aspect of the hourglass that he can muster, whether visual, mythical, erotic or occult, and plays them off against each other. His intention is to create the type of poetic synthesis that he had defined in 'Linteau' as "oeuvre unique faite de toutes les oeuvres possibles offertes à tous les yeux encerclant le phare argus de la périphérie de notre crâne sphérique." (PL I 172)

The poem adopts a stark geometrical schema, depicting two triangles, point to point. This can be interpreted in several ways and Jarry deliberately deploys a multiple iconic intertext in this poem. It is a visual motif known as the hourglass shape, found on Copper Age pottery and in other primitive drawings, and thought to represent a stylized female figure with upraised arms wearing a skirt-like garment.¹⁴ (Fig. 46) But the motif also refers to the mother and child theme which runs so strongly through this poem of memorial and memory,

¹⁴ See R. L. Mégroz, Profile Art Through the Ages. A Study of the use and significance of profile and silhouette from the Stone Age to Puppet Films, London, The Art Trade Press Ltd., 1948, pp. 24 and 26. Haddon, quoting Ehrenreich says "a triangle does not by any means indicate that simple geometrical figure, but the small, three-cornered article of women's clothing." Cf. P. Ehrenreich, 'Mitteilungen über die zweite Xingu-Expedition in Brasilien', Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, xxii, 1890, p. 89, cited in Haddon, op. cit..

but which is unstated.¹⁵ We see it again in his article, 'La Vierge et L'Enfant,' which reduces the configuration of the Madonna and Child to a basic schema of two triangles, as depicted in the L'Ymagier illustration labelled simply 'Image populaire 17^e siècle'¹⁶

La Vierge et l'Enfant, triangles semblables, drapés d'isocèles chapes sacerdotales
comme le son des cloches (...)(PL I 979)

The mother and child symbolism that Jarry understands by this schematic configuration of the double triangle is of capital importance to the meaning of 'Le Sablier.'

As we have said, the strains which run through 'Le Sablier' provide a strange mixture of the Christian, the obscene and the occult. The poem contains typical Jarryesque ambiguities relating to *anneau* and *pal* which suggest an obscene subtext,¹⁷ yet cannot be regarded as pure spoof. The strong statement of occult motifs cannot be trivialized. The poem is also one of mourning and memorial which belongs to the same phonic category as Lorca's memorial poem, 'Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías.' Jarry uses rolling 'r's and the staccato repetition of *ton coeur* to drive home a harsh, funereal drumbeat rhythm.¹⁸ The repeated double beat of the two words *tonka-tonka*, with the stress falling on the second, is clearly intended to evoke the double beat of the heart - systole and diastole.

And now we come to Jarry's main parodic intertext alluding to physiological experiments

¹⁵ The importance of the theme of intimacy between mother and son to Jarry and his suppression of it is nowhere so evident as in his several crossed out attempts to rewrite Solveig's lullaby at the end of Peer Gynt. From babyhood to death the mother-child union is here expressed as continuous:

Ils passeront la vie entière
un contre l'autre ...

See Appendix II.

¹⁶ L'Ymagier no. 1, oct. 1894, p. 157.

¹⁷ Cf. Marcel Détienné, Dionysos at Large, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 1989, originally published as Dionysos à ciel ouvert, Paris, Hachette, 1986. Détienné gives a good general account of the mythical representation of Dionysos as both beating heart and bounding phallus, which is relevant to the hopping (*pedan*) of the Bâton-à-physique and binds 'Le Sablier' thematically to 'L'Acte héraldique' of César-Antechrist and to Mnester's dance of Messaline.

¹⁸ Constructed in two parts, like an hourglass itself, the novel Messaline makes what we judge to be an intentional reference back to the combined motifs of tom-toms and glass (the tom-tom is hourglass-shaped) in the first chapter of Part II ("Puis le verre répercuta le grondement d'un tambour de Taprobane...") (PL II 116)

to record the movements of the heart. This intertext depends on knowledge of E.-J. Marey's early scientific text, *Physiologie médicale de la circulation du sang*. The motif of the squeezed or constricted heart becomes totally clear in the light of Marey's illustration of his working model of the heart created by a rubber and a glass ampoule attached to each other, (Fig. 35) which strikingly reproduces the basic shape of a normal hourglass. Jarry's poem which refers to the theosophical notion of the soul's release by way of the occiput needs to be read alongside Marey's accompanying description to appreciate his grim parody of the physiologist's scientific account given here:

L'ampoule V (ventricule) est enfoncée dans une ampoule de verre (...) si l'on foule de l'air dans le ballon v, le ventricule se trouve comprimé dans tous les sens. Il se resserre donc sans l'influence de la pression environnante et expulse son contenu par le seul orifice qui en permette la sortie, le tube VA."¹⁹

The poem's penultimate line, "Au van des vents longtemps errés," phonically similar to the above passage, but transformed to poetry through its connotations with the romantic concept of wild, primeval winds and through the insistent rat-a-tat beat of the verse, which grips the attention and drills the words into the memory.

Printed in upper case as the climactic *cri solitaire* or *Eli sabacthani* of Jarry's poem, matching Rimbaud's "O flots abracadabrantésques,/Prenez mon coeur qu'il soit sauvé,"²⁰ here is Jarry's poetic equivalent to Marey's scientific "expulsion of the heart's contents."

VERSE TON AME QU'ON ÉTRANGLE
AUX TROIS VENTS FOUS DE TON TRIANGLE

Through Marey, the spectre of Monsieur Hébert in the physics laboratory of the *Lycée de*

¹⁹ Marey, op. cit. p. 41.

See also Marey's accounts of experiments with actual tortoise hearts filled with bull's blood, aesthetically set up for chronophotography as follows:

Le tout est établi sur un support solide S, et se détache en silhouette sur un fond clair.

Marey, *Le Mouvement*, Paris, Masson, 1894, pp. 274-5.

²⁰ From the poem variously titled 'Le Coeur volé,' 'Le Coeur du pitre' or 'Coeur supplicié' in Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies, Une Saison en enfer, Illuminations*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 72.

Rennes, hovers over this poem, encapsulating the notion of science at its least humane and its least imaginative. This verse is the retort of his most resistant, rebellious and imaginative pupil.

Indeed Jarry describes the heart's *ballon* or *aérostat*, caught up on the three posts,²¹ which, later described as "Le triple pal noirci," are more evocative of the charred laboratory tripod than the usual urban telegraph poles:

Pends ton coeur aérostat, aux
Triples poteaux monumentaux.
Que tout ton lest vidé ruisselle:

He would later evoke these rubber parodies of the heart, as the grotesque visions which haunt Sengle in his delirium, together with other hearts, as follows:

Le coeur de Sengle battit avec une intensité et fréquence sonore, (...). Et il rêva ensuite encore de coeurs anatomisés, coeurs de gastéropodes séparés, au milieu de longs vaisseaux, comme des bulbes en caoutchouc d'injecteurs; coeurs de crocodiles égyptiens, embaumés dans des vases de verre pendant que l'animal errait derrière les dernières convulsions de ses mâchoires. (PL I 785)

One of Jarry's principal themes in 'Le Sablier' is therefore the debasing of the heart as a symbol of life and traditional source of poetic inspiration. The allegorical form of the double-chambered hourglass, which reflects the two chambers of the heart and needs sand to function as much as the heart needs blood, is particularly apt. Unlike the human heart and despite the jaggedly broken glass chamber of the illustration, (the *doigts estropiés* referred to earlier), the poem seems to affirm the hourglass as an indestructible instrument pouring out the sands of time eternally and, in these sibilant lines, which even imitate the hissing of falling sand, upholds an enduring unextinguishable value in human life:

²¹ The trapping of the balloon on the posts is linked to the idea of the astral body for which Jarry also uses the metaphor of the escaped kite, treated in 'Consul Romanus,' and which will be discussed in Chapter 5. The swollen *aérostat* is the visual counterpart of the thin snapped glass "waist" (*ton corselet de guêpe fin*) of the hourglass representing the void, through which life is escaping into its ever-heavier phantom. Similar images had been used by Odilon Redon.

Et sur leur sang ineffaçable
Verse ton sable intarissable.

However ingenious Marey's crude model, duplicating the heart and capable of perpetual motion, Jarry's point is that whatever secrets can be squeezed from this poor pumping artefact, neither rubber and glass ampoules nor severed tortoise heart, can ever achieve the mythical stature of either the hourglass, wasp-waisted symbol of both Woman and Time, or of the real beating human heart. The punning clue to the physiologist-photographer has so far escaped attention. Laid in the first and last verses ("marais") and balancing the reference to Hérisson in 'Le Pouls,' it does not detract from Jarry's affirmation that the human attribute of nostalgic memory endows him with an indestructible individual value, separating him from all other humans, giving him an unpredictable quality impossible in insects. The *fil de mémoire* described by Bergson, the unique silver trail unravelled in the memory as life proceeds, defines the individual and is equivalent to his conscious self.²² It is his *trace* and cannot be eradicated even by death. This helps to explain Jarry's mysterious and emphasized term *pelotonnement*, describing the final acrobatic pose of Mnester's dance, to which we shall return in Chapter 6. (PL II 116) The curled posture at the end of the dance represents the end of life itself.

The merry flying snail, of Jarry's illustration to 'Guignol' and whose *trace* is clearly marked in the air, unravelling from the dense spiral of its self, represents the soul or 'âme badine,' we would argue, escaping its earthly persecutors with sticking out tongue.²³ (Fig. 36) Now with the final word of 'Le Sablier' Jarry strikes a blow against the dry science represented by Marey in his early experiments by obliterating his name under the name of his

²² "C'est si l'on veut, le déroulement d'un rouleau, car il n'y a pas d'être vivant qui ne se sente arriver peu à peu au bout de son rôle: et vivre consiste à vieillir. Mais c'est tout aussi bien un enroulement continu, comme celui d'un fil sur une pelote, car notre passé nous suit, il se grossit sans cesse du présent qu'il ramasse sur sa route; et conscience signifie mémoire."

Henri Bergson, *La Pensée et le Mouvant*, Paris, Alcan, 1934, p. 208.

²³ "Et les chandelles de résine pleurent des larmes qui grésillent; et dans leur fumée d'encens regardent de leurs yeux troubles monter l'âme badine du navré Achras." (PL I 185)

own most precious talisman, the teeming Breton marsh pool of his childhood memories, elsewhere called *mare*, but here subtly changed to *marais*.

Suspend ton coeur aux trois piliers,
Suspend ton coeur les bras liés,
Suspend ton coeur, ton coeur qui pleure
Et qui se vide au cours de l'heure
Dans son reflet sur un marais.
Pends ton coeur aux piliers de grès.

The penultimate verse, evoking an ash-filled heart, alludes specifically to Rimbaud's deeply pessimistic 'Coeur supplicié' and provides the affirming poetic response to it in the last, where Jarry places the magical *res* like a counter over the identical phonemes of the scientist's name cancelling out both it and the life-debasing experiments that it stands for:

Plante un gibet en trois endroits,
Un gibet aux piliers étroits,
Où l'on va pendre un coeur à vendre.
De ton coeur on jette la cendre,
De ton coeur qui verse la mort.

Le triple pal noirci le mord;
Il mord ton coeur, ton coeur qui pleure
Et qui se vide au cours de l'heure
Au van des vents longtemps errés
Dans son reflet sur un **marais**.

An important role of 'Le Sablier' seems therefore to set out the contest between the imaginative values represented by Rimbaud (from whose work Dr. Faustroll/ Jarry selects the

magical and nonsensical image “les glaçons jetés par le vent de Dieu aux mares”²⁴) and the blinkered scientific values represented by Marey. Our thesis is that the upholding of imaginative values against all others represents, in a nutshell, Jarry’s lifelong artistic mission.

We have considered two possible and equally valid interpretations of ‘Le Sablier.’ In Section 7 of this chapter we shall look at Jarry’s part-parodic rendering of so-called Pattern Poetry, where he takes the typical pattern motif of a wedding chalice as the subject of his poem, but portrays a fractional distillation column. The hourglass was likewise a traditional motif for pattern poetry by virtue both of its distinct shape and the worthy cause of constant diligence, to which it lent itself. Jarry seems to lean towards these pattern motifs in the *Minutes* collection since, with the chalice and the axe, the hourglass and the pair of hearts are the third and fourth typical pattern motifs that he deploys as the central theme of a poem, capriciously turning what was conventionally the concrete outer form of the poem as its actual subject. Following the terminology given by Dick Higgins, the full hourglass was known as “the triquet displayed” and the inverted triangle “the triquet reverst”. Although we have argued that ‘Le Sablier’ is a genuine grief poem expressing Jarry’s recent bereavement we cannot ignore the accompanying illustration, ‘Le Coeur qui pleure,’ the “vilain petit bois” as

²⁴ A phrase from ‘Larme’ in *La Saison en enfer*, in which Rimbaud sees the possibility of drinking the *aurum potabile*, the liquid gold which brings eternal life, but was unable to bring himself to drink it. The implicit link that Jarry makes between the undrinkable philosopher’s gold, (here the sunset gold, iced over and made inaccessible) the evanescent *mare* of his childhood and the untrodden sand is an important one. This poem no longer figures in the most recent editions of Rimbaud’s work.

Loin des oiseaux, des troupeaux, des villageoises,
Que buvais-je, à genoux dans cette bruyère
Entourée de tendres bois de noisetiers,
Dans un brouillard d’après-midi tiède et vert?

Que pouvais-je boire dans cette jeune Oise,
- Ormeaux sans voix, gazon sans fleurs, ciel couvert!
Boire à ces gourdes jaunes, loin de ma case
Chérie? Quelque liqueur d’or qui fait suer.

Je faisais une louche enseigne d’auberge.
- Un orage vint chasser le ciel. **Au soir**
L’eau des bois se perdait sur les sables vierges,
Le vent de Dieu jetait des glaçons aux mares;

Pleurant, je voyais de l’or - et ne pus boire.
Contained in Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud*, London, Faber, 1973, p. 197 [my emphasis].

Jarry called it, containing two inverted triangles or “triquets reverst” and which Higgins asserts are sometimes used to signify that the real meaning of the poem is the opposite of what it says it is.²⁵ Let us take this as a further and very necessary clue laid by Jarry to the pun on Marey’s name. This poem represents a fascinating plait, where the strands of the genuine and the parodic would seem to be of equal weight.

Before we leave the simple outlines of ‘Le Sablier,’ which is undoubtedly Jarry’s most obvious example of simplicity expressed as “du complexe resserré et synthétisé,” and without hoping to unravel all the meanings in it, we should nevertheless touch on the occult aspects that it represents, especially its message about the equal identity of opposites which announces the main theme of César-Antechrist which follows it.

The theme is still that of movement or “Mobility” according to the term of Jakob Boehme, whom we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. The inverted triangle is regarded as unstable and therefore evocative of Boehme’s concept of “Mobility”; the lower, but broken triangle is supposed to represent the stability of God’s spiritual presence (in this case perhaps the maternal presence). The two triangles, stable and unstable, white and black, appear in a hermetic diagram which was intended to form a graphic synopsis of Boehme’s cosmo-conception. This is Freher’s Byss, Abyss - Nothing and All - Time and Eternity, mentioned above. The Outpouring (*verser*) of Fierceness (here *cendre* denoting black sand) is symbolized as a triangle balancing on its apex, expressing Boehme’s idea that the “Fierceness in every power maketh all things moveable running and generative.”²⁶ The Outpouring of Solar Light emanates from the lower triangle. The two Outpourings of Fierceness and Light interact, according to Boehme, to produce a third Outpouring, called Conflict. The Meeting Point of the two forces produces what Boehme calls the *Kreuzrad* or Crossed Wheel and its revolving motion akin to the Sun-Wheel or Circle and Cross symbol remarked on by Waring.

²⁵ Dick Higgins, Pattern Poetry. Guide to an Unknown Literature. New York, State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 79.

²⁶ See William Law, The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher, Vol. IV, London, 1781.

In 'Le Sablier' it is represented by the *anneau noir*. Jarry represents it as a vorticist force at the very source of the creative impulse: "Le Temps verse aux orbites entonnoirs, en la suture saggitale." (PL I 249) He would later link this magical revolving motion to the archaic seduction instrument, known as the Jynx or Bull Roarer. It is also the spiral that we see tattooed on Ubu's belly. The legend on Freher's banner explains the cause of our time-ridden condition as follows:

Outbreathed exhalation from spirit Δ and spirit ∇ which is called time in this world.²⁷

Jarry likewise gives us Chronos and Saturn united in the icon of the double triangle - in fact surely the main significance of the Sandglass is as a symbol of Time.

In this discussion of Jarry's private battle against the onset of the scientific and mechanical age we have looked at 'Le Sablier' from at least five angles: myth, primitive art, pattern poetry, the occult and as a genuine lament. At an intertextual level we have invoked the names of Rimbaud, Marey and Boehme and at the metatextual level Saturn, Marsyas, Odin and Jesus Christ. However parodic in intent, the function of the parody is a serious one and the care of composition in this culminating poem of the *Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial* collection is meticulous.

If we take 'Le Sablier' as the masterpiece of Jarry's Symbolist mode and certainly representative of his 1894 style of writing we can begin to interpret his artistic values. His protest was directed not against poetry, but against rigid or artificial formats, which passed for poetry and against the establishment and the unquestioning, tradition-loving *foule*. He deployed cryptic satirical word play and visual outlines to uphold poetic values, not to undermine them. Wherever the establishment tried to impose standards or rules on literature and art, Jarry would be there to overthrow them, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Jarry upheld

²⁷ I am indebted to Fred Gettings' analysis of similar occultic triangular structures in Blake's *The Body of Abel found by Cain*, in Fred Gettings, *The Hidden Art. A study of occult symbolism in art*, London, Studio Vista, 1978, pp. 120-5.

the absolute authority of the imagination, whether artistic or mystical. Hence his unexplained choice, out of all the saints, of St. Gertrude the Great as subject for one of his few woodcuts, and his detailed references to the visions of the naive German mystic Catherine Emmerich. Genius was his only valid criterion (“Du moment que le peintre a du génie, c’est le peintre qui a raison.”) The law, the ‘proven’ theories of science and mathematics, fixed verse forms and representational art were all fodder for Jarry’s absurdist logic and deforming imagination. There are no ‘right answers’ in his universe. The mission of poetry and art in his view is always to push against the barriers of the latest theories and to seek the unknown. In his last years Jarry was to say that the only worthwhile thing he had written was ‘*Éléments de Pataphysique*.’ This is an appropriate moment to look at his definition of this imaginary science which posits the existence of an alternative universe to this one and whose laws are equally valid²⁸ :

Elle (la pataphysique) étudiera les lois qui régissent les exceptions et expliquera l’univers supplémentaire à celui-ci; ou moins ambitieusement décrira un univers que l’on peut voir et que peut-être l’on doit voir à la place du traditionnel, les lois que l’on a cru découvrir de l’univers traditionnel étant des corrélations d’exceptions aussi, quoique plus fréquentes, en tous cas de faits accidentels qui, se réduisant à des exceptions peu exceptionnelles, n’ont même pas l’attrait de la singularité.

DÉFINITION: *La pataphysique est la science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux linéaments les propriétés des objets décrits par leur virtualité.* (PL I 668-9)

We shall have cause to return to this definition quit often. If we apply it to ‘Le Sablier’, it implies that the outlines of the Sandglass could symbolically refer to the author himself, reflecting on and breaking with his past. Certainly the symbolic accordance of the properties of objects to their lineaments is the function of profile art, whether applied to ornament, as we have seen in Chapter 1 or to mask and marionette, the subject of Chapter 5. Jarry is here declaring his creed.

²⁸ Although Lewis Carroll does not figure amongst the *élus*, the title that Jarry planned for a future collection of poetry was *Navigations dans le miroir*, declaring a clear affiliation with the nonsense principles of the English writer and his belief in an ‘alternative world,’ as expressed in *Through the Looking Glass*.

In semiotic terms, 'Le Sablier,' which has been the main subject of this section, represents a multiple layering of meaning and interreflectiveness which we shall not meet in such density until the chapter of Messaline, 'Il dansait quelquefois le nuit.' It is a masterly synthesis - a packing down of different literary manners and motifs. It represents Jarry's notion of condensed and tightened simplicity, as defined by him here in relation to Filiger's paintings:

Simplicité condensée, diamant du charbon, oeuvre unique faite de toutes les oeuvres possibles.
(PL I 172)

Unfortunately it is not so easy to separate a diamond into its chemical components. From this very abstract poem, concerned with Death, Eternity and Jarry's belief in a continuous "Etre", let us move to "Vivre" and the Cockchafer or *hanneton*.

2.5 The instinctual drive: the human being viewed as insect.

Although the human being as insect is a recurring motif throughout Jarry's texts, we maintain that this is precisely the idea that he rejects. He certainly portrays machines as insects, as we shall see from his portrayal of train as bee-moth in Haldernablou. Ellen Elson's modern red racing car in Le Surmâle, another "bête métallique," is described in terms of a scarab /automobile and the six-man bicycle team are masked and bound together at the legs, so that they are not only dehumanized but operate in unison like a centipede. Later, in the huge turning tower, they will compare themselves to flies crawling on the ceiling. Once again we see Jarry juxtaposing myth and machine: the idea of the insect as a magical and mythical creature (Psyche as butterfly; Arachne as spider and the sacred Egyptian scarab) set against the insect (stripped down human skeleton in miniature) as a pure mechanism.

In Chapter 1 we showed how Jarry combined the idea of the soul's release with Psyche as a silk moth, to contextualize the Asiatic Tree Tender in a setting of Chinese silk culture. His

descriptions of Messaline's powerful jaw muscles (*mandibules*) are strangely at odds with human norms of female beauty but are completely appropriate to the attributes of the female trapdoor spider or *mygale* of his early texts. Indeed her emergence as from a *trappe* out of the hillside in Chapter VI of Messaline is a clear pointer to this identity and reinforces her predatory character.

Following his own technique of "literary collage," we have seen how Jarry is prepared to interlard slices of E.- J. Marey's texts, altered or unaltered, into his own work and we shall prove that he did the same with the texts of J.- H. Fabre. Fabre, however, is in a category of his own, in that he bursts the bonds of scientific disquisition and creates a genre of lyrical-scientific-philosophical writing of his own such as Jarry attributes to Bathybius in Le Surmâle.

First let us take some examples of the Insect-Machine. The unfortunate Achras of 'L' Autoclète' impaled on Marey's "joli pal portatif" is a clear metaphorical reference to a pinned live insect. The motif of the impaled insect is repeated in the 'Récit de Balkis', when Doublemain crucifies a giant water beetle on his mast in order to give the boat momentum, commenting "Le bourdonnement de tes ailes autour de ton corps strident est épouvantable." (PL I 912) Doublemain's sympathy with his victim's audible discomfort is a sentiment which never mars Marey's scientific enthusiasm, entranced as he is by the beauty of the golden blur created by his pinioned subjects, any more than it affects the aesthetic pleasure in the beauty of suffering which Lautréamont repeatedly portrays in the Chants. In his 1894 article on Charles Filiger's Breton paintings, Jarry refers to Filiger's love of the "pure and pious", but uses the pure evil represented by Maldoror as a counterpoint. He here insists on his image of beauty and suffering encapsulated in the pinned moth or butterfly, metaphor for the human condition:

Filiger les Bretons résignés, ovale presque losange, encadrés aux portes de verdure des fermes et des noces, faits pour le supplice dont ils ne bougeront pas, qui donc ne fanera pas ces lépidoptères (je les trouverais bien plus beaux crucifiés - et qui sait? Ils portent tous tout le crucifiement au coeur de leur face immortellement immobile).

(PL I 1025)

The metaphor of the winged insect and the juxtaposition of Lautréamont and Filiger anticipates Dr. Faustroll's selection from the Chants of "le scarabée, beau comme le tremblement des mains dans l'alcoolisme, qui disparaissait à l'horizon." (PL II 666) The insubstantial 'beauty' of an insect's trembling or whirring wings, so prized by Marey and so difficult to capture on the photographic plate, cannot be in doubt. On two occasions Jarry evokes the flight of the Broad-bordered Bee Hawk Moth (*Macroglosse fusiforme*), renowned for the extraordinarily rapid beat of its transparent wings and which used to prompt entomologists to lyrical outpourings.²⁹ Because the wings are invisible, Jarry uses it as a glamorized metaphor for the train in Haldernablou in a pompous and dense eulogy, companion piece to his energetic and neologistic praise of the *Bâton-à-Physique*, another item looted from the Chants. Both this first ode to the train and Achras's death on the stake in Guignol would seem to have their roots in Fabre's Souvenirs entomologiques. Let us compare the two relevant passages which depend on the metaphor of the squirrel in its wheel:

FABRE

Faisant face au captif, l'Araignée ramène un peu le ventre au dessous d'elle et du bout de filières touche un instant l'insecte; puis avec les tarses d'avant elle met son sujet en rotation. **L'Écureuil dans le cylindre mobile de sa cage n'a pas de dextérité plus gracieuse et plus rapide.** Une traverse de la spire gluante sert d'axe à la machinette qui vire prestement vire, ainsi qu'un broche de rôtisserie. C'est régal pour les yeux que de la voir tourner.³⁰

JARRY

Gavée des intestins terrestres, **tu dépenses ta force dans la rage de tes verticaux cercles d'écureuil**, et bourdonnes si douce sur la terre qui te tient en sa glu, que tu sembles le vol de limace d'une fusiforme macroglosse. [my emboldening] (PL I 217)

Not only can we match the Palotins' cannibalistic glee and the *vire-vire* movement of their

²⁹ "This Sphinx is a true lover of the sun; its flight is only in its rays; he who has not seen this fairy creature pendulizing over a purple patch of the common bugle - anon descending to sip without alighting (...) its body the while motionless, its legs shivering, and its wings invisible and undefined through rapidity of motion (...) has a delight yet to come."

Edward Newman, British Butterflies and Moths, London, William Glaisner, 1869, Pt. II, p. 11.

³⁰ J.-H. Fabre, Souvenirs entomologiques, 9ième série, Paris, Ch. Delagrave, 1881, Vol. VI, p. 144.



rotating victim to Fabre's description of the spider wrapping its prey, but we can identify Achras' "silhouette cristallisée en X" with "l'X de l'araignée tétrapode" of 'Les Paralipomènes II' when Aster, also connoted as spider, ties up his sister, right arm to right leg and left arm to left leg in imitation of some male spiders which bind the female to avoid being eaten during the mating process. (PL I 237)

As we shall see in the next chapter, the spectacle of ritual torture, bleeding and crucifixion is the subject of three of the mediaeval woodcuts that Jarry uses to illustrate Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and César-Antechrist, highlighting the barbarous customs which human society time and time again sanctions in the name of religion or law. Continuing with the analogy of human and insect or aquatic creature, we move to Marey's experiments with specimens in double-chambered aquariums, another variety of *communicating vessels* to those of the Sandglass.³¹ Jarry presents the Gare St. Lazare, which had an illuminated glass ceiling, as a vast aquarium in which to examine human specimens, here evoked simply as "La lumière sur le glauque daïs horizontal" but in L'Amour absolu referred to more explicitly in terms of an aquarium:

Quand il a quelque nostalgie de la mer, Monsieur Dieu va au vitrage de la gare Saint-Lazare, lequel à l'heure des lumières, ressemble pas mal à un aquarium. (PL I 938)

Haldern and Ablou lift their gaze to the glass ceiling, over which men and women are passing like Marey's highlighted specimens and indeed Jarry reads the gender of the gaits passing overhead like a text: the military one-two; one-two of trousered male legs, seen in terms of a snail's jerky tentacular probing (*le discontinu*) set against the hip-swinging, but swirling movement (*le continu*) of the female, skirted form, seen as amoeba under the microscope, bumping up against each other, like round, jostled baskets in a crowded street:

³¹ "On forme avec deux glaces lutées au mastic, un petit aquarium dont les dimensions soient égales à celles du champ que devra couvrir l'image, et l'on place l'animal, une crevette par exemple dans cette petite caisse rempli d'eau de mer. En recueillant sur pellicule mobile les images successives qui se détachent en silhouette sur un fond lumineux, on obtient la série des mouvements des membres." Marey, Le Mouvement, p. 222.

(skirts=circles=amoebae=baskets.)³² Here are the respective passages:

MALE

Une, deux; une, deux; les jambes s'allongent
et s'accourcissent comme l'une après l'autre
les cornes d'un limaçon alternativement
aiguillonnées. (PL I 218)

FEMALE

Des robes de femmes, sur nous passent
déhanchés des mouvements amiboïdes de
corbeilles qu'on cahote.

For everyday walking, Marey and Muybridge focused only on photographing the movement of the nude body. Jarry's innovation is not only to analyse human movement from *beneath*, but to describe, as an artist, the flowing movement of clothed pedestrians: men in trousers and women in long skirts. Clothed and blurred by the effect of the thick glass, they retain their suggestive power. By contrast, Muybridge's nude sequences have a slightly repellent and degrading quality, especially if regarded from the perspective of the meticulous Nazi film records of stripped Jews forced to run to their place of execution and burial. Here Jarry's italicized stage direction is as follows:

Au dessus en majeure amplitude, oscillent et croisent leur zénith des ombres rondes, noires et dentelées.

By evoking these saw-toothed discs Jarry imposes a sinister theatrical effect, which rather recalls the rayed circles of the previous chapter. He would persist with the terrifying aspect of the *monères* as "reines d'épouvantement" in his poem 'Au Repaire des géants.' Again and again Jarry would insist on the value of the suggested or shadow image of the Platonic cave against the bald, apparent reality which presents itself to the camera's aperture - hence his repeated reference to the *papillon noir*, his metaphor for the typical double shadow cast by a pair of horses under the gas lighting, as Parisians made their way home at night by cab.

(PL I 220)

³² Vallotton's *Les Passants* of 1895 gives a graphic contemporary portrayal of the round-based swaying forms of female pedestrians.

Women are here portrayed as mysterious, remote and awesome creatures, devoid of voyeuristic connotations. The glass barrier between the young men and the women they are watching is symbolic as well as real. In L'Amour absolu, where the context is one of contemporary psychiatric theory, the scene is recalled with overt sexual connotations. Emmanuel/Jarry's sexual initiation, the crossing of the barrier, which he describes in characteristic terms of a clown jumping through a paper hoop, is indicated as follows:

Emmanuel a franchi le vitrage - d'un coup de tête, un clown en scaphandre - de l'aquarium de la gare Saint-Lazare. (PL I 942)

In the Haldernablou passage we see Jarry's first attempts to look at objects from unconventional angles and to perceive different but equally valid forms from the accepted and traditional. He would later make a personal doctrine of this policy, as enunciated in the following important statement from 'Éléments de Pataphysique' that we shall be quoting again:

Pourquoi chacun affirme-t-il que la forme d'une montre est ronde, ce qui est manifestement faux, puisqu'on lui voit de profil une figure rectangulaire étroite, elliptique de trois quarts, et pourquoi diable n'a-t-on noté sa forme qu'au moment où l'on regarde l'heure? Peut-être sous le prétexte de l'utile. Mais le même enfant, qui dessine la montre ronde, dessine aussi la maison carrée, selon la façade, et cela évidemment sans raison; car il est rare, sinon dans la campagne, qu'il voie un édifice isolé, et dans une rue même les façades apparaissent selon des trapèzes très obliques. (PL I 669)

This passage prematurely points to some of the tenets of Cubism but also derives from the theosophical point of view of vision on the astral plane as outlined by C. W. Leadbeater, where "an object is seen, as it were, from all sides at once, the inside of a solid being as plainly open to the view as the outside."³³ We shall return to this idea in Chapter 4.

By 1900 Jarry's texts begin to carry a satirical message aimed at the Scientist as Voyeur. We must regard this in the context of Eadweard Muybridge's macabre nude sequences, poised between science and art, showing a double amputee getting down from a chair, a

³³ C. W. Leadbeater, The Astral Plane: its inhabitants and phenomena, 1895, p. 6 ff. quoted in Gettings op. cit. n. 19 to ch. 6.

women subject to convulsions and finally a woman spanking her baby.³⁴ The Marcueil/Ellen 'love scene' of *Le Surmâle* is certainly portrayed in terms of a controlled sexual experiment conducted under glass and approached with a researcher's curiosity by Dr. Bathybius as follows:

Il s'avança vers la vitre comme il eût approché son oeil de l'oculaire d'un prodigieux télescope, emporté sous sa coupole trépidante par de colossales horlogeries, et braqué sur un monde inexploré. (PL II 243)

But instead of portraying Bathybius bending to his task with the dry and meticulous determination of a Marey, Jarry has him carried away by a "scientifico-lyrico-philosophical" reverie, of which he makes an unconscious written record. Far more 'poetic' than the repeated mechanical copulation of the human subjects under observation is the doctor's imaginative rendering of the irresistible force propelling them in the form of the natural magnetism between Sperm and Ovum, which he here portrays as Gods, just as he had portrayed the microscopic amoebae as Queens of the Munthian Underworld:

Quand le dieu et la déesse veulent s'unir, ils entraînent chacun de leur côté, l'un vers l'autre, le monde où ils habitent. L'homme et la femme croient se choisir... comme si la terre avait la prétention de faire exprès de tourner!

C'est cette passivité de pierre qui tombe que l'homme et la femme appelle l'amour. (PL II 245)

Jarry here professes to espouse a fatalistic philosophy, based on the theories of Delbeuf, denying humans the freedom of choice that would raise them above insects. In a later review, he quotes several psychologists' definitions of love, each drier than the last. Love is reduced by Théodule Ribot to a long algebraic formula, which Jarry cites deadpan. Rather like Marey's description of his experiments with hearts it begins as follows:

Représentons par A un état intellectuel et par s l'état affectif qui l'accompagne; A par

³⁴ Robert Bartlett Haas, *Muybridge, Man in Motion*, Berkeley, London & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1976.

association suscite B, C, D, E, etc. *s* est transféré successivement à B, C, D, E, etc.³⁵

It is precisely this scientific ambition which seeks to reduce emotions and movements to their individual ingredients that Le Surmâle satirizes. What Jarry attacks is the cold rationality of Marcueil's and Ellen's mechanical approach to breaking the human record for continuous copulation. In his view they reduce themselves to the level of clockwork toys subject to a durability test, or a pair of fighting cockchafers (*hannetons*) who must continue tearing each other apart until one dies. (The six-man cycling team, bound as a single twelve-legged monster-insect is in the same category.)

The element of voyeurism in Le Surmâle is actually supplied by the audience of seven prostitutes more than by Bathybius. They finally shatter the glass membrane which separates them from the 'experiment' and change the tone of the scene from the scientific/aesthetic to the pornographic. As in Messaline, Jarry makes the tacit point that the individual reader or spectator is responsible for the interpretation that he lays on a performance, painting or piece of writing. All interpretations are possible and equivalent.

When Messaline came out in book form Jarry wrote an anonymous titillating review emphasizing the obscene and lascivious aspects of the novel in an attempt to attract a readership. His claim, "On y trouvera des gladiateurs d'un genre ignoré et obscène" is a deliberate distortion. Messaline is a highly complex and thoroughly documented piece of literature, whose erotic content is defused by the matter of fact tone of the narration and the disparate nature of the subject matter. Elsewhere Jarry frequently distances himself from the prurience that he attributes to the average reader or writer, as here in 'Barnum':

A peine devons-nous reconnaître que quelque rubrique "Sport" se tapit à la dernière page des quotidiens, et que quatre-vingt-dix-neuf sur cent - mais pas plus! - de nos romans sont exclusivement réservés à exploiter la sollicitude de l'homme à l'égard de son appareil reproducteur. (PL II 332)

³⁵ See Jarry's review of Gaston Danville's la Psychologie de l'amour, La Revue blanche, 1.3.1903. (PL II 669-671)

While admitting that ‘Guignol’ was “a masterpiece,” Gide accused Jarry of lowering his professional standards in order to appeal to the prurience of the masses with his last novels. If alcoholism, poverty and illness made him turn to the easier and more lucrative writing of *opéras bouffes* for Claude Terrasse, Messaline and Le Surmâle are still examples of high professionalism where the reader is the dupe. The dance of Mnester, as we shall show in the final chapter, is more appropriate to the lifelong asceticism of the rigorously trained acrobat, the African shaman or the Indian dancer than to the sexually suggestive mimes of decadent Rome.

2.6 *Mémoire and mares*: writing memories.

Turning from the mechanistic view of the human as an insect, powered only by a genetic imprint of inborn instincts, let us turn to the insect itself, transformed by one of the most fertile entomological imaginations of the day into a magical creature of mysterious powers, with tremendous potential to stimulate fantasy. We have seen that Jarry appropriated both Marey’s text and his illustrations for use as an unattributed intertext to his own work. Extracts from the Souvenirs entomologiques of J.-H. Fabre were likewise the target of Jarry’s acquisitive literary technique, not as objects of derision this time, but as literary curiosities to be ‘collected’ and put aside in Jarry’s personal larder as raw material to be transmuted into poetry or fiction.

Let us now focus on the precious remembered image, to which Jarry returns in several significant passages and which, for him, represents the antithesis of the exact photographic print. In autobiographical terms, the Breton *mare*, which we briefly mentioned in Chapter 1 relate to the marsh pools of his local childhood explorations. Evoked in Haldernablou, ‘le Sablier,’ Les Jours et les Nuits, L’Autre Alceste and Messaline, the *mare* represents Jarry’s treasured personal talisman. His rendering of the *mare* metaphor is one of the points of distinction which casts him as a nineteenth-century Surrealist, following Lautréamont and

Rimbaud, rather than a Symbolist.

The Symbolist view of the *mare* derives from the Romantic as a dark, mysterious and magnetic focus of fatal attraction, as in Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, where Mélisande is drawn inexorably to her death. Rachilde also subscribed to the macabre aspect of the *mare* as here in *Le Château hermétique*:

La mare verdâtre hérissée de broussailles noires, où l'on se jette avec la presque joie d'avoir enfin trouvé sa tombe à soi.³⁶

Although a fervent admirer of her work, Jarry was amused and horrified by the extreme ghoulishness of her subjects, as his comments show.³⁷ Henri de Régnier's perception is closer to Jarry's in that he regards water, here *puits*, as a repository of memories:

*Et je regarde en l'eau, hélas!
Du puits profond qui dort
Dans ces jardins aux houx de jaspe
Croupir mon passé noir où je puise à seaux d'or.*³⁸

But this is still a tragic evocation, steeped in regret and deprived of any of the vitality and joy injected by Fabre and Jarry. Jarry's glowing and vivid prose descriptions of the *mares* of his childhood are healthily distinct from the deep, dark pools of most Symbolist writing. Even Rimbaud associates pools with a dark restricting magnetic past rather than a journey of adventure. In the poem 'Mémoire' he links the image of the pool, 'oeil d'eau morne,' to a chained canoe, antithesis of his 'bateau ivre':

Mon canot, toujours fixe; et sa chaîne tirée
Au fond de cette oeil d'eau sans bords, - à quelle boue?³⁹

³⁶ Rachilde. *Le Démon de l'Absurde*. Paris, Mercure de France, 1894, p. 36.

³⁷ His inscription on her fan reads:

Moi - Alfred Jarry je dis - que, madame Rachilde, mange des lentilles avec une épingle d'or - mais - la nuit court [sic] les cimetières pour déterrer les morts -

³⁸ Henri de Régnier, 'Tel qu'en songe' in *Poèmes. 1887-1892*. Paris, Bosquet, 1897, p. 30, [Régnier's italics]

³⁹ Arthur Rimbaud. *Complete works, Selected Letters*. London, The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 124.

By contrast to these indistinct and sinister pools, Jarry's are shallow and transitory. He shares Fabre's enthusiasm for the seething life held in a small stretch of water, which represents the unknown. Here again, is the passage to which we referred in Section 2:

Je n'ai point vu le marais, mais un peu d'eau dans une prairie près d'un petit rocher entre des herbes desséchées, et la lubricité au fond de cette eau du volume cylindrique des livres de mon père et de mon aïeul, ébranlé sur place par les bêtes luisantes des mares, qui le soulevaient par instants, portées vers la surface par la bulle qu'elles respirent, et l'abandonnaient pour un peu d'air vital. (PL I 915)

This unexpected, dark and glistening little bogpool is the antithesis of Marey's rectangular aquarium, illuminated for high visibility of its occupants. As a child, Jarry had perused the wonderful engravings in the entomological works in his grandfather's library and could imagine every detail of the invisible aquatic creatures which were beneath the muddy surface. Jarry's phrase *un peu d'eau* is perhaps an allusion to Victor Hugo's "Une bouche voulant boire un peu d'eau qui fuit", but lacks the sinister nuance of the following line, "Fût-ce au creux de la main fatale de la nuit." Jarry is actually making an important analogy between the literary text and the *mare*, which we shall see again in a passage from *L'Ymagier* and which supports the view of his text as a series of layers, superimposed like a *collage* rather than a coherent linear sequence. Jarry is clearly trying to get away from a rectangular and horizontal, consecutive view of an imaginative literary text and would prefer to see the act of reading in terms of a vertical plunging down through various layers, in order to search for the glistening *bulle*, which represents the true meaning. Like the water beetle, the reader then returns to the surface of the text, borne on the buoyant silver bubble, described in the above passage. At the beginning of Part II of *Messaline* the reader is given a very distinct signal to refer back to Jarry's earlier texts by the sudden odd references to *bêtes des mares* and to a weighted pearl diver.

We can glimpse the *mare-texte* analogy again, ostensibly referring to the quality of saints, but equally applicable to the reader in search of truth, in Jarry's *compte rendu* of Remy de

Gourmont's woodcut, Tête de Martyr, already cited in Section 4. The reference is not this time to a water beetle or a diver, but a toy bottle imp or *ludion*, floating upwards through layers of mud, as Jarry here puts it :

Trop sublimes pour notre atmosphère lourde d'aquarium, ils ne transparaissent,
ludions ascendants, qu'à travers les limons superposés. (PL I 967)

Jarry's crucial views on the nature of the writer, the text and the reader will form the basis of the final chapter and will bring us back to these evocations of the committed reader as a kind of intrepid diver.

It is noticeable that Jarry frequently draws his metaphors out of a child's toy cupboard, perhaps his own. Always needing something solid on which to hold and to give his imagination impetus, Noah's ark, bottle imp, puppet and *culbuteur chinois* have important paradigmatic roles which he has transposed into his aesthetic theory, as we shall see below.

In Les Jours et les Nuits the chapter 'Le Tain des mares' brings the motif of the *mare* once again to the fore, linking it to that of the mirror. In the following passage Jarry is emphasizing the evanescence of these seething pools or puddles, the slipperiness of happiness and reality and perhaps the treacherousness of memory:

Et il y avait au pied de l'escalier sur une route droite, des fossés avec des mares et des grenouilles bleues, et Sengle aimait beaucoup les mares, parce qu'on ne sait jamais les bêtes qu'on y trouvera, ni même avec le tarissement solaire, si l'on trouvera des mares ou les mêmes mares, et on croit toujours les avoir rêvées. (PL I 797)

Whether or not Fabre is Jarry's source, the two writers share the notion of small freshwater pools as concentrations of potential marvels and foci for discoveries. Like Jarry, Fabre associates the pools with the sun, seeing them as fertile incubators of multifarious life forms, as he here describes:

Oui, couvé par le soleil une nappe stagnante, de quelques pas d'étendue, est un monde immense, inépuisable trésor d'observation pour l'homme studieux, émerveillement

pour l'enfant.⁴⁰

And indeed this is the stuff of dreams - not the nightmares of delirium, but the hard held memories of childhood, which Sengle/Jarry evokes as his private reality to obliterate the daytime dull rigour of the military regime. The following two passages from Souvenirs entomologiques and Les Jours et les Nuits and respectively celebrate the Giant Water Beetle as a kind of marvellous monster - its glistening air bubbles are a symbol of life itself:

FABRE

Aux lieux profonds plonge le Dytique, muni de ses réserves respiratoires: au bout des élytres, bulle d'air, et sous la poitrine, lamelle gazeuse couleur qui resplendit ainsi qu'une cuirasse d'argent.

JARRY

La mare squameuse de lentilles, d'où glougloutent les bulles des dytiques bordés et des grands hydrophiles de poix

(PL I 761-2)

From Fabre Jarry also takes the grotesque and graceful Water Skater, whose choreographic movements on the surface of the water reinforce the Beardsley-like atmosphere of dream which he needs as a setting for the grotesque monster-ferryman, Doublemain in the 'Récit de Balkis' and whose image of the rope-maker he borrows for his descriptive piece on Beardsley.

FABRE

A la surface, vire et revire le ballet des Gyrins, perles miroitantes; à côté patine insubmersible l'attroupement des Hydromètres, qui glissent par brassées transversales semblables à celles du cordonnier en travail de couture.⁴¹

JARRY

Des êtres tels que des oeufs de mercure écrivaient et décrivaient tous les nombres et le signe de l'infini, glissant leurs éclairs qui resplendit ainsi qu'une cuirasse sur la tôle de sable.

(PL I 911)

In terms of lyrical and evocative power, nothing could be further from Marey's dry plodding descriptions of aquarium-bound water creatures in his chapter 'Locomotion dans l'eau' of

⁴⁰ Fabre, op. cit. vol. VII, p. 281.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 282

Le Mouvement.⁴² As we shall see in Chapter 6, the most exquisite piece in this genre of lyrical locomotion description would later be accomplished by Paul Valéry in Degas - Danse - Dessin, where he portrays a pair of jellyfish as brazen cabaret dancers.

2.7 'La Régularité de la chasse' and pattern poetry.

We have indicated cryptic elements of spoof amounting to a parodic intertext which interferes with a purely tragic reading of 'Le Sablier'. The poem 'La Régularité de la Chasse' would appear to be a prime example of spoof intermingling with a genuine poetic impulse, but here we also have the first hint of Jarry's idea of the poet as a transparent glass jar. This poem won Jarry a prize in the Echo de Paris poetry competition and Léon-Paul Fargue (whose testimony has elsewhere proved suspect) claimed that it was a joint composition. From the ambiguous title onwards, there are clear signs of the parody of several poetic artifices. Although there are also typographical reasons for the 'M' sequence, which the next chapter will address, the most unwieldy artifice is the alliteration in lines such as "Mais ma main mince mord la mer de moire mauve..." This is known as a tautogram or alliterative sound poetry where the vowels vary but the consonants do not.⁴³

What is striking is Jarry's choice of subject for both 'La Régularité de la chasse' and 'Le Sablier' - each poem based on a glass vessel. Both the chalice and the hourglass had been popular forms of so-called Pattern Poetry, of which Rabelais' 'La Dive Bouteille' is a well-known example. The form of the wedding chalice was traditionally used to celebrate love and

⁴² "La Méduse est assez facile à étudier; la transparence de ses tissus fait que la silhouette montre quelques détails intérieurs.

Au moyen d'une baguette plongée dans l'aquarium, on amène la Méduse dans le champ sur lequel l'objectif est braqué: elle y exécute des contractions et des relâchements alternatifs de son ombrelle; ces mouvements chassent à chaque fois, un certain volume d'eau et, par la réaction, propulsent l'animal en sens inverse.

Si la Méduse est verticalement orientée, la propulsion se fait de bas en haut et l'animal s'élève; si elle est inclinée horizontalement, la propulsion se fait dans le sens horizontal: c'est ce qui a lieu, la Méduse nageait en s'éloignant de l'observateur. Cette disposition permet de voir comment les franges qui bordent l'ombrelle se retournent tour à tour en dedans ou en dehors, suivant les mouvements de l'eau alternativement aspirée et refoulée."

Marey, Le Mouvement, pp. 211-2.

⁴³ See Higgins, op. cit., pp. 192-3.

a long life together for the couple. This is not at all the theme of Jarry's poem, which slides rapidly from the worthy first line, "Chasse claire où s'endort mon amour chaste et cher" into a *danse macabre*. The chalice is therefore title and starting point for the poem but not the concrete form. A pattern poem based on a chalice would normally be a homily to the virtue of chastity, whereas Jarry's vision of love rapidly succumbs to infernal forces, conforming to his stated ideal of *stupre démonial* as described in Haldernablou. (PL I 216) Part 2 of the poem is true pattern poetry but it does not represent a conventional chalice, nor does it dwell on the virtues of chastity. Part 2 would seem to represent a vertical system of multiple retorts, such as used in fractional distillation, through which the elixir of the poetry drips, like the *gouttes lourdes* of Time, evoked in Part I, but which is actually a graphic representation of the memory process, as we shall see below. The single words at the beginning and end of each verse act as the narrow funnel which eases the continuity between one chamber and the next, so that the reader's imagination is not jolted as it is led by the author from one scene to another and finally comes gently to rest in the bottom of the final vessel.⁴⁴

In an occult milieu, such as that of Madame Blavatsky and the Salon du Rose+Croix frequented by Jarry at this period, this fragile vertical spiral or double meander, which he elsewhere refers to as the *vis interminable*, can also be interpreted as the schematic representation of the movement of the wheeling centres called the *chakras* and the two polarities of forces attached to its workings, commonly given in oriental diagrams as two interweaving lines, running up the centre of the body through the chakras themselves.⁴⁵ (Fig. 40) The modern spectator can recognize this shape in Brancusi's Colonne éternelle and, externalized as a vertical pattern, on the dress of Kandinsky's The Woman in Moscow (Fig.

⁴⁴ Balakian has referred to these as *bridges* built with words that fit two realities, but Jarry has already evoked the Kasbah, with figures in long black veils slipping along the walls and I see these transition-words as a kind of double curtain between each dream-room that the reader has to enter, like the *tentures* through which Messaline has to pass in the chapter 'L'Impératrice à la chasse du dieu.' (PL II 99-100)

Cf. Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism, New York University Press, 1947, pp. 112-3.

⁴⁵ This is a summary of the definition given in Gettings, op. cit. p. 139. In addition to the general interest in the Orient and its religions, the influence of Jarry's translator friend A.-F. Hérold in matters of Indian philosophy and literature should not be underestimated.

31). It also appears in two of André Breton's illustrated texts: the first is the cat's tail of Le Rêve du chat, drawn by Nadja; the second is the multiple sand glass of Man Ray's photograph illustrating the concept of eternal love and described as "un filet de lait sans fin fusant d'un sein de verre" in L'Amour fou. As usual with Jarry, the reader is given a choice of interpretations: the workaday fractional distillation column from the chemistry laboratory, companion to the blackened tripod of 'Le Sablier,' or its glamorous occult counterpart. We shall see Jarry dangling these alternatives in front of the reader several times in the certainty that he will choose the more 'intellectual' alternative and pass over the familiar everyday object from Jarry's own world, here an instrument devoted to the serious business of producing pure alcohol.

With '*Le Pouls*', '*Une forme nue*,' and a juvenile poem written in the shape of a diamond, 'La Régularité de la chasse' represents one of Jarry's occasional attempts to mould a poem to a graphic shape, but his intent is not crystal clear. We have given two sample verses at the end of the chapter to demonstrate the graphic pattern of the eight linked units: vertebrae, fountain bowls, alchemical vessel or flight of birds. It is difficult to establish whether Jarry's purpose in writing this poem was serious or not - or whether there is a spoof section and a serious section, as in '*Une forme nue*'. Despite the validation of Valéry, the pun contained in the title and the crude combination of so-called sound poetry tacked on to concrete poetry leads to this writer's sensation that Jarry embarked on the poem as a kind of wager, if only with himself. That there are undeniable poetic effects is due to chance rather than a genuine poetic feeling on Jarry's side.

The text of the poem gives the reader no clue as to what the outer form is actually supposed to represent. The poet simply pours the words into the set mould. The delicacy and elegance of the patterned section of the poem contrasts quite starkly with the awkwardness of the alliterative lines in the first part. The poem seems to be intended as a pastiche of both sound poetry and pattern poetry, just as Jarry would later parody ekphrastic

poetry, although he seems to have bent to his task with serious intent. There are, on the other hand, many typical symbolist features present: *sphinges, nimbes, vols d'esprits, ciel de cendre finlandais*, all rather typical of Lugné Poë's vague and muted productions and of the airy-fairy aspects of Symbolism that Jarry stood against. We incline to the view that Jarry's pride in 'La Régularité de la Châsse' would have been in its quality as an ingenious fake, that is, as a clever combination of several poetic artifices, convincing enough to take a literary prize. He recognized the quality of a true imaginative impulse such as Rimbaud's. He also recognized that he did not have the same poetic gift. His efforts therefore went into assembling the mechanisms and ingredients of different types of poems in order to produce what amounts to a series of brilliant pastiches. This may be why he later disavowed all his literary efforts apart from Pataphysics, his personal and ingenious brand of Nonsense.

2.8 The movement of the memory: Jarry and Bergson

Despite his cynical portrayal of human sexual relations in *Le Surmâle* as a mechanical procedure, Jarry uses mechanistic metaphors for human mental processes without any indication that these processes are thereby degraded. One of his favourite metaphors for human perception, that of the revolving lighthouse beam would later be labelled by Karl Popper as the "searchlight theory of the mind", espoused by Ernst Gombrich and here described by him as:

A conception that stresses the constant activity of the organism as it searches and scans the environment.⁴⁶

Jarry seems to have taken his inspiration from the *Musée de la Marine* in the Louvre referred to in the first chapter of *L'Amour absolu*, by Emmanuel Dieu, who talks of shutting himself in a room with this revolving beam of a "decapitated lighthouse." His own eyes are answering

⁴⁶ Gombrich cites K. R. Popper, 'The Bucket and the Searchlight. Two Theories of Knowledge' in *Objective Knowledge*, appendix, as deriving from Locke and surviving in textbook psychology. Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order. A study in the psychology of decorative art*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1979., n. 1 to p. 1.

beams, but in going to sleep he is able to dowse the artificial beams in the “sea” of his eyes.⁴⁷ The passage in Linteau where Jarry alludes to this probing beacon as “le phare argus de la périphérie de notre crâne sphérique” is echoed in his article ‘Filiger’ where he compares the artist’s method to that of a butterfly collector who manages to seize one or two of these whirling images that assail him and pin it to his cork board, “L’artiste pique et collectionne le vol arrêté d’une des faces du phare tournant.” (PL I 1025)

Subscribing to this active “searchlight theory” apparently does not prevent Jarry from subscribing equally to the so-called passive “bucket theory of the mind” which he terms “les oubliettes de la mémoire,” regarding the process of forgetting, that constitutes letting acquired knowledge and impressions plummet into the deep unconscious recesses of the mind, as a part of the memory process. (“l’oubli, qui est pareillement mémoire”) and of the creative process.⁴⁸ Jarry emphasizes this both in ‘Filiger’ and in his later article “Toomai des éléphants.” We shall need to cite this important passage from Les Jours et les Nuits again. It proposes a swift gathering up of impressions, as opposed to the contemplative notebook approach of ambulant poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley, that Jarry condemns:

Ces gens horripilaient Sengle qui, se croyant poètes, ralentissent sur une route, contemplant les «points de vue». Il faut avoir bien peu de confiance en la partie subconsciente et créatrice de son esprit pour lui expliquer ce qui est beau (...)

(PL I 769-70)

Drawing perhaps from the theories of Leonardo da Vinci, which had recently been the subject of a study by Paul Valéry, to which we shall return, Jarry envisages an extension of the bony human skeleton, which would propel the human body at a much faster rate than mere

⁴⁷ This image tallies with that of Valens’ hypnotic eyes connoted as *mares* from the chapter ‘La route de Dulcinée’ of Les Jours et les Nuits.

⁴⁸ For a concise exposition of the importance of forgetting to the creative process see M. Blanchot, ‘Oublieuse mémoire,’ in L’Entretien infini, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, pp. 460-1:

L’oubli est la vigilance même de la mémoire, la puissance gardienne grâce à laquelle les hommes mortels, comme les dieux immortels, préservés de ce qu’ils sont, reposent dans le caché d’eux-mêmes (...). Ce qui s’oublie pointe à la fois vers cela qui est oublié et vers l’oubli, le plus profond effacement où se situe le lien des métamorphoses. Passage de l’extérieur à l’intérieur, puis de l’intérieur à ce plus intérieur où se rassemble, disait Novalis et disait Rilke, en un espace continu-discontinu l’intimité et le dehors de toute présence..

legs and perhaps replace his bicycle:

Il [l'homme] devait se servir de cette machine à engrenages pour capturer dans un drainage rapide les formes et les couleurs, dans le moins de temps possible, le long des routes et des pistes; car servir les aliments à l'esprit broyés et brouillés épargne le travail des oubliettes destructives de la mémoire, et l'esprit peut d'autant plus aisément recrée des formes et les couleurs nouvelles selon soi. (PL I 770)

Despite the clear affinities that this passage shows with theosophical beliefs in forms and colours on the astral plane as described by Leadbeater, Jarry's mode of expression and his addition of speed to the equation is an exciting anticipation of Cubist, Futurist and Vorticist theories. As we said in Section 2, it also relates to his later theories on dance and creativity.

Jarry's idea of the circular movement of perception seems to owe a great deal to Bergson, who argued against the image of linear perception viewed in the following terms of moving further and further away from the perceived object:

Une marche en ligne droite, par laquelle l'esprit s'éloignerait de plus en plus de l'objet pour n'y plus revenir. Nous prétendons au contraire que la perception réfléchie est un *circuit*, où tous les éléments, y compris l'objet perçu lui-même, se tiennent en état de tension mutuelle comme dans un circuit électrique, de sorte qu'aucun ébranlement parti de l'objet ne peut s'arrêter en route dans les profondeurs de l'esprit: il doit toujours faire retour à l'objet lui-même.⁴⁹

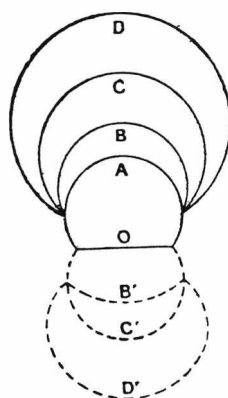
Bergson's circuit theory is certainly reflected in Jarry's notion of the movement of the human memory as expressed in his article 'La mécanique d'«Ixion»' which he bases on the looping movement of a Retriever constantly returning to its master after questing for its prey and on which the early Tape-Loop-Drum computers were also based. First Jarry describes the strange bias that impels a person lost in the desert to walk in a circle, continuing as follows:

La mémoire, ce chien d'arrêt de l'esprit, est aussi un pareil cercle. Quêtant tout le long de la courbe des circonvolutions limitées par la sphéricité du crâne, elle repasse par les mêmes points... et rapporte. (PL II 407)

⁴⁹ Henri Bergson, 'Souvenirs et mouvements' in *La Mémoire et le cerveau* in *Oeuvres*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963, p. 249

Bergson's diagram of the memory as a series of concentric semi-circles is given below. He claims that its "elasticity" permits it to expand indefinitely to embrace all the possible associations connected with a particular object. His idea of an envelope compressing a great number of memories, coincides with Jarry's idea of "du complexe resserré." Here is Bergson's definition:

Cette enveloppe extrême se resserre et se répète en cercles intérieurs et concentriques, qui, plus étroits, supportent les mêmes souvenirs diminués, de plus en plus éloignés de leur forme personnelle et originelle, de plus en plus capables dans leur banalité, de s'appliquer sur la perception présente (...) un moment arrive où le souvenir ainsi réduit s'enchâsse si bien dans la perception présente qu'on ne saurait dire où la perception finit, où le souvenir commence.⁵⁰



This twilight area between true perception and memory or waking perception and dream (*Toutes mes Heures égales, rêve ou veille*) is precisely the theme of Les Jours et les Nuits and fits Jarry's concept of the continuous state of Being. Jarry uses the myth of Ixion bound eternally to his wheel to express the Bergsonian idea of the circularity of memory, but, it is the unreliable "wobbling wheel," referred to in our introduction, which careers uncontrollably into other worlds. Jarry seems to step to one side of the dull, undifferentiated continuum of Waking and Dreaming through the phenomenon of Clinamen, the swerving atom, that he defines as Chance and which seizes some of his hours, representing the Unexpected:

A mon sable se heurte le clinamen d'Heures amies, qu'il s'agglutine en sa chute
arbitraire, (HASARD)

(PL I 249)

⁵⁰ Bergson, op. cit., p. 251.

Projecting himself into the position of Ixion, Jarry arranges for Ixion's eternal torture to be made less boring by introducing a small mechanical fault to the eternal wheel, causing it to swerve off course and even to tackle the exciting obstacle course of Dante's Hell:

Heureusement, la roue d'Ixion, de par l'éternité qu'elle dure, 'prend du jeu': Ixion ne tourne plus *dans le même plan*: il revit, à chaque circuit, son expérience acquise, puis pousse une pointe, par son centre, dans un nouveau monde liséré d'une courbe fermée; mais après il y a encore d'autres mondes! Il remonte la chute des bolges du Dante; le progrès, tel qu'un clown crevant ses cerceaux, débouche de nouveaux mystères comme une spirale de bon acier de bouteilles. (PL II 407)

The spirit of Dionysos, is evoked once again with the image of the corkscrew spiral releasing the juice of poetic inspiration. It is preceded by Jarry's favourite image of the clown, or *cubiste*, somersaulting through paper hoops and rupturing one by one the membranes separating one world from the next, diving from one reality to another.

Jarry's ideas also coincide with Bergson's on the question of associative imagery, which he discusses in his article 'Toomai des Éléphants.' Both men defend the idea of unconscious association, something which Jarry claimed to be the very basis of creative thought. Bergson persists with his idea of a closed circle representing our perception, where our *image-perception* is directed inwards towards the spirit and the *image-souvenir* catapults into space, 'ideas which Valéry develops in his Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci.) Jarry's concept of the ostrich gobbling up anything which comes within its reach and transmuting it into a creative work, and which he applies in the domain of illustration as much as literature, absolutely matches Bergson's as we see in the following passages. Here is Bergson's definition of the creative process as a continuous destruction and reconstruction, on which Jarry builds:

BERGSON

Ces expérimentateurs ont établi que la lecture courante est un véritable travail de divination, notre esprit cueillant ça et là quelques traits caractéristiques et comblant tout l'intervalle par des **souvenirs-images** qui, projetés sur le papier, se substituent aux caractères réellement imprimés et nous en donnent l'illusion. Ainsi nous créons ou reconstruisons sans cesse.⁵¹

JARRY

Un cerveau vraiment original fonctionne exactement comme **l'estomac de l'autruche**: tout lui est bon, il pulvérise des cailloux et tord des morceaux de fer. Qu'on ne confonde point ce phénomène avec la faculté d'assimilation, qui est d'autre nature. Une personnalité ne s'assimile rien du tout, elle déforme; mieux, elle transmute, dans le sens ascendant de la hiérarchie de métaux. Mise en présence de l'insurpassable - du chef-d'oeuvre - il ne se produit pas imitation, mais **transposition**: tout le mécanisme de l'association d'idées se déclenche parallèlement aux associations d'idées de l'oeuvre qui selon une expression sportive ici fort juste, sert d'entraîneur.
[my emboldening] (PL II 393-4)

Deformation, transmutation and transposition are central concepts to Jarry's view of the creative process. His satirical journalism and, in particular, 'La passion considérée comme course de côte' constitute a monument to this theory.⁵² It could be argued that Jarry is justifying the literary technique of *le plagiat* in the above passage as elaborated and practised by Lautréamont. Some of his borrowings are meticulously attributed. Each chapter of *Messaline* is attributed to a source, even if this source is not precisely the correct one. Jarry also acknowledges his debt to each of the authors of Dr. Faustroll's *élus*, the literary curiosities selected and collected by him. As we have seen above, many of his hidden layers of meaning bear no attribution. In the thoughtful conclusion to his book Keith Beaumont also quotes the above passage and makes the broadbrush suggestion that Jarry's work could be seen as "a series of quotations from beginning to end."⁵³ Although this is an exaggeration,

⁵¹ Bergson, op. cit. p. 249.

⁵² The article is described by Gérard Genette as a *texte travesti*. Jarry adopts the style of a sports journalist in order to describe the stations of the cross. The approach switches from that of a cycling event to a climbing feat and finally to aeronautics.

Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1982, p. 76.

⁵³ Keith Beaumont, *Alfred Jarry. A Critical and Biographical Study*, Leicester University Press, 1984, p. 305.

Jarry would justify his creative method, as does Beaumont, from an alchemical perspective. Beaumont speaks of transposition and transmutation - we would point to a more violent stage in the alchemical procedure. In Chapter 4 we shall return to the *estomac d'autruche* metaphor whose connotations of omniverous gobbling and the implications of a violently destructive capacity applies more to the alchemical stage of trituration, signified by the spiral of Ubu's *gidouille*.

2.9 The Man-with-Machine presented as dehumanized authority figure

We cannot complete this discussion of Jarry's resistance to the impersonal mechanization of the coming century without reference to his satirical articles demonstrating the fundamental irrationality, if not immorality of the law and the institutions of authority that it supports. Ubu and the Palotins represent Jarry's caricature of tyrannical authority for which he gives a simple recipe:

Il suffit de l'initiative d'un petit César dans son village. Trois serviteurs dociles (...) pour battre et graisser. (PL I 338)

In 'Visions actuelles et futures' as early as 1893, Jarry gives a grisly vision of execution as Sunday entertainment for the masses, made easier by the use of inflatable 'henchmen' who do the flogging and grease the stake, but are then put away in boxes like rechargeable batteries. To judge by the themes of his adolescent poetry, the perception of an unjust and ineradicable tyranny prevailing throughout society seems to have acted as an irritant and an inspiring force to Jarry from the moment that he began to write seriously. The practices of the army were always a target of his irony. Referring to Breughel's Massacre of the Innocents in relation to the Boer War, he describes the continued practice of killing children in these terms:

C'est un des sports favoris du militaire d'ajuster, comme à la cible, les petits enfants sur le sein de leur mère et de les en détacher à coups de fusil. Le tireur serait disqualifié - il va sans dire, - s'il touchait la mère, ce qui prouve que dans l'armée est toujours vivace la vieille galanterie française. (PL I 639)

Despite his pose of misogyny, he gathered women and children into his category of the vulnerable. In registering the invention of a “beating machine” known as a *castigateur orthomatique* [sic] for the punishment of recalcitrant schoolchildren, he speaks without irony of “ces êtres dénaturés qui battent leurs femmes” and goes on to recommend that men with this tendency should invest in a rubber model as a substitute for marrying the live article. (PL II 341-4) Irony nevertheless colours his observation that the authorities offered a reward of twenty five centimes for the extraction of a dead body from the Seine, but only fifteen centimes for the rescue of any live person.

As an innocent instrument of society’s desire to punish and kill its malefactors, Deibler, the chief executioner of Paris receives the qualifier, “sympathiquement” appended to his dedication in Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll. Furthermore the scene with the Love-inspiring Machine of Le Surmâle is clearly modelled on the American Electric Chair and the first experimental execution as conducted on William Kemmler, which had not killed the victim outright.⁵⁴ He suffered the same agony of burning that Jarry replicates in the macabre death scene of André Marcueil, whose circlet of electrodes is depicted in terms of Christ’s crown of thorns as follows:

Les deux Américains, qui “avaient de la Bible” et du Nouveau Testament, eurent besoin de quelques minutes de sang-froid et d’appel à leur sens pratique pour chasser l’image, pitoyable et surnaturelle, du Roi des Juifs, diadème d’épines et cloué en croix
(PL II 268)

Jarry’s message is a bleak one, that nothing has changed to make society’s power figures more enlightened or humane since the time of Christ’s crucifixion or Herod’s massacre of the innocents. His vivid portrayal of linking an electrically powered metal construction to a

⁵⁴ Cf. Patrick Robertson, The Shell Book of Firsts, 1983, p. 53 quoting from The Electrical Engineer, 13 August 1890:

The first man to die in the electric chair was the convicted murderer William Kemmler at Auburn Prison, N.Y. on 6th August 1890.(...) ...it is quite certain that the death of the victim at Auburn was not instantaneous, that respiration was resumed some minutes after the application and cessation of the current, that the current was turned on again, this time despatching the convict, but not without burning his flesh at the points of contact with the electrodes, and not till he had exhibited to the spectators meanwhile evidences of the vital struggle not less revolting than those usually seen on the gallows.

human being and its appalling result represents his wry condemnation of unscrupulous scientific curiosity, unchanged since 'Le Sablier,' but now unconcealed. The following few lines of dialogue encapsulate the impatience of the scientist, now Edison, rather than Marey, in his quest for knowledge, pushing aside all humanitarian considerations:

William Elson, savant curieux et père pratique, se disposa à lancer le courant.

- Une minute, dit Arthur Gough.

-Qu'y a-t-il? demanda le chimiste.

C'est que, dit l'ingénieur, s'il est possible que cet engin donne le résultat désiré ... il est possible aussi qu'il ne donne rien du tout ou autre chose. Et puis il a été fabriqué un peu vite.

- Tant pis, ce sera une expérience, interrompit Elson et pressa le commutateur.

(PL II 269)

Despite Jarry's fidelity to first hand accounts, the macabre scene which ensues, where the white hot "crown" bites into Marcueil's head and he breaks free of his bonds in agony, only to meld with some metal railings, is on a par with modern science fiction. Jarry's implicit message is that the realities of scientific experiment are more gruesome than anything that his imagination might contrive.

The satirical message of Ubu roi and its implications as a social commentary has been previously explored by other commentators. In this chapter we have focused on some of the main points where Jarry's Black Humour, as it would later be known, comes into play, both cryptically and overtly. For a man who insisted on owning the latest model of bicycle, the latest camera and the lightest racing canoe, it seems ironic that he should select the pioneering scientists and inventors such as Marey and Edison as his chief targets. It seems that he distinguished between the "imaginative scientists," such as Boys, Kelvin and Faraday, celebrated in Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, and the invasive, non-imaginative scientists, of whom Monsieur Hébert was a caricature. Indeed he declares that scientific imagination is the only kind that he accepts ("nous ne comprenons d'ailleurs pas d'autre

imagination”). (PL II 434)

2.10 Conclusion

In this discussion we have seen Jarry's confrontation, as a poet, with the new invasive developments in recording the movement of all life forms from the internal organs of the body to tiny winged insects. We have also seen his personal revulsion at the debasement that this frenzy for measuring imposes and his protest at the way in which all the 'poetic' evanescent beauty connected with the flight of a bee or the emotion implicit in the beating of the heart is simply stripped away. This revulsion led Jarry to develop the method of slipping a cryptic parodic intertext into certain poems, which falls into a genre of protest literature of its own and which, through its function of methodically cancelling out and undermining any lyrical elements created by the writer, falls under the heading of Black Humour. Although we have been able to identify at least a part of this parodic intertext in the poem, 'Le Sablier,' there are certainly other cryptic insertions elsewhere which have not yet been identified. It is not the ambition of this thesis to discover and decode all of Jarry's protest messages, but only to indicate a method that he favoured. The discipline of journalism forced his satirical style to become increasingly overt, culminating in the violent scene of the Love-Inspiring Machine of Le Surmâle.

Far from being out of tune with the *fin de siècle* interest in the spiritual among artists and writers, much of Jarry's inspiration derives from his belief in the metaphysical. Very many articles, such as 'Battre les femmes,' 'Le balistique de la danse' and 'De quelques romans scientifiques' continue to satirize the extraordinary mechanistic impulse gripping society and the desensitizing effect that the use of machines had in social relationships. The atrocities of the Boer War and of the Boxer Rebellion in China cast their respective shadows over 'Le Temps dans l'Art' and 'Communication d'un militaire.' Representing a return to the cruelty of more barbaric ages, whose tortures figure throughout L'Ymagier, Ubu's Palotins,

of his evil will, are prime examples of the desensitizing effect of weapons and machines.

Jarry's gift as a clever wordsmith and his quick perception of the associations between words led him to 'mirliton' verse and his alliance with Claude Terrasse and Paul Ranson into acidly satirical and obscene puppet theatre - a natural progression from Ubu roi.

Both Messaline and Le Surmâle contain passages of great imaginative power. Occasional, but ever rarer glimpses of his earlier lyrical impulse can be seen in passages of his novels and rare poems. It is not a quality for which he is known and it is to be hoped that this chapter has traced some of the moments when a more sensitive and contemplative nature can be discerned, although it exists side by side with the urge to undermine, attack and caricature, consistent with his outer persona. His talent was to disguise the lyrical impulse, so that pockets of poetry and self-revelation lie camouflaged within a satirical text. The reader does not really know whether they are there or not. As a determined poet, this constitutes Jarry's guerilla warfare with the new age of scientific analysis. His view of the man-machine, instinct-driven physiological engine existing side by side with man-spirit, the intricately rolled up skein or ball of memories and private fantasies provides the peculiar tension and conflict in his texts. The writer never completely stifles his imaginative world but surrounds it with a palisade of spikes to deter and confuse the intruding reader.

Chapter 3 moves to Jarry's practical efforts as a graphic artist and also his 'pell-mell' technique as extended to illustration. His drawings and woodcuts of 1894 interrefract with his written texts and provide crucial information about his aesthetic development at this date.

La Régularité de la chasse

PART II.

.....

[sample of format]

Clair
un vol d'esprits flotte dans l'air
corps aériens transparents, blancs linges,
inquiétants regards dardés
des
sphinges.

Et
le criblant d'un jeu de palet,
fins disques, brillez au toit gris des limbes
mornes et des souvenirs feus,
bleus
nimbes...

La
gondole spectre que hala
la mort sous les points de pierre en ogive,
illuminant son bord brodé
dé-
rive.

Mis
tout droite dans le fond, endormis
nous levons nos yeux morts aux architraves,
d'où les cloches nous versent leurs
pleurs
graves.

PART II ILLUSTRATION AND ART

CHAPTER 3 THE BOOK AS IMAGINATIVE VEHICLE: JARRY'S INNOVATIONS

3.1 Introduction

Jarry's interest in folk art, whose genuine worth as an inspiring force he saw as proven by its indestructible and ancient tradition, led to his promotion of popular imagery and especially woodcuts of the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries. His typically truculent statement "Tant pis pour qui ne sait d'Épinal que son cru fatras superficiel, non son unique, lorraine ou allemande, vérité et excellence" (PLI 1026) sums up its appeal for him as an honest form of art, unadulterated by affectation. He stood against academic art, subjected as it is to fashion and to transitory theories. On account of his role as co-editor of the magazine or picture book, *L'Ymagier*, together with Remy de Gourmont, Jarry is increasingly being perceived as one of the pioneers in the art of the book. His individual encouragement was also a force which actively encouraged Rousseau, Filiger and Bonnard to diversify their talents.

This chapter will draw together the most important statements made by the joint editors in *L'Ymagier*'s sparse text, since these have not been collected as a whole. They throw light on important aspects of Jarry's theoretical position and also complement other statements of his. Although the number of Jarry's drawings, prints and paintings has been put at approximately one hundred, this figure includes many doodles not destined for publication.¹ A more accurate figure would be between thirty and forty. Jarry's illustrations were mainly destined for his own work during 1894-5 and several follow the strict compressed style of *culs de lampe*. His contribution to the field of late nineteenth-century book design show experiments with a very small and a very large format. It consists firstly of his tiny 16vo editions of *Les Minutes de Sable Méorial* and *César-Antechrist*, appropriately printed in Grotesque, with

¹ Jacquelynn Baas bases her figure on Michel Arrivé's *Peintures, Gravures & Dessins d'Alfred Jarry* which reproduces Jarry's known graphic work in its totality and contains 82 plates. See Jacquelynn Baas and Richard Field, *The Artistic Revival of the Woodcut*, Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1984, p. 121.

woodcuts pulled mainly in the macabre rust-coloured tint of dried blood, a lurid orange, or by contrast, an eerie blue-green; secondly the five large-format numbers of L'Ymagier, containing many hand-painted religious images from Épinal and Troyes; thirdly two beautiful, slim folio numbers of Perhinderion, again with hand-painted religious images by Bernard and partially printed with fifteenth-century Mazarin type, recast for the occasion. This chapter will give equal importance to the illustrations selected by Jarry, both for his own work and for publication in L'Ymagier and Perhinderion and to their role as an instrument of subversion and challenge to the stale artistic canons supported by the French establishment.

Marcel Schwob and Remy de Gourmont, whom Jarry met at the *Mercure de France* offices, were probably of equal importance in guiding his early literary and artistic development. Gourmont, fifteen years his senior, was a passionate bibliophile who came from a long line of respected book printers and engravers. Jarry was fascinated by his book collection and by his eccentric tastes in both mediaeval and modern literature. Through his job at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Gourmont may have become involved in the immense task of cataloguing the fascinating collection of Greek and Roman antiquities that took place during 1893-52 and had access to the most esoteric manuscripts in the Reserve. It stands to his great credit that he there discovered and realized the outstanding originality of Lautréamont's ignored Chants de Maldoror, bringing it to the public notice through an article in the *Mercure de France* of 1 February, 1891, titled 'La Littérature Maldoror.' Jarry's fervent identification with the dead writer, from whom he borrowed both metaphorical images and whole stretches of text, seems to have extended to his discoverer and his other interests, especially the field of book illustration. Gourmont was one of the founders of the *Mercure de France* publishing house in 1889 and published over twenty carefully designed books and booklets between

² Brunella Eruli and Henri Béhar separately indicate Daremberg and Saglio's illustrated catalogue of Greek and Roman antiquities as one of the principal literary and visual sources of Jarry's 'encyclopaedic' knowledge. Eruli, 'Sur les sources classiques de Messaline: collages et montages,' L'Étoile Absinthe, nos 1-2, mai 1979, pp. 66-82 and Henri Béhar, Les Cultures de Jarry, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1988, p. 165. We would also stress the importance of Ernest Babelon and J. Adrien Blanchot, Catalogue des bronzes antiques de la bibliothèque nationale, illustr. Saint-Elme Gautier, Paris, Ernst Leroux, 1895.

1892 and 1901, now collectors' pieces.

Although Jarry was forced to sell his books and Breton curios, he had the collector's mentality and also fed off the collections of others.³ He had the generosity of Paul Fort to thank for lending him many exotic and mediaeval woodcuts for *L'Ymagier* and for his own publications. The story that he "amused himself by making woodcuts in barrel hoops" is not true.⁴ Jarry took the technical side of his undertakings extremely seriously. Jacquelynn Baas's study identifies his woodblocks as commercial endgrain boxwood like Gauguin's, but emphasizes his anti-establishment purposes and intention to shock, both through his choice of subject matter and his rough materials.⁵ Taking up an eccentric position straddling the Cabbala and caricature, Jarry's graphic work and his use of macabre mediaeval illustrations to highlight the satirical intent of his text represent a veering away from the ostensibly Christian themes that dominate the work of both Bernard and Gauguin and a sharper tack towards the savage and the pagan.

3.2 The context: Gourmont's and Jarry's role in the revival of the woodcut and the promotion of primitive images

The art of wood engraving had been revived by Gustave Doré, whose vivid illustrations to Coleridge, Dante, Milton and Jules Verne are well-known. Doré would do a wash drawing on a prepared wood block which the engraver then had to reproduce. Such blocks were known as tone blocks and the method was taken over by several accomplished artists including Auguste Lepère, Daniel Vierge, Frédéric Florian and Timothy Cole. This resulted in a high degree of sophistication and technical skill around the 1880s, where a great variation

³ A contemporary review of Henri Rousseau's missing portrait of him attests to the collection of Breton religious artefacts that filled his flat as does the testimony of an acquaintance:

Et grotesque était le contenu de l'appartement dans lequel j'entrai. Aux murs, des images de saints, des crucifix, des encensoirs et une foule de choses servant au culte. Tout cela venait de la Bretagne (...) et avait la naïveté et la lourdeur de style des bois sculptés par les paysans de là-bas.

Albert Haas, *Souvenirs de la vie littéraire à Paris*, from the 1922 special number of *Les Marges* dedicated to Jarry reprinted in *L'Étoile-Absinthe*, nos. 51-52, 1992, pp. 23-4.

⁴ Rolf Söderberg, *French Book Illustration, 1880-1905*, Stockholm Studies in History of Art, No. 28, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977, p. 130.

⁵ Baas and Field, op. cit. p. 122.

in tonality was achieved, but was still outdone by the new art of photography. A reaction against the refined dull greys of reproductive wood engraving therefore set in and academics turned their attention to the earliest and most “primitive” means of image production. The adoption of the simple black lines of the early woodcut was seen as a return to a less artificial, fundamental language of visual communication and wood itself as an organic material, was felt to possess an intrinsic dynamism. For the Symbolist generation the woodcut provided the least mechanical form of print-making and was deemed to be the only kind of illustration which could achieve an intimate welding of text and image. Its two forms were equally unsophisticated: the basic black and white which lent itself to the Symbolists’ nocturnal world and hand-painted popular religious images which were directed at the simple piety of the peasant, who would buy these and paste them on his wall as religious icons. We have cited Rimbaud in the previous chapter as Jarry’s model of a true lyric poet. The following well-known extract from *Une Saison en enfer* may not have been immaterial in setting

L’Ymagier’s editorial policy:

J’aimais les peintures idiotes, dessus de porte, décors, toiles de saltimbanques, enseignes, enluminures populaires; la littérature démodée, latin d’église, livres érotiques sans orthographe, romans de nos aïeules, contes de fées, petits livres d’enfance, opéras vieux, refrains niais, rythmes naïfs.⁶

There is no item in Rimbaud’s list which would be excluded from L’Ymagier.

Although L’Ymagier published a broad cross-section of popular imagery its most striking feature is the Épinal restrikes. The *Image d’Épinal* derives its name from the firm established in Épinal by Jean-François Pellerin in 1782. The subjects were usually religious and initially closely related in style to the woodcuts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. When the business passed to Pellerin’s son and son-in-law, the inventory of 1822 included 221 blocks, which included contemporary secular subjects, especially the Napoleonic legends.

⁶ Arthur Rimbaud, ‘Délires II: Alchimie du verbe,’ in *Oeuvres*, Paris, Garnier, 1960, p. 228.

François Georgin (1801-1863) was the the most famous French popular imagist of the nineteenth century and received his instruction from Antoine Réveillé, Pellerin's best cutter. The clear frontal poses and bright primary colours of his images represent the *Image d'Épinal* at its best and at its most original. L'Ymagier is distinguished by the large proportion of coloured pullouts that it contains, many of them Pellerin restrikes and of which Georgin's Jésus sur la Croix is one of the most striking. Georgin's and Bernard's large and simple hand-painted images are decidedly the most representative feature of the magazine, whose emphasis on colour sets it apart from other publications of the same date. As the title and the editor's prefatorial statement indicate, the bias was towards images rather than text. A perfectionist in all matters concerning his professionalism, Jarry was irritated by the requirement to fold the images, which creased and spoiled them. When he designed Perhinderion one of his main criteria was to have a format which was large enough to make folding unnecessary, regardless of cost, and it is certainly true that L'Ymagier's pullouts are unwieldy. The following extract from the preface of the first number of L'Ymagier sets out the editorial intent to publish images alone with a minimum of textual commentary:

Des Images et rien de plus, religieuses ou légendaires, avec ce qu'il faut de mots pour en dire le sens et convaincre, par une notion, les inattentifs. Des images d'abord taillés dans le bois, cette matière à idoles, matrice de si bonne volonté; dans le métal, prolongeant d'un siècle la série des emblématiques rêves.⁷

This preface was probably written by Remy de Gourmont and establishes two important characteristics of L'Ymagier: the emblematic and the fantastic, as expressed by both religion (from various cultures) and legend. The editors put a high value on wood as a natural material, which was easy to work. Gourmont calls it "cette matière à idoles" and we shall see its attraction as a living, rather than an artificial material, a feature that was also of paramount importance in the making of marionettes. As the opinion of Mallarmé was still very influential and, of the two editors, Jarry, at any rate, regarded him with deep respect, it is worth putting on record his total rejection of the illustrated book as a genre, here sweepingly expressed as

⁷ L'Ymagier, no. 1, oct. 1894, pp. 6-7.

the very poor relative of cinema:

Je suis pour - aucune illustration, tout ce qu'évoque un livre devant se passer dans l'esprit du lecteur: mais, si vous remplacez la photographie, que n'allez-vous droit au cinématographe, dont le déroulement remplacera, images et texte, maint volume, avantageusement.⁸

Putting absolute value on the power of the imagination, Mallarmé therefore speaks out against any attempt to suppress the free play of the reader's spirit by means of a fixed image. L'Ymagier, with its emphasis on the image alone, cannot be regarded as an illustrated magazine and therefore does not contravene the Mallarméan view. It is a collection of disparate pictures, loosely grouped under various headings, pictures which are themselves springboards for the imagination and whose frail supporting text is almost superfluous. Let us contextualize these pictures.

Émile Bernard's early woodcut of 1889, L'Adoration des bergers was the first example of a primitivist style emerging in the late nineteenth century.⁹ (Fig. 8) His artistic inclination was dually motivated by a very strong Christian faith and an attraction to the art of the middle ages. His style was directly influenced by the *Images d'Épinal* but rapidly developed a vigour and simplicity whose modern accent was unmistakable. In 1892 he became co-editor of Paul Fort's Livre d'Art, to which Jarry was closely allied. Bernard's innovatory impulse lasted a mere three years before he regressed to the classical style, but its effect on Gauguin, Jarry and others was of lasting importance. Although several individual artists were experimenting with the sidegrain woodcut, since Bernard was the main proponent of a return to a crude, mediaeval style of woodcut, his departure for Italy and then Egypt in 1893, which heralded a ten-year absence from France, left the movement without focus. Jarry had committed himself to the illustrated book as a medium for his own earliest texts, Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and César-Antechrist, which quickly became

⁸ Mallarmé, 'Sur le livre illustré,' Mercure de France, jan. 1898, p. 110 and OC 878.

⁹ Baas and Field, op. cit. p. 22.

collector's pieces. Bearing in mind Mallarmé's view, however, and the independent character of Jarry's illustrations with regard to the text, it is not quite appropriate to use the term "illustrated book" to describe these two disparate collections of images and text, which are almost as tiny as hymn books or missals; perhaps Paul Fort's term, *livre d'art*, would be a better label.

With Gourmont Jarry took the initiative of trying to provide the lacking focus for a potential group of innovative engravers: firstly through L'Ymagier, which ran from 1894-6, later with his effort to launch his own resplendent, but financially non-viable Perhinderion. Jarry seems to have learnt the skill of woodcutting at Gauguin's side in 1894 and to have retained at least an amateur interest in it through visits to Maurice Dumont's *atelier*, where his friend Maurice Delcourt was experimenting with four-colour woodcuts. Jarry provided commissions for both Delcourt and Rousseau through L'Ymagier. After his own publishing venture had collapsed, he continued an inconspicuous collaboration with Paul Fort's Ballades and Livre d'Art, where the text of Ubu roi was first published in June, 1896. The December 1896 poster and programme for Ubu roi is a striking example of Jarry's expertise in the coloured woodcut. (Fig. 21)

During the critical years of 1894-5 Edvard Munch, around whom a group might have formed, was in Germany and committed to the journal Pan. Although Munch based himself at Saint Cloud in 1896, he did not associate with fellow artists in Paris. Only Lugné-Poë, with his strong bias for Scandinavian theatre and literature, seems to have succeeded in gaining his collaboration to produce the poster for his 1896 production of Peer Gynt and also in painting the scenery - a task normally performed by the ever-willing Nabis. Jarry's part in this collaboration is not on record, but his central role as actor/script reviser and general factotum for the production means that he would have worked at close quarters with Munch over this short period.¹⁰ As we have said, Jarry's disregard of such a towering innovator in

¹⁰ See Jacques Robichez, Le Symbolisme au théâtre. Lugné-Poë et les débuts de l'Oeuvre. Paris, L'Arche, 1957.

the field of woodcutting and colour lithography points to deliberate avoidance. If Munch was critical of Jarry's adaptations to the script or if Jarry expressed his views on "abstract" scenery there may well have been a disagreement between them. There was plenty of potential for encroaching on each other's artistic territory, quite apart from possible personal antipathy.

After being taken on as Lugné-Poë's 'secretary' at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, Jarry helped to marshal the best of the avant-garde talent to produce its scenery, programmes and posters. The most original talents working in the field of sidegrain woodcutting, (as opposed to wood engraving), came down to Bernard, Gauguin and Munch, none of whom could tolerate France as a permanent base. The hope cherished by Remy de Gourmont and Jarry to provide an outlet for this outstanding talent as well as for their own more tentative work almost succeeded. During their undocumented friendship of 1892, Bernard's enthusiasm for imitating and reproducing old woodcuts, especially those of Dürer, had inspired Jarry who, under Gourmont's tutelage, and with the help of the printers Louis Roy and Maurice Dumont, took up his torch with every evidence of zeal. Unfortunately the potential group of collaborators to the venture was riven by dispute and despair. Having failed to persuade Gauguin to publish alongside Bernard, Jarry called on Paul Fort to lend him the rare woodcuts from his collection to fill the pages of *L'Ymagier*.¹¹ He acknowledges this debt in the section, 'Monstres'.

In 1892 Jarry, Léon-Paul Fargue, Paul Fort and Émile Bernard had formed a loose group. They regarded themselves as the poet-artists of the next generation, fed off each other's precocious abilities and had gravitated together as an outstandingly multi-talented foursome with common interests. Jarry's and Fargue's relationship, although close, was characterized by constant and furious argument. It is to Paul Fort's credit that, after Bernard's return, he succeeded in reuniting the group both socially and artistically in 1905 through the so-called *Closerie des Lilas* meetings, focused around his magazine, *Vers et Prose*.

¹¹ Out of several speculative theories, to explain the 'pictures' described in 'Clinamen,' the chapter of *Faustroll* dedicated to Paul Fort, I favour the view that 'Clinamen' demonstrates Jarry's gratitude for these loans and describes other prints or blocks belonging to Fort that were never published.

The project on which Gourmont had set his heart, to publish a magazine devoted to the *Images d'Épinal* using the energies of his protégés, Jarry and Fargue, seemed set to founder when Jarry fell out with the magazine's patron, Berthe de Courrière and quarrelled with Fargue at the same time. Embittered by lack of recognition in the shadow of Gauguin, a man who painted Christian images after the style he had pioneered but who did not share his faith, Bernard turned his back on everything he had previously worked towards and left France for a full ten years. Armand Seguin, one of the most talented contributors, died. The Irish artist Roderick O'Connor, whom Jarry was cultivating, went back to Ireland definitively. Editors and contributors to L'Ymagier were thus blown apart after only two years. The successful publication of eight numbers containing handcoloured pullouts nevertheless represented a considerable achievement for a high-cost two-man venture. Each number represented a work of art in itself whose printing and binding requirements were complex in the extreme.

In the background, meanwhile, the Mercure de France publishing house, under the direction of Alfred Vallette, had pledged itself to the archaising movement and to promoting the book as an art form. Links with the English movement, led by William Morris, were fostered by his wife, the novelist Rachilde, and by Marcel Schwob, to whom Wilde's Sphinx was dedicated in 1894. Among the Nabis Maurice Denis and Paul Ranson were the most committed to ornamental lettering and book illustration.¹² Prior to L'Ymagier, Jarry's 16vo editions of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and César-Antechrist, with their two-colour woodblocks, designed by himself in 1894, are exquisite examples of the book as *objet d'art*. In Gourmont, Rachilde and Alfred Vallette he had found solid support for publishing these tiny esoteric books, whose text is ruptured rather than illustrated with a mixture of grotesque mediaeval woodcuts and his own. The images have the function of jolting and arresting the reader, rather than fulfilling the soothing and complementary function of illustration which, after Jarry's own words in praise of Bonnard's marginal illustrations to Verlaine's

¹² Denis illustrated Sagesse in 1891 and Gide's Voyage d'Urien in 1893. Ranson designed 55 large initial letters to A.-F. Hérold's Le Livre de la naissance, de la vie et de la mort de la bienheureuse vierge Marie, Mercure de France, 1895.

Parallèlement, “semblent les propres fantômes qui s’évoquent des rythmes à mesure de la lecture, assez diaphanes pour ne point empêcher de lire.” (PL II 608) The effect of Jarry’s images is therefore diametrically opposed to that of Bonnard’s diaphanous marginal drawings and contravenes his own definition of illustration as an inconspicuous adjunct to the text.¹³

Having taken a financial stake in Remy de Gourmont’s *Images d’Épinal* project, Jarry seems to have perverted Gourmont’s original idea by personally rallying the avant-garde engravers of Le Pouldu to his cause under the banner of L’Ymagier, promising remuneration to the impoverished Charles Filiger and Armand Seguin for any potential contributions.¹⁴ Rousseau’s lithograph La Guerre was likewise done on a commission basis. In the *Livret* of the final number of L’Ymagier under their dual editorship one can sense Gourmont returning to his original project, emphasizing its archaic focus and invoking the name of Émile Bernard, whom he had probably envisaged as his partner:

Dorénavant, nous alternerons, autant que possible, les images que la maison Pellerin peut encore fournir ou reconstituer, et les facsimilés de la vieille imagerie que nous ferons exécuter par les procédés les plus directs et les plus aptes à donner l’impression vraie de cet art si simple et si large - dont M. Émile Bernard veut reprendre la tradition.¹⁵

Gourmont and Jarry were clearly competing for the collaboration of Bernard in their respective ventures - a tussle where Jarry gained the advantage. The advertisements carried by Perhinderion make it clear that Jarry was acting as Bernard’s agent in France for the engravings he had left behind. Whether or not Bernard had a financial stake in the magazine is unknown, but Jarry certainly declares his intention of publishing the complete series of

¹³ Elsewhere Jarry further insists on the subordinate and supporting function of illustration:

Couturier a illustré le livre de dessins parfaitement adaptés au livre, ce qui est leur meilleur éloge. (PL II 619)

¹⁴ See L.-P. Fargue’s letter to Jarry of 12 June 1894 published in L’Étoile-Absinthe, nos. 43-45, p. 24:

Mon cher Jarry: ceci est à peu près une commerçante lettre. J’ai su par raccroc que tu étais à Pont-Aven sans parler de retour: Moment fâchement choisi puisque Remy de Gourmont point content ma foi, prétend qu’il faudrait que nous prissions cette semaine avance du livre sur l’Image d’Épinal, chez Quantin, Didot, etc (...) Gourmont m’engage vivement à vigoureusement te partir chercher par les cheveux; mais je ne sais si je vais pouvoir cela..

¹⁵ L’Ymagier, no. 5, oct. 1895, p. 67.

Dürer's Grand Passion - a project dear to Bernard. Bernard was now the only contemporary artist to be published by Jarry and his prints are in the mediaeval style, invariably on Christian themes. After 1896 and the foundering of Perhinderion, Jarry himself abandoned the archaic style. As administrator for Lugné-Poë at the Oeuvre he presided over some of the most innovatory poster and programme production of the day. Toulouse-Lautrec, Vallotton, Vuillard and Bonnard were the house artists. From this time on Jarry recognized that his income would come from his talent for the grotesque and the satirical. Of the previous four artists it was Pierre Bonnard, one of his most ardent fans, who now became his illustrator.

Jarry's fascination with systems, rituals and patterns, that we discussed in Chapter 1, ran parallel to his attraction to the grotesque. He displayed a strict sense of order in his early graphic work and an obsession with symmetry and balance. In the process of assembling his first poems and prose pieces into a collection his interest was engaged by the movement promoting the decorative arts and the book as an art form begun by the Pre-Raphaelites in England and propelled by the subsequent efforts of William Morris, Charles Ricketts, Aubrey Beardsley and Walter Crane amongst others. Rapidly absorbing the tenets of French Symbolism, but aware that it was in its death throes, he began to look for other forms of two-dimensional art than stained glass windows and Japanese woodcuts which had already been exploited by Anquetin, Bernard, Bonnard and Gauguin.

As we have seen, Jarry was well versed in the earliest forms of two-dimensional art, such as cave painting, Egyptian friezes, and designs on early pottery. As a practitioner of the ancient profession of puppeteering, he was also alert to all forms of Profile or Silhouette Art from niello to heraldry. The Chat Noir shadow theatre, which sometimes provided a background performance designed by artists such as Caran d'Ache or Henri de Rivière to accompany the work of new poets, provided him with the most modern examples of silhouette art.¹⁶ Whether deliberate or involuntary, Haldernablou and other texts of Les

¹⁶ For example De Rivière's brilliant drawings (1890) for Georges Fragerolle's La Marche à L'Étoile, a mystery play in ten tableaux. Printed in Söderberg op. cit. as fig. 40. and repr. as fig. 55 in this thesis.

Minutes de Sable Mémorial lend themselves to this medium. Certainly Jarry's attraction to a very distinct and simple outline, as represented in man's earliest graphic representations of man, is reflected both in his early illustrations and in his literary texts. His illustrations display an ability to configure the abstract unequalled among his French contemporaries.

3.3 Jarry's alignment with the Belgian avant-garde movement.

Brussels was ahead of Paris in the early 1890s in giving especial prominence to the decorative arts. French avant-garde artists who were working with wood, stained glass windows and on fine book illustration found a warmer welcome in the Belgian capital than their own. In 1892 the Society of Bibliophiles, *Les XX*, had extended invitations to Bernard, Anquetin, Denis, Gauguin and Redon to exhibit, an encouragement noticeably lacking from their own country.

Jarry's respect was clearly with the Belgian movement and his early aspirations seemed to settle on being a poet-illustrator. His graphic work of 1893-4 displays a parallel abstract and schematic style to the Belgian artists, Max Elskamp,¹⁷ Charles Doudelet, Henry van de Velde and George Minne, whose bronze statuettes he rated as outstanding. (PL II 641) Minne's illustrations to Maeterlinck's Serres chaudes, which Jarry would have known, are stunningly simple and equal the primitivism of Bernard. (Fig. 50) (We must bear in mind that Jarry chose the overtly Belgian pseudonym of Jans for some of his work in L'Ymagier, which Henri Béhar pertinently ascribes to his wish to demonstrate his alignment with the Belgian movement¹⁸). Jarry would have also known Minne's bold woodcuts for Verhaeren's Villages illusoires and the abstract designs of Henry van de Velde who illustrated Elskamp's books. (Fig. 53) He may also have benefited from the skills of his friend, the writer-illustrator

¹⁷ See Jarry's letter to Elskamp of 16 April 1895 referring to "la robe isocèle de N.D. des Ermites" (PL I 979) and claiming to know Elskamp's "précédents vers" (Salutations, dont angéliques) by heart. (PL I 1041).

¹⁸ This is the observation of Henri Béhar:

La désignation explicite de l'objet, le recours à un pseudonyme curieusement belge me font penser qu'il y a moins l'appropriation d'une esthétique que le souci de montrer, dans la continuité d'une luxueuse revue d'estampes, la parenté de certains traits.

Henri Béhar, 'Jarry et l'imagerie populaire,' L'Esprit créateur, Winter 1984, p. 38.

Léon Bloy who provided small illustrations for the Mercure de France and was certainly inspired by the beautifully produced books of the Sâr Joséphin Péladan, as his reviews testify. Jarry's title illustration of two chameleons for Jules Renard's Mon ardoise¹⁹ (Fig. 9) dates from this time.

Elskamp's ground-breaking work in Belgian book design was later acclaimed by Remy de Gourmont. Indeed his search for inspiration in mediaeval woodcuts, monastic illumination and popular imagery has been linked to the ideas of Gourmont, Bernard and Jarry.²⁰ In terms of their emblematic fantasy Jarry's small, starkly simple images take their place alongside Minne's, Elskamp's and Léon Bloy's. Like them he chose the *cul de lampe* as his speciality. Jarry's Minutes de Sable Mémorial published a year before Elskamp's Enluminures is similar in intent, although Jarry's book, mixing macabre mediaeval *trouvailles* with the author's own equally macabre woodcuts is the more original of the two. Chronologically it would appear impossible for Jarry's artistic style to have been influenced by Elskamp. (Fig. 51) The two men seem to have worked independently, respectfully sending each other complimentary copies of their books. If we were to seek another model, it might be the Swiss Nabi, Félix Vallotton, "un qui ABSTRAIT - en si peu de traits." (PL II 178) Vallotton's innovative technique of juxtaposing blocks of dense black ("un noir de velours absolu") and plain white caught Jarry's attention. (Fig. 87) But Jarry's graphic style is distinctly his own.

It is worth stressing that Jarry's gaze was focused beyond French borders in 1894-6 and that, in experimenting with the colour woodblock, he was distancing himself from the colour lithography of Marty and Roger-Marx in L'Estampe Originale and even from the Nabi group of illustrators, grouped around Vollard. This was true not only of his experiments with illustration but of the development of his literary style as well. He was following Gustave

¹⁹ Mercure de France, juillet 1894 p. 193. Pen drawing reproduced, blown up, as Plate 20 of Peintures, gravures et dessins d'Alfred Jarry, preface and commentary by Michel Arrivé, Collège de Pataphysique, 1968.

²⁰ Entry 112 for Elskamp's Enluminures, Paysages, Heures, Vies, Chansons, Grotesques in Warrack & Perkins, Catalogue of Spring 1978.

Kahn's experiments with free verse, and his early poetry shows the influence of Émile Verhaeren's markedly visual style. The books of both writers figure in the list of Faustroll's *Livres pairs*. Rimbaud, Kahn, Verhaeren and Jarry were the four nineteenth-century writers whom the Futurists honoured on account of their attempts to break out of traditional poetic moulds. Jarry's typographical experiments with his title pages allow the letters freedom to attach themselves to several words. As the reader's eye roams over the jumble of large and small letters different words suggest themselves which carry a less banal message than title, author and retail outlet. So we may read *REVE* or *VEDA*; *SAR*, or *STARRY*, which present themselves with equal force to *JARRY*. (Fig. 38) This is a first step towards Marinetti's "words in freedom" concept and one which Jarry reinforces through Sebastian Münster's text of mixed spellings and abbreviated words published in *Perhinderion*. As always Jarry had to follow the daimon which constantly drove him to seek alternatives to accepted conventions.

3.4 The image speaking for itself: Jarry's use of unattributed woodcuts

Jarry published *Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial* in September 1894, a month before the first number of *L'Ymagier* appeared, initiating the innovatory layout of using his own woodblocks side by side with old ones, both without legends. Jarry's layout is thus crucial to understanding which illustrations relate to which piece of text and we can only see this by consulting the original editions. The printing of the old alongside the new would be the policy adopted by *L'Ymagier* as the initial editorial here states:

Tournée la couverture, Filiger annonce que nous appartenons aux imagiers nouveaux tout comme aux anciens, et, vers les derniers pages, Émile Bernard redit notre intention de collaborer à une rénovation de l'image.²¹

It is important to note the use of the word *imagier* as opposed to *illustrateur* and *image* as opposed to *illustration*. This editorial statement declares the magazine's purpose as "renovation of the image" by living artists, a policy which ceased to be enforced as soon as

²¹ *L'Ymagier*, no. 1, oct. 1894.

Jarry left the editorial team. One of the most noticeable characteristics of L'Ymagier is the sparseness of commentary. The magazine is literally intended as a collection of simple images and ballads “avec ce qu'il faut de mots pour en dire le sens et convaincre, par une notion, les inattentifs” as cited above. The accent is Catholic, mediaeval, pagan and magical by turns.

At least L'Ymagier, as a non-fictitious and semi-documentary magazine, carried legends which identified the artist and the subject of the illustration, if not the date. Jarry's own books, on the other hand, display a disregard for attributing either illustrations or quotations from other works. His policy of mixing unacknowledged and unidentified mediaeval woodcuts with his own in Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and César-Antechrist constituted a new departure in book design. The pictures are supposed to act as mere vehicles of suggestion. Jarry's readers, inattentive, unalert and unappreciative, as he expects them to be, have been warned about this in his prefatorial statement:

Il est très vraisemblable que beaucoup ne s'apercevront point que ce qui va suivre soit très beau (...); et à supposer qu'une ou deux choses les intéressent, il se peut aussi qu'ils ne croient point qu'elles leur aient été suggérées exprès. Car ils entreverront des idées entrebâillées, **non brodées de leurs usuelles accompagnatrices**. (PL I 171)

Thus the untitled little woodcut whose description in L'Ymagier gives the likely theme as the brutal dismembering of Saint Hippolyte by four horsemen, points up the Ubic theme of petty tyranny and of torture and execution as entertainment for the *foule*, who can be seen peering through the crenellations of the city walls with the ghoulish curiosity celebrated in the Chanson de Décervelage:

*On s' fich' des coups pour être au premier rang;
Moi je m' mettais toujours sur un tas d' pierres
Pour pas salir mes godillots dans l' sang.* (PL I 471)

Jarry's inclusion of this woodcut, together with another portraying Christ incarnate as the host on the altar and then torture by crucifixion is designed to create a shock effect, jolting the

reader's imagination. A two-dimensional, stylized depiction of cruelty is no longer shocking to the inured eyes of the late twentieth-century visually bombarded audiences, but the effect on late nineteenth century readers would have been more acute.

As author-collector, Jarry's selection and careful positioning alone suffice to put his landmark on ^{his} works, a technique more appropriate to the collagiste than to the writer. His disrespect for historical chronology, as he cuts and pastes from works of different dates and across cultural and linguistic boundaries is also characteristic. Following Noël Arnaud and Henri Béhar's classification of Jarry's method in relation to Marcel Duchamp's 'Ready Mades,' Brunella Eruli compares his technique to that of Picasso, Ernst or Schwitters in the pictorial domain. Emphasizing the importance of the assembling process rather than the end result, she gives this excellent definition of collage, demonstrating that his work can be more readily classified according to the values of a twentieth century collagiste than those of nineteenth century writers:

Le collage joue sur la dissonance, la rupture, le contraste. (...) Faire du nouveau avec du vieux implique un procédé de fragmentation et de confiscation de la matière, comme si toute signification unitaire ou univoque que l'on pourrait attribuer à l'image, au texte ou à l'objet était le résultat d'un acte frauduleux qu'il fallait dénoncer. L'art contemporain a assumé ce rôle de remise en question et de dénonciation. Au lieu d'apporter des éléments pour construire une signification stable, les formes, les images s'affichent comme les résidus de questions restées sans réponse. C'est le trajectoire et non son point de chute, le procédé de fabrication et non le résultat qui, dans le collage, se trouvent porteur de sens.²²

Jarry's importance as a writer is here seen to lie in the originality of his method: collecting, selecting and blending choice items from literature of the past and the present. Faustroll's list of *élus* represents the first stage of Jarry's procedure, the collection of the raw materials before they are blended into the finished product.

Another commentator, Elzbieta Grabska, has drawn attention to the significance of the

²² Eruli, 'Le Monstre - La Colle - La Plume,' La Revue des sciences humaines, July - Sept. 1986, pp. 52-3. Cf. Arnaud, op. cit., p. 62 and Béhar, op. cit. p. 38.

dedicatee of César-Antechrist, the eighth-century theologian Jean Damascène, otherwise known as Chrysorrhoas.²³ His dictum, “Tout est bon” is not only the motto of the collagiste but echoes Jarry’s crucial comparison of the original mind to the ostrich stomach, capable of crunching metal and stone:

Un cerveau vraiment original fonctionne exactement comme l’estomac de l’autruche: tout lui est bon, il pulvérise des cailloux et tord des morceaux de fer. (PL II 393)

Although she does not refer to this analogy, Grabska quotes a parallel extract from the *Livret* of L’Ymagier no. 2:

On doit accueillir dans son cerveau tout ce qu’il peut contenir des notions et se souvenir que le domaine intellectuel est **un paysage illimité** et non une suite de petits jardinets clos et murs de la méfiance et du dédain.²⁴
[my emboldening]

His rejection of watertight compartments and enclosed rectangular domains moreover reflects Jarry’s dislike of a text divided into rectangular pages and his preference for a circular and interflowing idea of an author’s text. This corresponds more to his “stacked plates” configuration, described in ‘Barnum,’ in which the inhabitants of one stratum of a circus’s vertical space may invade another. The following citation from Mardrus’s translation of Le Livre des Mille Nuits et Une Nuit²⁵ is one of the most substantial of all of his reviews. It encapsulates Jarry’s vision of a *paysage illimité* and corresponds to his own ideal watery world, one such as he believes the ideal literary text should unravel:

...Et il vit la mer au-dessus de sa tête se déployer comme un pavillon d’émeraude, tel que sur la terre l’admirable azur reposant sur les eaux; et à ses pieds s’étendaient les régions sous-marines que nul oeil terrien n’avait violées depuis la création; et une

²³ Elzbieta Grabska, ‘Iconologues ou iconoclastes - sur L’Ymagier de Jarry et de Gourmont’ in Les Cahiers de Varsovie, Actes du Colloque de l’Institut d’études romanes et le Centre de Civilisation française de l’Université de Varsovie, nov. 1973, p. 64.

²⁴ L’Ymagier no. 2, jan. 1895.

²⁵ Jarry censures the earlier English translators for not injecting colour into the colourless Arab text in contrast to Borges who censures Mardrus for doing so. Cf. Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Los traductores de los 1001 noches,’ in Historia de la eternidad, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1994, pp. 124-132.

sérénité régnait sur les montagnes et les plaines du fond; et la lumière était délicate qui se baignait autour des êtres et des choses, dans les transparences infinies et la splendeur des eaux; et les paysages tranquilles l'enchantaient au-delà de tous les enchantements du ciel natal; et il voyait des forêts de corail rouge, et des forêts de corail blanc, et des forêts de corail rose qui s'immobilisait dans le silence de leurs ramures; et des grottes de diamant dont les colonnes étaient de rubis, de chrysolithes, de béryls, de saphirs d'or et de topazes; ET UNE VÉGÉTATION DE FOLIE QUI SE DODELINAIT SUR DES ESPACES GRANDS COMME DES ROYAUMES...

[Jarrry's emphasis]

(PL II 627)

With the sure eye of the connoisseur, Jarrry selects the literary jewel in this dazzling and extraordinary submarine landscape, the tossing lunatic fronds of gigantic seaweed, to be placed in his mental catalogue alongside Maeterlinck's audible light, Rimbaud's *glaçons*, Lautréamont's trembling scarab beetle and the established *élus*.

Although L'Ymagier was certainly a convenient vehicle for their own work, Jarrry's and Gourmont's deliberate mixing of 'borrowed' mediaeval woodblocks with their own was a radically novel procedure and set a precedent for twentieth-century avant-garde magazines, such as the Blaue Reiter Almanac and E.-G Craig's The Page. The crudity of Gourmont's and Jarrry's materials and the "untutored intensity" of their engraving style has also been hailed as a forerunner of German Expressionism, especially the woodcuts of the *Brücke* group, and much the most interesting of the contemporary works published in L'Ymagier.²⁶ The primitivist impulse represented by L'Ymagier actually found its full force less in France than in Germany and Russia. Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova had followed the newest trends in France with close attention. The primitivist trends signalled by L'Ymagier in publishing images such as Jarrry's *Pains d'Épice* and the exaggeratedly simple style of Filiger, found their most obvious expression some thirteen years later at the third exhibition of the 'Golden Fleece' in 1909, where Larionov and Goncharova demonstrated their sources of inspiration as Siberian embroidery, gingerbread moulds and the peasant *lubok*, the Russian equivalent of the *Image d'Épinal*.

²⁶ Baas and Field, op. cit. p. 64.

Dürer's engravings are given prominence in both L'Ymagier and Perhinderion. A small section headed Gravure sur bois inveighs against the policy of retouching. Once again L'Ymagier's editorial policy is to print the exact surface of the woodblock with all its imperfections and all the artist's strokes, however clumsy. According to Jarry's dictum, "Dès que l'artiste a du génie c'est l'artiste qui a raison," the mistake of a genius is of more value than the correction of an artisan, as the following passage seems to plead:

Dürer écrivait son dessin sur une planche de poirier et le graveur "ôtait" de la surface de cette planche tout le blanc, sans se permettre le moindre accroc, la moindre retouche interprétative. On lit ceci au-dessous de la planche du Graveur sur bois, dans le recueil de Jost Amman, Künstler und Handwerker: Je suis un bon graveur sur bois et je coupe si bien avec mon canif tout trait sur mes blocs que, quand ils sont imprimés sur une feuille de papier blanc, vous voyez clairement les propres formes que l'artiste a tracées; son dessin, qu'il soit grossier ou qu'il soit fin, est exactement copié trait pour trait.²⁷

In describing Gourmont's very crude woodcut, Tête de martyr, and later Dürer's Martyrdom of St. Catherine, it was Jarry's whim not to concentrate on the intended image itself but to give his own interpretation of the shape of the actual strokes in the wood and the unconscious or alternative forms that they provide to an unprejudiced eye. The strange dots that Gourmont uses to denote the brightness of the martyr's halo are thus interpreted by Jarry as "cheveux lumineux (qui) donneront les points d'orgue des concerts." As in his article on the "reverse mimesis" of Henri de Régnier's characters, discussed in Chapters 1 and 5, Jarry imputes an exteriorized personality or aura to Gourmont's 'Martyr' and identifies the vague glow round the edge of the picture as his astral body:

Et l'on ne sait d'eux que cette divinité extériorisée, qui fait manifestes les trois bordures de leur nimbe et le bord aussi de leur épiderme, où comme un poil blond se courbe l'onde supérieure de leur corps astral. (PL I 967)

In Chapter 4 we shall resume this discussion of Jarry's habit of imposing alternative interpretations of the same configuration, and which, André Breton linked to the

²⁷ L'Ymagier, no. 3, avril, 1895, p. 139.

“systematized delirium” or *paranoia-critique* later practised by Dalí.

3.5 Pattern as language

The texts selected by Jarry for publication under the title Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial contain his first attempts to integrate the word as image or pattern unit with its role as a vehicle for sound and meaning. As we saw in Chapter 1, his literary texts have a striking visual content and reveal that he not only followed contemporary research into primitive pattern-making, but subscribed to the belief of Western scholars, that the sources of language lay in early ornament. Archaeological finds were scrutinized and historians of decorative art drew parallels between the pictograms of one culture and another. As Ernst Gombrich points out, nineteenth century scholars thought that the primitive tribes of the day provided a living replica of palaeolithic society. They hoped that study of the decorative art of modern “savages” would provide the key to understanding the origins of ornament.

A large part of Gauguin’s self-imposed artistic mission was to discover and copy ancient ornamental outlines. He hoped to imbue his paintings and carvings with a deeper meaning by decorating them with ancient patterns. It was a mission which convinced Jarry and set his own investigations in train. As a method of composing poetry it was, however, seriously flawed. In sacrificing language, as a vehicle of communication, to the exigencies of pattern, some of Jarry’s poems can be regarded as little more than an exquisite series of mysterious linked shapes, (spider - star - starfish - hand - palm - palm tree) forming a beautiful surface texture or visual *chapelet*, but which fail to resonate at an emotional level. The reader strains to discern what the insistent signs are pointing towards - what the pictorial code is supposed to mean. He remains no wiser than the archaeologist turning and turning the earthenware pot. The arguments provoked by Lessing’s Laocoön in relation to Homer’s shield always seem to be flickering in the back of Jarry’s mind. Is it possible to read a picture? Is it possible to experience *visual* delight from a poem?

As a writer, Jarry usually withholds himself from the reader. For him the purpose of writing was never to become an unburdening of his innermost thoughts and feelings, without the simultaneous drawing down of distracting barriers between himself and the reader. We have seen that the written word for Jarry was a spur or springboard to the imagination and was intended ^{to} provoke a rapid cinematic succession of images like those assailing a cyclist on a headlong downhill plunge. He was torn between the attraction of the visual and the power of the word. Mainstream art, in terms of the framed oil painting as a representation of nature, drew him far less than the decorative and performing arts. The fascination of the decorative arts and their ancient sources had gripped the young avant-garde artists throughout Europe. Evidence suggests that Jarry immersed himself in the latest academic research into the subject. It must have been this quest which, as early as 1892 or 1893, brought him to the work of the Norwegian painter Gerhard Munthe, with its terror-inspiring ancient Norse motifs, which we shall be examining in the next chapter.

The terror-inspiring profile preoccupied Jarry, since he believed that fear was one of the main stimuli of creative thought. His most significant statement on primitive ornament is his article 'Les Monstres' of 1895, although the compressed minimalism of his style and the absence of legends to the illustrations, leaves too much to the deductive capacity of the reader or to his access to the relevant theoreticians. The opening sentence is an isolated statement on the quality of perpetual movement contained in a symmetrical form such as the lyre, heart or ornamental vase:

Lyres, coeurs ou potiches, ils sont vivants parce que longitudinalement
symétriques. (PL I 969)

As we saw in Chapter 2, Jarry takes the opportunity to demonstrate the moving flow of verse with Part 2 of his poem 'la Régularité de la chasse,' which takes the visual form of fountain basins or a fantastic distillation column.

Perhaps the key word used here by Jarry in his discussion of the decorative is “stable,” in referring to the solid frontal symmetrical pose of the Cochin-Chinese warrior. (Fig. 1) and which accentuates its “magnetic” quality, or “field of force” to use Gombrich’s term, in the sense of the rallying function exerted by a heraldic banner on a battlefield. By including the spider and scarab profiles in this category, (“stable comme un scarabée, semblable à l’araignée mygale”) Jarry betrays their primary function as ornamental signs in his literary texts. In Chapter 1 we saw how his anarchic curiosity led him to experiment with *destabilization* of the sign. It is notable that in Le Véritable Portrait de M. Ubu he sets Ubu at an oblique, askance angle to the viewer, underlining his unstable and ambiguous, even repulsive qualities. He follows the same procedure in his woodcut Saint-Pierre Humanité which anticipates Cubist experiments in transmitting the sensation that the image has been twisted and caught in mid-revolution, representing a radical change of style from the symmetrical frontality of his ‘symbolist’ designs of 1894, which duplicates that of the *Image d’Épinal* itself. (Fig. 16)

The main interest of “Les Monstres” lies in Jarry’s choice of illustrations, which derive directly from the great ornamentation issues of the day, prompted by the intense research into the art of primitive tribes pursued by the theoreticians mentioned in Chapter 1. The article is headed by a mysterious grapheme or pictogram - probably a primitive alligator design, which sprawls magnificently across the page, needing no legend to announce its identity as an embodiment of abstract ferocious movement. (Fig. 2a) It is the pair to a pictogram representing a cat published in Paul Fort’s Livre d’art (Fig. 2b) and clearly one of Fort’s loans. Jarry declines to tell us its source or to make any attribution to the work of contemporary theoreticians who had assembled the various crocodile and alligator motifs used by primitive tribes as far apart as Colombia and New Guinea.²⁸ The illustration is supposed to speak for itself.

²⁸ M. Uhle, ‘Holz und Bambus-Geräte aus N.W. Neu Guinea’, K. Eth. Mus. Dresden vi, 1886, p. 6 and W. H. Holmes, ‘Ancient Art of the Province of Chiriqui, Colombia,’ Sixth annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology 1884-85, Washington, 1888, both quoted in Haddon, op. cit.

Jarry's choice of tailpiece, equally anonymous, throws up different decorative concerns relating to the delimitation by straight lines of the graphemes of the border zone from the pictograms of the central design. Very similar to Walter Crane's 'Rapid Sketch of a Persian Rug,' discussed by Gombrich, it needs attentive scrutiny by eyes used to reading Roman letters, to distinguish the animal-like forms of the schematic design from the energetic oriental script of the border.²⁹ (Fig. 3) Jarry follows Munthe and Gauguin in using a sign-bearing border or pedestal to enhance the mystery of some of his pictures, in particular César - Antechrist. (Fig. 57)

Returning to the characteristic stability of ornament, mentioned above, we know that Jarry was never satisfied with stability and symmetry *per se*. He is not far into his discussion before he is gripped by the impulse to turn the image on its side in order to analyse it from a different angle and to offer an alternative (and, to Jarry, equally valid) interpretation of the ferocious god from the Sandwich Isles (Fig. 4) as follows:

Debout il se coiffe de la mitre et regarde de deux yeux grossissants (...)
couché semblable au seuil du caïman sacré. (PL I 972)

The urge to bend, twist and turn the fixed sign leads naturally to the Heraldic Act of César Antechrist and to the setting free of the heraldic charges from their traditional sign system. We shall later see how Jarry's urge to look at objects from unconventional angles and to open his mind to alternative identities that the outline of a form might suggest were at the very start of a trend which led to the experiments of Cubism and indeed anticipated Dalí's *paranoiac-critical* method, as André Breton perceived.

Pursuing his heresy of the mobile design, Jarry closes his article by challenging the fixity of the cross design, the stable central symbol of centuries of Western art. Alluding perhaps to tinkling Tibetan prayer wheels, he places what he terms "les croix des fakirs" in opposition to

²⁹ Reproduced as fig. 115 in Gombrich, *op. cit.*.

the severe Western cross, approving the joyous carnivalesque atmosphere which distinguishes primitive religious rites whether Asian or Breton, as opposed to the joyless formality of 'civilized' church services. Jarry's celebration of *La Vierge fauve* in his poem 'Ia Orana Maria' further demonstrates his opposition to the secular Catholic Church. Jarry joined Gauguin in seeking out the expression of genuine primitive religious impulses in communities where the local beliefs and folklore remained intact. (PL I 252-3) Jarry paints a scenario where sacred ornamental signs are set in motion, evoking a colourful fairground rather than a cold church interior:

Mais les croix des fakirs sont mobiles, et ils gyrent pareils à la joie des
oiseaux de son et de drap volant sous les auvents des pardons. (PL I 974)

Jarry's words imply a criticism of secular services and make a nostalgic gesture towards the gaiety and genuine community spirit engendered by the worship rituals of simple primitive communities and in pilgrimages, such as his own childhood journey to St. Anne d'Auray, described in the revealing chapter 'Le Tain des mares' in *Les Jours et les Nuits*, which combines an accent of pagan pre-Christian worship with the innocence of childhood:

On arrivait dans des cercles sacrés de pierre grise, et tout le monde montait à genoux
des marches douloureuses, jusqu'au sommet d'un triangle de granit; et il jouait debout
parmi, parce qu'il était tout petit enfant. (PL I 797)

Jarry's closing paragraphs of 'Les Monstres' deliberately draw Breton peasant rituals of worship into the same exotic and primitive category as the Hindu worship of Shiva. He turns away from the rigid Christian cross of unbending doctrine and places the reader within a world of whirling windmill sails reminiscent of Don Quixote, twopenny playthings and the notorious Moulin de la Galette which presides over one of his Ubu illustrations. These are happy crosses in rapid motion, connoting fantasy and amusement and anticipate his ingenious reconstruction of Christ's journey to Golgotha, viewed in terms of a modern bicycle race, 'La Passion considérée comme course de côte,' mentioned in the previous chapter. Jarry often

substitutes the obsolete *gyre* and sometimes *vire* or even *vire-vire* for *tourne*, whose closer onomatopoeic relationship to the action of whirling or spinning he preferred.

In his article 'Les Monstres' Jarry thus departs from the Christian themes which dominate L'Ymagier and momentarily opens a tantalizing peephole onto the massive body of research into the decorative art of primitive societies which had been an intense subject of focus for half a century. His early interest in the monstrous and the strange can be traced back to his choice of a line from the Aeneid, "*Multaque praeterea vararum monstra ferarum*" as epigraph to his important juvenile poem, 'la Menée de Hennequin' (PL I 125)

Jarry's much-quoted remark from this article "J'appelle monstre toute originale inépuisable beauté" smacks of his Lautréamont phase - an affected statement which, despite the unusual dissonance of the monstrous and the beautiful, fits better with nineteenth century Decadence than the purging Black Humour which endeared him to the Artist-Destroyers of the twentieth century. 'Les Monstres' is a typical example of Jarry's tendency merely to skim the surface of a subject which he has studied in depth. The specialist can recognise his knowledge by the handful of learned allusions that he lets fall, but the non-initiate reader is shut out. As he frankly states in 'Filiger,' Jarry is not prepared to offer a helping hand to those who are looking for shortcuts to erudition. The Monster section of L'Ymagier continued through succeeding numbers without a supporting text, providing an exotic, pagan contrast, or rather balance, to the predominantly Christian pageant. It is a section which reflects Jarry's love of the grotesque and whose creatures he absorbs into his literary texts such as Le Vieux de la Montagne and L'Autre Alceste. It must be stressed, however, that Jarry's selection of Christian imagery was intentionally savage and grotesque itself.

3.6 L'Ymagier: sacred images of cruelty and the portrayal of the mutilated body.

In the field of black and white engraving there were many precedents of startlingly gruesome illustration: Goya's Estragos de la Guerra; Félicien Rops's erotic illustrations;

Gustave Doré's illustrations to Dante's Inferno, on which Max Ernst later drew; Daumier's caricatures and Odilon Redon's uncanny, disembodied eye-balloons and freak monsters.

Jarry's early familiarity with Goya is evident through the dedication of his early poem 'Enterreé vivant' to Nada. Hogarth, Doré and Redon are all mentioned as points of reference in his art criticism.

Although balanced by images of the madonna and child, L'Ymagier is mainly distinguished by portrayals of ritual cruelty and the punishments of Hell. From Dürer to Gauguin the figure of Christ crucified alternates with infernal tortures. Jarry's article 'Les Clous du Seigneur' which minutely documents the number of nails used in the crucifixion as portrayed by various artists takes on an almost fetishistic accent. Parallels have indeed been drawn between mediaeval and Renaissance Christian ritual practices and images and "nail fetishes" found more recently in the Congo, but Jarry needed to look no further than European superstitions documented by Éliphas Lévi and J. G. Frazer to find records of practices involving nails or pins to achieve power over an intended victim.³⁰ In reproducing so many Christian icons of the body pierced, the underlying comment by Gourmont and Jarry seems to be that European Christianity is as barbaric in its inspiration and beliefs as any primitive religions that use bodily mutilation or human sacrifice to gain supernatural protection or salvation for the community. Notable amongst L'Ymagier's many depictions of Christ's crucifixion is the Pellerin print, Notre-dame des Sept Douleurs, (PL I 984-5) which depicts the Virgin Mary mourning the dead Christ with seven swords embedded in her chest. In Jarry's personal code of imagery the ray and the spike, blade or thorn are equivalent, thus he will talk about the sun's *claws* (PL I 1023) or make an linguistic equation between bayonets or, as he puts it "n'importe quelle chose militaire et pointue"=eyelashes=star's rays. (PL I 951)

Jarry's semantic approach to the alternative Greek renderings for crucifixion are perhaps

³⁰ "Un autre envoûtement usité dans les campagnes usité dans les campagnes consiste à consacrer des clous pour des oeuvres de haine (...) puis à suivre les traces de la personne qu'on veut tourmenter, et enclouer en forme de croix toutes les empreintes de ses pas qu'on pourra retrouver sur la terre ou sur la sable."
Éliphas Lévi, Le Dogme et le rituel de la haute magie, t. II, p. 242.

even more interesting than his discussion of the iconic alternatives and underline his implicit comment that Christ's crucifixion may not have happened at all and may be no more than a composite legend. Of the four Greek alternatives that he gives: *σαυρουν* [sic], *σκολοπιζειν*, *προσηλουν* and *κρεμαν* only *stauros* (not *sauroun*) actually refers to the conventional form of the cross. On the semantic evidence, Jarry reports that Christ could have suffered impalement, hanging or nailing according to variations in the terminology used in the Greek gospels and that the crucifixion as central tenet of Christianity could be pure fiction.

Having cast into doubt the Crucifixion itself, to quibble about the number of nails is an absurdity that Jarry approaches with huge mock academic seriousness and much quotation of learned texts, in absolute contradiction of his artistic principles as outlined in 'Linteau.' The inclusion of an illustration of two fleshy, disembodied feet, pierced by single round holes is a further absurdity, more appropriate to a medical than an art journal. At least as early as 1907 there was speculation in ethnographical circles that Congo nail fetishes were related to the Christian crucifix.³¹ The magical significance of nails driven into the body and their effect of endowing that body with supernatural powers would seem to be the burden of Jarry's article. The reader is once again dupe, if he is persuaded to waste his time following the detailed arguments into whether three nails or four nails riveted the sacred body during a supernatural event, obscured by conflicting accounts and the private visions of individual artists. Jarry's article, 'Les Clous du Seigneur' is a meticulously documented piece of spoof, laced with the odd deliberate "error," as a nudge to the alert reader, such as the use of the Greek word, *sauroun* = lizard, crocodile instead of *stauros* = cross.

We have referred to L'Ymagier's regular section on Monsters and now to its many portrayals and documentation of Christ's Passion. One section which seems singularly out of place with its anti-realist aims is that titled 'Costumes & Portraits.' L'Ymagier no. 5

³¹ Peschuel-Loesche quoted in D. G. Jongmans, 'Nail Fetish and Crucifix,' in E. J. Brill, The Wonder of Man's Ingenuity, Leiden, 1962, pp. 55 ff. cited in John Mack, 'Fetish?' in Anthony Shelton ed., Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire, London, The South Bank Centre and the Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton in assoc. with Lund Humphries Publishers, 1995, p. 54.

contains six ill-assorted illustrations under this heading, (selected “pell-mell”), running from portraits by Dürer and Cranach to sixteenth-century wood-engravings in which both engraver and subject are anonymous and simply titled, *Soldat* and *Dame*. One senses a conflict of interests between the two editors: Remy de Gourmont, author of the scholarly ethnological record *Chez les Lapons. Mœurs, coutumes, légendes de la Laponie norvégienne* and Jarry, pursuing his artistic mission to shock and liberate the powers of the lulled imagination, become lazy with spoonfeeding and comfortable, familiar fare. Thus the sixth woodcut in the “Costumes” section, lurches back into the macabre category of sacrifice discussed above and bears the long title ‘Rabbais saignant un enfant chrétien pour la Pâque (l’an 1475). Bois tiré de la *Chronique de Nuremberg*, édition latine.’ The costumes of the officiating Rabbi and his attendants are surely less significant than the theme of ritual child sacrifice. The mysterious poem, ‘Prologue de conclusion.’ seems to refer to this theme:

L’enfant drapé de la pourpre et du sang du Christ mourant
 Sur son front a les fleurs de la vierge couronne écran
 Et la croix sur l’épaule en militaire dans le rang.

The next, much simpler verse must surely refer to an Épinal print:

Et Jean-Baptiste enfant va rose et nu sous le ciel bleu
 Avec à ses pieds blancs des sandales couleur de feu;
 La peau du mouton bêlant vêt le prophète de Dieu.

The following repeats the metaphor of flowers for sacrificial blood and evokes another popular subject of Épinal prints in the figure of St Geneviève of Brabant:

On égorgea les fleurs sur la route des innocents.
 Le barrissement des tambours fait envoler le sang
 Que brouta la biche de Geneviève de Brabant. (PL I 242)

What is puzzling is Jarry’s decision to reproduce a macabre woodcut in a rather bland section of *L’Ymagier* where its theme is hardly appropriate. We suspect that the distance between

Jarry's and Gourmont's artistic aims was becoming more and more apparent and that Jarry's later contributions to L'Ymagier were often barbed. The savage spark, the primitive element of cruelty, that was an inherent ingredient of Jarry's artistic makeup, was alien to Gourmont.

3.7 The grotesque and unreliable sign

Whilst maintaining a strong visual content throughout Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial, Jarry can be seen testing out the early Mallarméan Symbolist criteria before rejecting them and moving towards the emblematic and cabalistic - a process that Mallarmé himself was following at a more thoughtful pace. Mallarmé's original concept of writing as black signs on a white page did not accord with Jarry's view of writing as an almost magical spontaneous process. Here is Mallarmé's observation:

Tu remarquas, on n'écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l'alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s'indique ébauché ou interrompu; l'homme poursuit le noir sur blanc.³²

Jarry's first piece in Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial conforms to Mallarmé's vision in portraying human life (here through the metaphor of Breton funeral processions) as a moving script of black on a white scape:

Sur l'écran tout blanc du grand ciel tragique, les mille-pieds noirs des enterrements passent, tels les verres d'une monotone lanterne magique. (PL I 174)

In his poem 'La Peur' he follows the same idea, using a favourite Mallarméan pun with 'chemises de cygnes' (*signes*). Jarry imparts a mysterious graphic significance to the shadows cast by the girls' fingers on the white surface of their nightshirts. In the poem 'Végétal' he partially acquiesces to the black on white definition of the literary text, but its blackness is the blackness of the intelligent raven, who does not follow a straight trajectory or fly simply to

³² Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Quant au livre', (OC 370.)

reach a destination, but enjoys impetuous tumbling and somersaulting. This is Jarry's first intimation that he views the written text as a treacherous and hostile surface and the signs upon it as mad, sparkling, dancing and uncontrollable:

Le vélin écrit rit et grimace livide.
 Les signes sont dansants et fous. Les uns, flambeaux,
 Pétillent radieux dans une page vide.
 D'autres en rangs pressés, acrobates corbeaux,
 Dans la neige épandue ouvrent leur bec avide. (PL I 179)

The text then for Jarry is an unreliable entity, composed of lunatic, uncanny and **ravening** signs, an idea which, implies that the letter is a kind of undeveloped neutral imago that must be fed by the writer. The portrayal of the writer as a weary parent bird, complying reluctantly with a never-ending insistent demand, fulfilling his sacred obligation of pouring shape and meaning on to a potential text that would otherwise fail to exist, is of capital importance to understanding Jarry's own motivation and even his resistance to the act of writing. His own live owls, with their daily requirement for meat, would have given him an immediate concrete parallel. As we shall see, he would develop this metaphor of the shapeless, hungry **female** text, more fully in Messaline.

It is immediately apparent that even Jarry's view of the white ground that receives the text has a grotesque tinge different to Mallarmé's. For Mallarmé white has an intrinsic purity and the blank page an unsullied, virginal quality. The first line of Jarry's poem 'Végétal,' 'Le vélin écrit, rit et grimace, livide' portrays an unhealthy whiteness with the lividity associated with a scar or a face unnaturally drained of blood. The snow of the second verse has a cruel character with the same connotations of famine contained in Lieds funèbres, just as the arrival of dawn in Jarry's barracks, carries no connotations of newness, purity and light, but denotes the cold and ugly questing snout of a white pig, which here flattens itself grotesquely against the window panes:

Vers l'attente du clairon terrible, le jour commença d'aplatir son groin givreux aux

vitres. (PL I 755)

This is not to say that Jarry always ascribes a negative value to the colour white, but he distinguishes between an unhealthy white due to lack of light (*lombrie blanc*) or lack of blood and the richness of a white formed by all the colours of the spectrum, as in this description of Varia, Jarry's vision of Mortal Woman or Eve, as opposed to Miriam, the Sacred Woman or Madonna:

Varia n'est blanche que de la blancheur de feu des filles qui sont l'épanouissement du Gulf-Stream. (...)

Elle est blanche comme toutes les pierres colorées qui sont pâles.
topaze blanche, rubis balais, perle morte, en poudre mêlée. (PL I 942)

Mallarmé's simplicity of absolutes therefore does not exist for Jarry. Black is not completely black and white is not completely white. Nor does the poetically inspired text by virtue of its magical nature deserve to appear in anything but the glowing gold of mediaeval missals. Jarry had to bow to practical requirements in the printing of his own texts, but it is noticeable that his illustrations are nearly all pulled in colour and that L'Ymagier and Perhinderion are remarkable for the bright colours of their hand-painted illustrations.

In Jarry's unstable universe, where there are no absolutes, even the single letter cannot be relied upon for a fixed sound as the title page of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial proves. The written text and even the embroidered pattern is a live, slipping and sliding, elusive mass - treacherous black quicksand. Nothing should be more comfortingly permanent in the universe of the child than the pattern on its bedspread, but in his poem 'Manao tupapau,' the supposedly fixed designs on the bedcover desert their stations and leave a frightening vacuum:

L'arabesque s'effare
et fuit comme un serpent (PL I 254)

In Noa Noa Gauguin had insisted on the idea of the pattern as a vital mechanism and

mysterious language.³³ As we have seen, Jarry embraced Gauguin's idea as one of his guiding compositional principles. Gerhard Munthe was an exponent of the same principle, vividly portrayed in the three Contes de fées watercolours, which were the subject of Jarry's Tapisseries poems (Figs. 10a, b and c) and whose gruesome borders of lolling-tongued tulips and leeches seem poised to quit their decorative stations and to invade the main picture. As we shall be discussing below, Gauguin drew from a repertoire of distinct and documented poses (*bras liés, bras dressés, mains jointes*) which he uses over and over again. That the letters of the alphabet, such Φ and Ψ or X and Y derive from some of these typical human poses is well-documented and had often been exploited by illuminators.

As we mentioned in the last chapter, Jarry had taken his cue from Lewis Carroll in planning to call a future collection of poetry Navigations dans le miroir. Carroll's threatening and unpredictable playing card figures, which would normally be under the control of the human player represent the grotesque ornament stepping off its tidy shelf, the marginal illumination invading the text, the phantoms of dream disordering the tenor of real life. Following Carroll's example, Jarry releases heraldic emblems from their shields and introduces exotic, unpredictable flower objects, whose oddness and rarity seem to give them licence to behave in an extraordinary way. Messaline and Le Surmâle provide the best examples of this. The roses grown at Lurance, Marcueil's property have a peculiar exoticism and grotesque character, at variance with the usual connotations of roses. We must remember that, from César-Antechrist to Messaline, Jarry associates the colour red with the Phallus ("son vermillon obscène - l'écarlate chauve" etc.) Marcueil's gesture of male gallantry in cutting all his Lurance roses is one of determined courtship, if not attack. The largest Rose of Lurance, already carrying the poisonous and putrefying connotations of scarlet fungus, penetrates the carriage of Ellen Elson, as if the servant of its master's will. In similar manner, but of their own volition, like goblins rather than goblets, the rare opaline myrrhines,

³³ Sur le sol pourpre de longues feuilles serpentes d'un jaune de métal, tout un vocabulaire oriental - lettres (il me semblait) d'une langue inconnue mystérieuse. Paul Gauguin, Noa Noa, ed. J. Loize, 1966, p. 21.

documented by Pliny and collected by Claudius, pursue Messaline down the steps of the amphitheatre. Patently denoting the words of the text like the 'ravens' of 'Végétal' and likewise gape-mouthed ("les bouches avides de boire") they refuse to stay in the rows where they have been set. These seem to reflect Jarry's most negative view of the act of creative writing as the production of rows of exotic and rebellious glyphs or ornaments which demand to be fed like small birds, pursue or even stick to the writer, but refuse to be controlled. As the myrrhines will figure in future chapters, we shall only cite here the passage on the Roses of Lurance as an example of the mature writer's increasingly grotesque creative imagination and his Magritte-like vision of the primitive emblem or sign as capable of violating the human being in his or her neatly defined and 'civilized' private space.

Mes regards traversèrent sans obstacle, d'une glace à l'autre, son wagon. Quelque chose intercepta le coup d'oeil que je voulais jeter dans l'intérieur du wagon de Miss Elson. La première fenêtre du long compartiment d'acajou, la seule qui fût à ma portée, était obstruée, à ma grande stupéfaction, *à l'extérieur*, par un épais capitonnage écarlate. On eût dit que des champignons sanglants, dans l'espace de cette nuit-là, avaient crû sur la vitre...

Il faisait grand jour maintenant, je ne pus douter de ce que je vis: tout ce que j'apercevais du wagon disparaissait sous des roses rouges énormes, épanouies, fraîches comme si elles venaient d'être cueillies. Le parfum s'en diffusait dans l'air calme à l'abri du coupe-vent.

Quand la jeune fille baissa la glace, une partie du rideau de fleurs se déchira, mais elles ne tombèrent point tout de suite: pendant quelques secondes, elles voyagèrent dans l'espace à la même vitesse que les machines; la plus grosse s'engouffra, avec le courant d'air subit à l'intérieur du wagon.

Il me sembla que Miss Elson poussa un grand cri et porta la main à sa poitrine, et je ne la vis plus pendant tout le reste monotone de cette journée. (PL II 221)

Although this symbolic rape by a rose, written in 1901, contains overtones of Jarry's earlier 'L'Incube' through its basic motif of the glass window as the vain protecting membrane between the child and the malevolent supernatural forces which threaten him, it is a masterly synthesis of the organic and the mechanical and would provide perfect material for an Ernst or Klinger illustration. It shows how strongly Jarry's written style had veered towards the

grotesque since 1894, when he wrote that “les fleurs sont toujours inanimées et harmonieuses et emblématiques... les plus ‘communes’ plantes.” (PL I 1024) As with the passage from “Le Récit de Balkis” quoted in Chapter 1 concerning the immense lentil-encrusted pool across which the dead are rowed, there is a definite Beardsleyan accent about Jarry’s mass of ambiguous roses, redolent of the designs for Salome and many other drawings, where Beardsley uses a thick **clustering** manner which we shall call the *grotesque of suffocation*.

We must nevertheless return to Jarry’s poetic development of 1894, when we see that his imagination had been taken with the Old Testament account of the mysterious *Mene Tekel Phares* glowing on Belshazzar’s wall, as a supernatural event with convincing credentials. For him the graphic sign was not only a medium of communication from man to man, but of god to man, and had been commemorated as such in the gold leaf of mediaeval missals. He saw the creation of poetry idealistically in terms of the alchemical process and the poet’s words could only be seen in terms of the glowing gold of the final product - certainly not the same colour as the black ash of the detritus. In direct refutation of Mallarmé, Jarry pushed his idea to its conclusion in ‘L’Acte héraldique’ of César-Antechrist, where he has the three heraldic charges, Chef, Trescheur and Pairle reflecting the rising sun to form the incandescent word << TOY >> against the sable of the retreating night. (PL I 293) (Fig. 11) It is significant that he chooses a gold bearing on a black (sable) ground for his own invented poetic arms, as reproduced at the beginning of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and that this **Y** bearing, that we discussed in Chapter 1, duplicates the ancient supplicatory gesture of raised arms. For Jarry this is an obsessive image, first delineated in the prose poem, ‘La Plainte de la Mandragore.’ He moreover asserts it to be the symbol representing Christ crucified and the Word of God itself, citing the testimony of the visionary, Catherine Emmerich, to whom Christ’s cross appeared in the form of a **Y**. (PL I 732)

It is an interesting coincidence that the two obsessive gestural forms that we see in Jarry and later, Dalí are ones of prayer. In Jarry’s case the form of upraised arms, known in Greek

figurative design as *χειρες υπτιαι* and which he takes as his own ambiguous sign of poet-martyr, is partly based on the sinister anthropomorphic form of the mythical mandrake with its phallic connotations, but transposed to the configuration of the nailed Christ - indeed Christ fused to the shape of the woodbeams to which he was nailed. In Dalí's case it would be the bent female form with clasped hands that haunted him as one of menace, and that he equated with the Praying Mantis as Praying or Preying Woman.

The poetic text on the page of course consists of these magical and emblematic letters or ciphers, linking arms, like dancers, sometimes threatening, sometimes entreating. We discussed above Jarry's absurdist and negative view of the uncontrolled text. His second more positive view of the writer as ploughman alludes directly to the debate treated by Lessing's *Laoköon* about the relative values of literature and art. Jarry transposes Homer's image of the regular troughs of the plough, as wrought by Hephaestus in glowing inlay for Achilles' shield, onto the Roman circus arena of *Messaline* where the tracks of the chariots have made the same pattern, but black against the glittering surface of the ancient crystal sand ("l'ancien sable de cristal"). Jarry's attraction to this metaphor for the poetic text surely rests partly on the pointed reference to the cup of mead which the ploughman/charioteer pours on to the "soil" from which inspiration, in the form of words, will spring.³⁴ This passage will be cited again in the final chapter as an important ingredient in Jarry's personal vision of the nature of poetic inspiration and the sanctity of the text.

But for his break with Remy de Gourmont, Jarry stood to be formally classified as a member of the group that Gourmont had defined as Emblematic poets, as distinct from the earlier Symbolists. Gourmont's definition of Elskamp's poetry here makes the clear

³⁴ "And he made on it a field of soft fallow, rich ploughland, broad and triple-tilled. There were many ploughmen on it, wheeling their teams and driving this way and that. **Whenever they had turned and reached headland of the field, a man would come forward and put a cup of honey-sweet wine in their hands:** then they would turn back down the furrows, pressing on through the deep fallow to reach the headland again. The field darkened behind them, and looked like earth that is ploughed though it was made in gold. This was the marvel of his craftsmanship." *The Iliad*, 18, ll. 540-550 tr. Martin Hammond, London, Penguin, 1987.

distinction between the abstract nature of the emblematic and the symbolic:

L'emblème pose tout d'abord l'abstraction; il se sert de paysages, de personnages, de matérialités, mais vues selon des attitudes volontairement significatives; tandis que le symbole présente la nature telle qu'elle est et nous laisse la liberté de l'interprétation, l'emblème affirme la vérité qu'il exprime; il affirme avant tout et ne sert de figuration que comme d'un moyen purement mnémonique.³⁵

Gourmont here summarizes the vague character peculiar to Symbolist expression whose intent is to carry a certain open-ended suggestiveness. He contrasts this with the emblem as unequivocal figurative sign whose purpose is to impress its identity on the reader or beholder,

As we have seen, Jarry aspired to this abstract quality described by Gourmont both in his poetry and his small illustrations, attempting to recapture the sacred and hieroglyphic nature of the Renaissance emblem and to which he ascribes exalting powers in his article, 'Filiger.' ('L'émblématique est faculté.') Writing of Gargantua's personal emblem, Rabelais had used the term *ymage* in preference to *emblème* which no doubt counted for something in the choice of title for L'Ymagier. It must remain a matter of speculation whether Gourmont allowed his personal differences with Jarry to override his intellectual judgement on the value of Jarry's poetry and on Jarry's artistic right to take his place beside Elskamp in the small group of Emblematic poets and certainly to be included in his Livre des Masques, for which Vallotton had done his portrait. It is likely that such a perspicacious critic eventually discerned the subversive intent concealed in many of Jarry's poems and in some of his apparently serious contributions to L'Ymagier. Although he believed in the aims of the magazine, Jarry pursued a subtle policy of anarchy and deception targeted at the lazy bourgeois reader, akin to the veiled obscenity in Beardsley's contributions to the Yellow Book. This treacherous practice had benefitted from Gourmont's unwitting cooperation and patronage. The damage to him was both personal and professional.

³⁵ Remy de Gourmont, Livre des masques II, Mercure de France, p. 129. Gourmont also puts Maeterlinck and Redon in the emblematic category.

3.8 The letter as flexible graphic sign

Jarry added the letters of the Roman and Greek alphabets to his repertoire of visual signs, sorting them according to their shapes and to their equivalents in the natural world. As Chapter 1 has shown, he was particularly fond of the zig-zag or toothed outline - one of the most basic designs that the human hand can draw, common both to children's drawings and to the decoration of early pottery, where it is known as the chevron design. When broken up into units, the chevron design translates into a series of Ms or Ws.³⁶ We would contest the view that Jarry saw a mystical significance in the letter M, by virtue of its role as the initial letter of *Mère*, *Mer* and *Mort*,³⁷ given that he also plays with other letters of the alphabet. The quality to which he was particularly alive was its visual impact as part of the terror-inspiring configuration which evokes the jagged outline of feral fangs described in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2 we argued that the exaggerated alliterative effects of the poem, 'La Régularité de la chasse,' were a deliberate pastiche of so-called "sound poetry." Although there is also a visual element in the jaggedness of the repeated Ms in the line, "**M**ain maigrie et maudite où menace la mort!" which could be said to emulate the sharp-peaked waves and plunging troughs of the stormy seascape that he evokes, we hold to the satirical purpose of the earlier argument, based on his technique of **cramming** a poem or illustration with artificial devices to indicate the presence of spoof.

Jarry nevertheless demonstrates keen awareness of the graphic shape of letters and chooses the names of his chief characters accordingly. The initial letters of his characters' names are often drawn from the jagged 'wave pattern': A or M are placed in opposition to V.

³⁶ Jarry makes use of this image in his description of the macabre ferryman Doublemain:

Je vis aussi que Doublemain avait des bras doublement coudés, un second bras naissant des os de son poignet; et selon qu'il levait ou baissait les coudes, de chacune de ses épaules naissait un M ou un W. (PL I 915)

³⁷ Mourier-Casile uses the mystical significance she perceives in Jarry's particular use of the M to draw a line to Breton's "M bleu qui me menace" in *Champs magnétiques* and to link the Surrealist imaginative processes with those of the *fin-de-siècle*. In my view Jarry's texts do not provide safe ground on which to base such a sweeping hypothesis, but they do provide many links to Breton and Ernst.

See Pascaline Mourier-Casile, *André Breton, explorateur de la Mère-Moire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1986, pp. 83-87.

Aster is the foil to Vulpian; Miriam (Maria) is in opposition to Varia. It is Jarry's keen sense of the plastic potential of letters and of their counterparts, such as teeth or thorns, in the visible world which prompts him to give one or another special emphasis in his written texts.

Jarry brings his idea of a changing and flexible cipher to its conclusion in the person of the acrobat Mnester, who, against the circular 'page' of the Roman arena, assumes all possible positions: the sinuous S is suggested by Jarry's description: 'son long corps ondulant de la même reptation qu'une lamproie' and restated with the undulating S of his swaying dance; the human cipher is reversed as a spinning vertical invisible J (representing "Je" or Jarry's own initial) and finally curled up in the O of the ultimate *τροχός* position, zero or Saturn's ring. As we shall see in the final chapter, the idea of dancing as a distilled form of writing, performed with the whole body and detached from any of the normal writing apparatus, had already been formulated by Mallarmé. Pierre Bonnard, who by 1899 had become Jarry's personal artist, gives a brilliant display of grotesque "body writing" with his illustrations to Jarry's satirical and obscene song, 'Tatane,' of dancing negresses, to which we shall return in Chapter 6. Author and artist apply the same plastic principle to the corpulent outline of Père Ubu. In the *Almanach du Père Ubu*, *illustré* Bonnard moulds Ubu's form into the shapes of the vowels a, e, i, o and u. (PL I 584-5) (Fig. 51)

Usually quick to shun anything universally recognized, Jarry adopts, in childlike fashion, the letter X to denote death, as expressed in the piratical emblem of the skull and crossbones. Here Jarry explains how the features of Xavier, one of his earliest classmates, had been overlaid in his mind by the morbid crossbones of death, connoted through the initial letter of his name:

Et le souvenir définitif de la classe des Minimes se schématisa en Xavier, les traits oubliés pour la substitution linéaire de l'X qui blanchioie, aux portails des enterrements, sous les têtes humaines des tentures:

La Mercquebac, la Zinner, la...

La Mort.

(PL I 934)

Jarry's earliest published piece, 'L'Autoclète' also insists on the schematic X as the sign of death, here configured by the rigidly splayed body of Achras:

Et pendant qu'échassier unijambiste, l'empalé tourne en sens divers, en une
inconscience de radiomètre et vire-vire dardant ses yeux glauques, les trois Palotins,
barbus de roux, de blanc et de noir, dansent une ronde à l'ombre de sa silhouette
cristallisée d'X. (PL I 185)

It goes without saying that the form of the large X denoting death is an implicit schematic presence in the memorial poem Le Sablier. Although the X occurs repeatedly in the texts of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial, we must remember that the collection appeared under the sign of the letter Y, as expressed in the heraldic title page illustration. As a symbol, the Y configuration provides Jarry with both an obscene and a sacred interpretation. On the one hand Rabelais, from whom he drew copiously, uses it vulgarly as the male sign;³⁸ on the other it refers to the supplicatory gesture that we have mentioned in connection with the poem 'Le Sablier', and which is also the posture of Christ crucified. It represents the reaching out of man to god as depicted on neolithic pots - the rooted, gravity-bound creature that Jarry parodies in 'La Plainte de la Mandragore' stretching up in the ancient gesture of despair and entreaty to the intuited spiritual forces which gave it mortal life and from which it demands life eternal. Here is the relevant verse:

Hausse tes bras infatigués
Comme des troncs d'arbre élagués.
Verse la sueur de ta face
Dans ton ombre où le temps s'efface;
Verse la sueur de ton front
Qui sait l'heure où les corps mourront. (PL I 245)

³⁸ "Il ne vouloit point mourir les couilles pleines. Et suys d'avis que, dorenavant, en tout mon Salmigondinoys, quand on voudra par justice executer quelque malfaiteur, un jour ou deux davant on le fasse brigoutter en onocrotale, si bien que en tous ses vases spermaticques ne reste de quoy protraire un Y gregoy. Chose si precieuse ne doit estre follement perdue."
François Rabelais, Le tiers livre, ch. XXVI, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, pp. 305-7.

We can therefore see that Jarry regarded the letters of the alphabet as pictograms whose semiotic role was quite separate from their role as sounds. This does not mean that he did not exploit the phonetic quality of poetry. His great talent as a versifier and doggerel-maker depends on it. Much of his poetry is alliterative and designed to be read aloud. He simply used the form of letters as an extra resource of decorative motifs, as had his primitive ancestors, particularly in regard to the sculptural poses of the human body. Taking a single example from the poem 'La Régularité de la Chasse,' where he takes both the phonic and the graphic potential of the letter to their extremes, Jarry exploits the form of the letter P as a potential clenched fist ("des poings de parricides"). (PL I 198) The poem 'L'Homme à la Hache' has likewise been interpreted by one commentator partly in terms of Jarry's fondness for the letter H and its guillotine-like form.³⁹

Whilst drawing from the ornamental history of manuscript illumination, whose craft was being perpetuated by the Nabis, Ranson and Denis, Jarry departed from accepted tradition by removing the graphic emphasis from the initial letter of the poem or chapter and by using letters as graphemes at any point in his text, especially if he could combine them to achieve the effect of a pattern. It is an appropriate moment to return to the polyhedron and to Jarry's prefatory statement about words, meaning and perception in 'Linteau'. The idea of a sentence or verse as a necklace of many-faceted diamonds is clearly in Jarry's mind as he gives the reader the following counsel to weigh the words both aurally and visually:

Qu'on pèse donc les mots, polyèdres d'idées, avec des scrupules comme des
diamants à la balance de ses oreilles, sans demander pourquoi telle et telle
chose, car il n'y a qu'à regarder, et c'est écrit dessus. (PL I 173)⁴⁰

This chapter has been devoted to Jarry's preoccupation with the aesthetic qualities of book, image and alphabetic letter. In 'Linteau' he addresses the problem of meaning,

³⁹ Daniel Compère, 'L'homme à la hache,' in Alfred Jarry, Colloque de Cerisy, Paris, Pierre Belfond, 1981, pp. 73-83.

⁴⁰ I have incorporated Kevil's correction from the first edition, replacing "telle ou telle" with "telle et telle".

commending us first of all to the surface of the word, evoking the image of rosary beads:

La dissection indéfinie exhume toujours des oeuvres quelque chose de nouveau. Confusion et danger: l'oeuvre d'ignorance aux mots bulletins de vote pris hors de leur sens ou plus justement sans préférence de sens. Et celle-ci aux superficiels d'abord est plus belle, car la diversité des sens attribuables est surpassante, la verbalité libre de tout chapelet se choisit plus tintante; (PL I 171)

Jarry's argument is here leading up to the sweeping and probably tongue in cheek statement, which affects to define the attributes of language in the same terms as a geometrical theorem:

Le rapport de la phrase verbale à tout sens qu'on y puisse trouver est constant; en celle-là, indéfiniment varié.

This statement of 1894, proposing an indefinite number of meanings for each sentence is at variance to the hypothesis of a universal language, which limits phonetically similar words to sharing the same meaning. Jarry attributes this theory to the recently published Introduction à la Histoire ancienne of Victor Fournié (1844-1900), "Pour qui sait lire, le même son ou le même syllabe a toujours le même sens dans toutes les langues." Half-serious, half-jesting, but deploying his logical skills to amusing effect, Jarry argues in favour of Fournié's theory in his 1903 article 'Ceux pour qui il n'y'eut point de Babel.' He doubtless knew that the theory of a universal language dated back to Socrates' speculations and figures in Plato's Poetics. Jarry's interest in a modern application of the theory, however, has been authenticated as sincere by the Pléiade editors, given that he cites Fournié ^{ou} other occasions.

This brings us back to the language of ancient ornament which shines so piercingly out of Jarry's illustrations and texts, and to his intentions in using it to impact on the psyche of the reader. The followers of Edouard Schuré believed in an original Adamic language and an original pattern of myth or belief which subsequently diversified into the various languages and religions of the world.⁴¹ In a passage which has all the formality of a legal disclaimer the decorative historian Alfred Haddon nevertheless points to the *absurdity* of a universal

⁴¹ See Edouard Schuré, Les Grands initiés, Paris, Perrin, 1889.

language of ornament such as this.⁴² The indications are that Jarry was with Gauguin in Schuré's camp and that he did believe in a universal language of ornament and in the subtle power of its outlines on the mind.

3.9 The emphasis on symmetry in Jarry's small illustrations

Let us now move to Jarry's own graphic work, in which he deploys some of these 'universal' outlines himself. Whether woodcuts or line drawings, his graphic work falls into five distinct categories:

- 1) illustrations designed as *culs de lampe* - compact, symmetrical, ornamental and abstract with careful attention to the distribution of white space.
- 2) chaotic and grotesque containing a jumble of personal symbols.
- 3) copies of mediaeval images or ready-made 'primitive' images.
- 4) 'borrowed' mediaeval woodblocks.
- 5) Ubu illustrations

Despite the tributes by present day commentators to Jarry's role in the history of book illustration, among his personal friends only Apollinaire and Rachilde drew attention to the originality of his small illustrations, and not within his lifetime. In 1918 Apollinaire called for

⁴² "We are absolutely certain that no race, no art, no motive or element in nature or in art can claim the exclusive origination of any one of the well-known or standard conventional devices, and that any race, art or individual motive is capable of giving rise to any and to all such devices. Nothing can be more absurd than to suppose that the signification or symbolism attaching to a given form is uniform the world over, as the ideas associated with each must vary with the channels through which they were developed"

Haddon op. cit., p. 183

an exhibition of Jarry's woodcuts and drawings, describing them as almost cabalistic;⁴³ with the wisdom of hindsight in the 1920s, Rachilde placed Jarry at the very source of the Cubist movement on the strength of his "hermetic" woodcuts.⁴⁴ The following two illustrations represent the most consummate and highly condensed examples of his decorative work exploiting the full symbolic potential of the image and its reflection or counter-image:

1. Le Coeur qui pleure (Fig. 12)
2. Life-in-Death (Fig. 13)

Neither of the above illustrations bear much, if any relation to their supposed poem companions. Jarry's insistence on the primacy of the imagination and its capacity to transform is here exemplified. It is the emotional and spiritual impulse behind 'Le Sablier' which is expressed by Le Coeur qui pleure. Pulled in black, in accordance with the heraldic enamel that the title of 'Le Sablier' encloses, it depicts with the utmost simplicity, a schematic leaf-like heart, its arteries drawn in the shape of a primitive ramiform man, which is bleeding into a viciously jagged *cul-de-bouteille* like an insect deprived of air in a controlled scientific experiment.⁴⁵ The primitive cruciform schema reinforces the idea of Christ crucified, connoted in the poem. If we persist with the image of a ramiform man (or woman) in the upper vessel, 'Le Sablier' is exactly covered by Michel Carrouges' category of double-

⁴³"JARRY DESSINATEUR

♣*Ubu-roi* qui était épuisé depuis longtemps, va reparaître en édition à 3 fr. 50. On y retrouvera la reproduction des bois que Jarry gravait avec un véritable talent.

On sait qu'il modela les marionnettes avec lesquelles il joua sa pièce.

Mais c'est dans ses dessins et ses bois gravés que le dernier grand poète burlesque avait su donner la mesure de son instinct artistique.

Quelques-unes de ses planches gravées ont un caractère de singularité presque cabalistique.

Il serait peut-être intéressant, au moment où il semble que l'on soit sur le point de rendre justice à l'auteur d'*Ubu-roi*, de faire une exposition de ces rares gravures sur bois et des dessins laissés par Jarry."

⁴⁴ Rachilde, Alfred Jarry ou le Surmâle de lettres, Paris, Grasset, 1928, p.88.

⁴⁵ Jacquelynn Baas wrongly links the illustration to the choral poem of the prologue to Haldernablou, but gives this perceptive commentary about his subversive intentions:

For Jarry, the "archaic" woodcut, as opposed to the modern photo-relief linecut, had associations with time and its passing that made it particularly appropriate for the illustration of a work that had as its Symbolist Idea time itself. Equally important to Jarry would have been the shocking unconventionality of these cuts - so different from the traditional wood-engraved vignettes that adorned establishment publications. When one considers that Vallotton's relatively elegant woodcuts were considered barbaric by most bibliophiles at this time, the value of Jarry's crude blocks to his anti-establishment purposes is unmistakable.

Baas & Field, op. cit. p. 122.

vesselled “ bachelor machines” which he defines as follows:

Toute machine célibataire se définit comme une intersection de deux ensembles (anthropologique et mécanique).⁴⁶

This illustration supposedly accompanies ‘Le Sablier’ which is thought to have been written after the death of Jarry’s mother, representing at one level, his sudden severance both from her and from his childhood. In Chapter 2 we referred to the metaphoric configuration of the hourglass in the poem depicting two triangles, point to point, the visual motif found on Copper Age pottery known to represent a stylized female form, and which Jarry may intend to denote the mother figure.⁴⁷ (Fig. 46) We have mentioned this use of a triangular form to signify female gendering of the *mygale* in Haldernablou. In simplistic terms Jarry lends his spider a triangular skirt.

The motif of glass in Jarry’s work has been mentioned by Michel Carrouges in terms of Jarry’s “bachelor machines” and will be discussed more fully below. The draining heart and splintered bottle of the illustration fully exploit the image of the sands of the author’s life running down from the vital upper vessel of the hour glass into the broken base. Departing from the conventional rectangular framing normally used for pictures, Jarry uses white triangles at top and bottom of the illustration to convey an impression of three-dimensionality and of a dark enclosing chamber, which serves to echo the idea of imprisonment conveyed by the constricting pillars of ‘Le Sablier.’ Like the pieces of a mobile picture-puzzle they could be repositioned to form the geometrically conceived hourglass mentioned above, composed of

⁴⁶ Cf. Michel Carrouges, Les Machines célibataires, Paris, Arcanes, p. 160. See pp. 79-92 for Jarry. Whilst indicating the motif of glass in Jarry’s work, Carrouges omits to mention ‘Le Sablier’ in his discussion of Jarry’s *machines célibataires*. It would nevertheless come into his category of *horloges obsédantes*, linked to Saturn-Chronos devouring his children, to whom Jarry actually refers.

⁴⁷This compelling visual evidence cuts across the homosexual interpretation laid on ‘Le Sablier’ by Hunter Kevil, but we must follow Jarry’s instruction that all interpretations are possible and equivalent. See Mégroz, op. cit. pp. 24 and 26 and Ehrenreich op. cit., p. 89 quoted in Chapter 2 n. 19.

two triangles whose apices touch, as does the heart and its silver reflection in the poem⁴⁸ :

*Verse ton sang, coeur qui t'accointes
A ton reflet par vos deux pointes*

What is outstanding about this illustration is its extreme economy as an abstract representation of grief, unique in the art of Jarry's time. As far as he can, Jarry strips the heart motif of all sentimental and romantic connotations which had accrued to it through *cartes d'amour* offering a bleak alternative to the pattern poems consisting of two hearts, which we mentioned in the previous chapter. Poem and illustration together form a self-sufficient, hermetic unit, appropriate either to the expression of private despair or to cryptic satire.⁴⁹ As we have said, this and Caméleo are the only woodblocks in Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial to have been pulled in black.

The idea of the heart as broken bottle, with its connotations of drunken brawls and murderous intent, removes Jarry's Le Coeur qui pleure design from all traditional decorative categories and gives it a sadistic and modern accent. In contemporary art only Vallotton's woodcuts provided a precedent. Strangely absent from the poem 'Le Sablier,' the broken glass motif nevertheless surfaces in Les Jours et les Nuits in the deliberately romanticized prose piece 'L'Ambre.' Jarry gives us not a message in a bottle but a doomed girl:

Puis une étoile blanche s'allume et le verre se fend dans la muraille; la forme blanche se fait visible avec le sang, né de la dent du verre, qui la drape du ventre à la pourpre des ongles. [The whole text of 'L'Ambre' is italicized] (PL I 791)

⁴⁸ The double triangle of the diamond and hourglass shapes have been identified by a present day commentator of Borges as the most acute aspects of self-reflection or "specular self-consciousness" by being reciprocals of one another. Quite simply, the upper triangle, here denoting the poet's heart and mind, is broken off from the lower triangle or *tain de mare* of childhood memories by the death of his mother. Cf. John Irwin, The Mystery to a Solution, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1994, p. 129.

⁴⁹ Self-illustrating poets are a rare breed and the illustrated poem a particularly impenetrable form of expression, as pointed out by Ségolène Samson-Le Men:

Le poème illustré forme ainsi un circuit autonome et clos, où chacune des deux expressions artistiques interprète l'autre. Leur voisinage permet de spécifier les significations potentielles du texte et de l'image, ce qui a pour effet de les réduire. Quant au critique, il ne lui reste qu'à se taire, à moins qu'il ne choisisse de paraphraser ce que le peintre dessine du texte ou ce que le poète écrit de l'image.

Samson-Le Men, op. cit., p. 86.

A more usual ornamental motif than the irregular fanged jaw of his earlier illustration, Jarry here gives the broken glass the form of a star, which is the visual motif that he uses for the configuration of the prison where the protagonist of his novel, L'Amour absolu is being held and which he often uses metaphorically to signify the five-pronged shape of the hand. Once again we can see how frequently he draws from the decorative arts to enhance the visual impact of his texts.

The woodcut Life-in-Death is notable for its skilful and highly condensed symbolic *dédoublement* of images practically to the point of saturation.⁵⁰ Both this and Le Coeur qui pleure were conceived as *culs de lampe*, which accounts for their highly concentrated emblematic character. Jarry's striking use of white space is an unusual technique for this period, one which he may have absorbed from Japanese woodcuts or from Vallotton.⁵¹ It certainly ties in with his praise for writers who leave "imaginative space" within the text, rather than trying to describe everything for the reader. (PL I 1010) We shall return to this idea in the final chapter.

Composed for his translation of Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Life-in-Death both adheres to and contravenes heraldic precepts. Commentators have not remarked that Jarry departs totally from the image of the red-lipped, golden-haired female figure of Coleridge's poem as here depicted:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was white as leprosy
The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

⁵⁰ Although Arrivé gives this as a pen drawing, Harald Szeemann's more recent list of exhibits for the 1984-85 Kunsthau Zürich Jarry exhibition describes it as a woodcut lent by Maurice Sallet. (Exhibit 23). Harald Szeemann, Alfred Jarry (1873-1907), Kunsthau Zürich, 1985.

⁵¹ See his 'Vallotton' quoted earlier (PL II 578-9)

As we shall see in Chapter 4, Jarry is at pains to free poetry and art from each other and to get away from an old fashioned view of illustration as a mirror of the text. Although he faithfully renders Coleridge's text in his own translation: "Ses regards sont hardis, sa bouche rouge," Jarry's configuration of *Life-in-Death* represents his own highly personal interpretation. As with 'L'Homme à la hache' he takes over a ready-made title and puts it into the crucible or "ostrich stomach" of his imagination. The drawing displays a compact and multiple emblem, composed of occult motifs, which conforms to his recipe of "du complexe resserré" and relates to his own concept of *Life-in-Death*, retaining only three elements: bird, boat and sea from Coleridge's ballad.

The emblematic and hybrid creature dominating the picture has been variously taken for Coleridge's albatross or a Jarryesque owl. It may alternatively represent the *harfang* or Arctic Owl already borrowed by Jarry from Jules Verne's *Les Indes noires*⁵² to describe the macabre pair of wings dominating Gerhard Munthe's painting, *Au repaire des géants*, whose arctic scenario matches Coleridge's. The double motif of sword and wings could equally refer to a pinned and labelled moth. This metaphor of the human condition is evoked by Jarry in his Filiger article, contemporary with this illustration (PL I 1025) and in the chapter, *ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST*, of *L'Amour absolu*. (PL I 945-6) Jarry repeatedly links the *papillon* image with the passage from life to death or from reality to trance. Like the *Mygale*, a nocturnal species of spider, the *papillon* of Jarry's texts is a creature of the night, as in the mask scene of *Les Jours et les Nuits*, where the colouring and markings of a distinct species of nocturnal moth are indicated. The death of Valerius the Asiatic in *Messaline* is likewise depicted as the metamorphosis of silk worm to silk moth, linking the idea of the embryonic phoenix as worm. The practice of pinning a live insect for collection in order to prevent damaging the wings, or to record the wing beat photographically, of course represents an aspect of life *in* death. Varia's broken language under hypnosis ("pas-pas-papillon") of

⁵² See Mourier-Casile. op. cit., p. 136.

L'Amour absolu manifests her in-between state.⁵³ The schematic *nez renversé* peculiar to the *tête de mort* combined with the eye slits typical of an African death mask (Fig. 17) certainly denotes the Death's Head Moth (*Sphinx atropos*) which we know was significant to Jarry.⁵⁴

The combination of the distinct symbols of death and the crescent moon, reflecting the anchor symbolizing Christ lends this picture the cabalistic overtones, to which Apollinaire refers. Although in a more modern idiom, a strikingly similar composition in terms of self-mirroring symmetry and occult symbols held in suspension is Max Ernst's Of this man shall know nothing (Fig. 45) whose lower half moreover contains the severed cardiac arteries, which Le Coeur qui pleure connotes.

As we shall see below, the tooth-formed letter 'V' was valued by Jarry for its graphic potential. He uses it here several times:

- 1) as a schematic sign for the nose cavity;
- 2) the arrow shape of the spectre bark's anchor, recalling the arrow which killed the albatros;
- 3) (reversed) as heraldic chevron depicting moth's wings.

The white spherical disc depicting the owl-moth's visage counters the black disc of the sinking sun, emphasizing the ascendancy of the moon and the supernatural context. The crescent moon is also evoked in the white reflection of the nightmare boat. Wings, anchor, boat, moon and sun are stacked by Jarry in a clever card-house structure, reflecting, doubling and contradicting each other in this masterly and strictly ornamental symbolist composition.

With Life-in-Death Jarry has made deliberately crude knife strokes in the wood to recreate what Richard Field calls the "formless night" of the woodblock surface. Never intellectually satisfied with a totally formal structure, he here counterbalances the strict

⁵³ See Eruli, Jarry. *I Mostri dell'Immagine*. p. 70 and p. 18.

⁵⁴ See Notes de Charlotte Jarry sur Alfred Jarry. (PL III 701)

outlines of crescent moon, anchor and arrow with the ragged texture of the sea and the moth's wings whose irregular patterns do not at all conform to the stipples and hatching dictated by the rules of heraldry, as deployed in the Heraldic Act of César-Antechrist to denote the colours of the shields and their charges.⁵⁵ Deliberately mixing his idioms, Jarry expresses the uncontrollable nature of the sea and the supernatural by recreating the rough texture of wood bark, placed in opposition to the severe heraldic shapes.

Although Jarry spent a month with Gauguin in Le Pouldu in July 1894 at the time when Gauguin was working exclusively on his woodcuts, simplifying the themes of his Tahitian paintings and although it was during this time that the three poems Manao tupapau, L'Homme à la hache and Ia Orana Maria were entered in the Livre d'or of the Pension Gloanec, there is little sign of Gauguin's influence in the subject matter of his illustrations.⁵⁶ What he took from Gauguin were the exotic decorative motifs, recorded from primitive cultures and collected in his pictorial archive and also the manual techniques of woodcutting. Jarry's stay in Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu was partly spent learning from Gauguin and partly from Roderic O'Connor, Armand Seguin and Charles Filiger. He also spent time recording primitive Breton motifs from the decorative carvings on wayside crosses and old churches. All Jarry's work manifests a central concern with primitive or occult designs in which the human form is reduced to its most schematic elements and a strong supernatural element prevails. During this trip he must have collected many of the pieces of folk art registered by André Salmon and which Henri Rousseau included in his portrait of him.

If we are to seek a model who may have inspired Jarry outside the Belgian group, it would be the young German illustrator Joseph Sattler, who himself took inspiration from the emblematic imagery of Dürer and the sixteenth-century engravers. Sattler created a stir in the

⁵⁵ See Arrivé op. cit. Plates 19 and 30.

⁵⁶ The exception is Ce est le centaure, which is similar to Gauguin's woodblocks in size and style and whose blurred outlines indicate that it may have been pulled twice in the manner of Gauguin's. The relationship of this creature to Hathor the Egyptian cow god with the sun disk between its horns also points to Gauguin's preoccupations with ancient mythology and decorative pictograms. Baas and Field, op. cit. p. 121.

Paris press in 1894 with a series of designs entitled 'The Modern Dance of Death.' (Fig. 70) Jarry was struck by his ability to combine the macabre and the modern and inspected his work with attention. The implications of his respect for this artist, on whom he comments in some detail, have not been noted. These remarks are taken from his L'Art littéraire review of 1894:

Mais surtout nous retrouvons ici - modernité d'Holbein, Callot, Rembrandt et Albert Dürer, l'album de JOSEPH SATTLER: lettres ornées, lettres déchirées sous des arceaux; faux droite et tête coupée sous deux sceaux; **la semelle du bateau voguant sous le lunaire écusson de poisson mâchoire;** pendu avec clefs et couronne au croc, nuages liant sur portée; les Cartes, la Trinité papale, et l'*Ende*, tête sur triangle avec menottes, sceaux ou grelots en banderolle. [my emphasis] (PL I 1018-9)

It is noticeable that Jarry's attention is caught by the opposing outlines of crescent moon and boat reflection, as rendered in his own drawing, but it is surely the macabre elements, which he picks out, such as scythe, hanged man and handcuffs that betray the essence of his inclination to this German designer, described as "weirdly fantastic" by a contemporary English reviewer.⁵⁷ Preoccupied with the design of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial which was to appear in October, it was towards Sattler's illustrations that Jarry gravitated at the Durand-Ruel Exhibition of March 1894. As he sought to break new ground, his gaze was firmly riveted on the activities of foreign designers.

3.10 The pull towards the chaotic and the monstrous

In the previous section we examined two extremely symmetrical, emblematic designs and now pass to two designs in Jarry's more chaotic manner which ran parallel to his tendency to seek patterns. The first, Croix des cimetières, (Fig. 15) pulled in blue-green ink, illustrated the prose poem 'Le Miracle de Saint-Accroupi,' the initial piece of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial. The second example of this manner, Saint-Pierre Humanité, (Fig. 16) pulled in orange-yellow ink, finds its description in the text of 'l'Acte prologal' of César-Antechrist, as 'Saint-Pierre tiaré aux ceps de ses clefs dans le pilori de jaspe triangulaire de trois Christs

⁵⁷ Colin Hiatt, 'A New German Designer: Joseph Sattler', The Studio, no. 4, 1894, pp. 92-97.

renversés' Both are based on superficially Christian themes; both draw on a number of decorative motifs; both dip into the realms of the fantastic.

Jarry's choice of the cross gives him a severe central motif as before, indeed the central symbol of the Christian world and the most often repeated in Western culture. Its severity is emphasized by the use of a ruler and contrasted with a plump and primitive misshapen cross in the background. But, into what Gombrich terms the cross's "field of force,"⁵⁸ Jarry draws a host of decorative motifs from both pagan and Christian cultures, which delightfully soften the strict linear form. Although, in drawing from Jarry's work, Joan Miró is said to have been mainly inspired by his writing and particularly the Ubu cycle,⁵⁹ Jarry's jumble of personal emblems in antic poses which mingles the esoteric and the burlesque provides an eerie fore-echo of the Catalan painter's work.

It is arguable that we have here another picture in the same genre as 'De voir à QUATRE HÉRAUTS porte-torches,' into which Jarry deliberately crams the main ornamental motifs of primitive cultures. Somehow the sharp satirical intent of that picture is absent from this one. Here Jarry is surely portraying the chaotically cheerful carnivalesque atmosphere that he connects with Breton religious processions, cited above. The happy memory of his pilgrimage to Sainte-Anne d'Auray is the subject of the chapter, 'Le Tain des mares', where the writer crystallizes the precise ingredients of remembered happiness into a silver ring, blue frogs, a train journey and a savage gargoyle. These are the four things into which Jarry concentrates an almost talismanic power and which betoken a treasured part of his childhood.

In *Croix des cimetières* Jarry has assembled many of his poetic images with their deliberately ambiguous profiles and offers us a unique chance to see them in graphic form. Admittedly many of them are the motifs perpetuated in primitive art or classical architecture,

⁵⁸ Gombrich sees fear-inspiring configurations such as the ocellus and cross as having a magnetic attraction Cf. Gombrich, op. cit. p. 249.

⁵⁹ Riewert Ehrich, 'Les Ubus de Miró,' paper given at the *Colloque Jarry*, Paris, 6-7 December, 1996 to be published in 1997 in a forthcoming number of *L'Étoile-Absinthe*. Ehrich cites Jacques Dupin, *Juan Miró. Leben und Werk*, Cologne, 1961.

but unlike his previous pictures, this is a happy composition, full of flowers, gentle tendrils and sun shapes. Even the heart is made into a tulip-like blossom, delicately held by curling leaves. Engraved onto the pedestal of the cross we see the Egyptian hieroglyph for the sun, used by Jarry from the Tapisseries to Messaline variously as eye, shield, breast or fear-inspiring *monère*. We can also see the algebraic signs X and Y under whose aeges Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial was written, and the creative spiral of Ubu's *gidouille*, alternatively to be construed as the heraldic *gouffre*. Balanced on the arms of the cross are some of the instruments of the Passion: the sacred pincers performing an exuberant handstand as a schematic acrobat (a motif of great importance for Jarry) and the consecrated host depicted as a dancing mannekin. The sacred chalice (*ciboire*) is meanwhile schematised as an owl (*hibou*), whose profile is invoked in the novels Les Jours et les Nuits and L'Amour absolu, making a combined equation through both linguistic and graphic paths. Departing from the Christian context Jarry plucks a *fleur-serpent* from the decorative border of Gerhard Munthe's La Marâtre and a hallucinatory mushroom in the form of the Tau, invented by himself. A cabbalistic *main de gloire* balances a vase of flowers. Mallarmé's *ongles-flammes* from the sonnet 'Ses purs ongles très hauts dédiant leur onyx ...,' a perfect monument to Profile Art, provide sharp petals for two flowers, whilst the curling tendrils of growth and fertility caress everything. For the moment we will try to forget that these flames also represent the profile of the ever-looming lotus bud motif. Jarry here provides at least a partial key to the most important dual images which inform his poetry and novels. Only the moon and its sinister nocturnal *cortège* are appropriately absent from this cheerful daylight picture.

Moving on to Saint-Pierre, Jarry offers us a different conglomeration of symbols and emblems. Less distinct and more sinister, they overlap and run into each other, receding into the distance like nightmare apparitions which slip away before they can be identified. Jarry here plunges into the realm of the grotesque, sweeping his personal images: monsters, angels and mediaeval ladies into a kind of amazing stew, rather like the many creatures, imaginary and real, swept into the flood of Alice's tears. With close attention we can identify the various

beings, human and inhuman which recede into the background. Prominent are the unicorn and one of Aldrovandrus' monsters, lifted from L'Ymagier. More puzzling is the bubble or perhaps water droplet which, seen under the microscope, might reveal the many-legged, spider-like creatures depicted by Jarry. Their little feet suggest the *mygale*, Jarry's favoured species of spider, rather than falling stars argued by Michel Arrivé, but star/sun, spider and hand are minor variations of same fear-inspiring graphic outline, the rayed or bristling circle evoked also by the line "*les oursins ronds ont hérissé leurs crins*" of the 'Acte prologal.'

The central and severe upright form of St. Peter, encased in a pillory of Tau crosses, which Jarry has purposely reversed and twisted to undo the magical cruciform magnetism, separates the amorphous and demonic on the one side from the angelic and radiant on the other. Odin's wolves and Yggdrasil are perversely allocated to the angelic side.⁶⁰ Jarry's implicit message is stated in Scene IV of the Prologal Act, that St. Peter prefers the order and security of his cage to the fantastic and creative disorder outside it, refusing his reflection's invitation to leave the pillory.

Urged by his reflection "Prends le bourdon de ta crosse et marche," the stage direction states that Saint Pierre "fait un pas en avant et recule." (PL I 279) Jarry then shows us this very unusual combination of the rigid central figure, as if borrowed from a religious icon, surrounded by a seething background of culturally diverse mythical creatures - hardly one of them an officially catalogued ornamental motif. The compositional principle exemplified by 'La Croix des cimetières' is ostensibly the same, but whereas the Breton cross attracts and gives a resting place to all manner of curious objects, the oblique, inhospitable and strangely tilted pillory enclosing St. Pierre repels, like a lobster pot, the creatures which the sea-drift of fantasy cause to bump up against it.

These two woodcuts which encapsulate Jarry's favourite motifs so compactly are placed

⁶⁰ See Michel Arrivé's commentary in Peintures, gravures et dessins op. cit. and Les Langages de Jarry, Paris, Klincksieck, 1972, pp. 122-3.

in opposition to one another: La Croix des cimetières strikes a positive and chaotic festive note. In fact Jarry's cross performs the function of a welcoming haven or roosting tree, far more than that of the sacred Christian symbol. Saint-Pierre, on the other hand, gives off an atmosphere of uncomfortable strangeness. The theme of asylum-giving is reversed by the image of the Non-Cross and replaced by the themes of imprisonment, refusal and impotence.

3.11 Configurations of Ubu

Jarry's configurations of Ubu were very diverse. As we have said, the original Ubu puppets were based on the profile of Monsieur Hébert, Physics master at the College in Rennes, the emphasis being on the long nose, receding chin, protruding belly and a scant moustache, whose three protruding hairs evoke the tentacles of a shellfish. (Fig. 48) When it came to the production of Ubu roi on the public stage, however, Jarry felt that this focus of schoolboy hatred actually needed to be transposed into the realm of myth and that a haunting, unreal, **monstrous** profile was needed - one that would provoke anxiety and fear in our subliminal selves. How did he succeed in doing this?

To obtain the ingredients for his Véritable Portrait de M. Ubu it seems that Jarry used the principles of the earliest ekphrastic poetry. That means that he turned to utilitarian objects, rather as Homer enhanced the stature of Achilles through marvellous objects: shield, chest and goblet. As we shall see below, Jarry decided that Ubu should take the form of a jar, and specifically a Greek wine-jar or *oinoche*.

Jarry first of all created a total body mask for Ubu. In the following extract from 'L'art et la science' written in 1893, Jarry has Ubu pompously vaunt his own form. Here following Platonic theory, Ubu regards his body as a thing of beauty on account of its spherical shape:

La sphère est la forme parfaite. Le soleil est l'astre parfait. En nous rien n'est si parfait que la tête, toujours vers le soleil levée, et tendant vers sa forme; sinon l'oeil, miroir de cet astre et semblable à lui.

La sphère est la forme des anges. A l'homme n'est donné que d'être ange incomplet.
Plus parfait que le cylindre, moins parfait que la sphère, du Tonneau radie le corps
hyperphysique. Nous, son isomorphe, sommes beau.

L'homme ébloui s'incline devant notre Beauté, reflet inconscient de notre âme de
Sage. Et tous doivent à notre genoux brûler l'encens. (PL I 188)

This Ubu discourse also echoes the aesthetic theories of the Swedenborgian, Gustav Fechner, mentioned in Chapter 1, here unacknowledged, but quoted by Jarry in 'Filiger' under his pseudonym, Dr Misès. Fechner pontificates at length on the intrinsic beauty of the spherical vessel, designed to contain liquid.⁶¹ Although Jarry seems to have been genuinely influenced by Fechner when it comes to his arguments on the associative nature of words, this particular passage seems likely to have excited his attention more for its easily mocked pseudo-philosophical earnestness and the absurdity of such a dogmatic equation between the round and the beautiful. We are on uncertain ground, however, as to Jarry's personal commitment to this theory, since it derives from the *Timaeus*, where Plato argues that God fashioned the All in spherical form, deeming it to be the most perfect, and chose the same form for the human head. In *César-Antechrist* Jarry definitely espouses the so-called theory of "Platonic Matter" which talks of a permanent substrate on which the forms passing in and out of the world may imprint. This theory is absolutely fundamental to the impetus of all his imaginative work. It is the one genuine constant on which he relies.

Thus the theory of 'universal' outlines to which we referred in Chapter 1 underlies the configuration of Ubu's body in the *Véritable Portrait*. But Jarry's procedure of configuring

⁶¹ "Ein Gefäß hat im allgemeinem den Zweck, etwas in sich zu fassen. Es wird unter sonst gleichen Umständen d.i. bei gegebener masse und Oberfläche am meisten zu fassen im Stande sein, wenn es kugelrund ist. Käme es nun auf weiter nichts an, und käme es überhaupt bei der Schönheit bloß aus Zweckerfüllung an, so würde uns ein kugelrundes Gefäß dadurch dass man ihm diese vorteilhafteste Erfüllung machen ihren Ansprüche an die Form geltend und dehnen, drücken, biegen an der Kugel, beschneiden sie, setzen ihr anderswärts wieder zu, und unser Schönheitsgefühl lässt sich das Alles nicht nur gefallen, sondern fodert es." A vessel is generally made to hold something. Depending on mass and surface it can hold the most when it is spherical. If it were only a question of fulfilling a particular aim, a spherical vessel would please us most because we would be able to get most into it. But there are many other considerations which make their claims on the shaping of form and which stretch or bend the sphere, cut it or set it at an angle and our aesthetic feelings are not only gratified but demand this. My translation from Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Vorschule der Aesthetik*, Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1876, Pt. I, pp. 218-9.

his characters according to real but strange objects conforms to the earliest and simplest ekphrastic poetry - something that we shall look at again in Chapters 4 and 5. Following his habit of 'borrowing' pictures without attribution, he has ingeniously transposed an illustration from the book of J. B. Waring, which bears the simple legend, "A Greek vase." The angle of Ubu's oblique stance on Jarry's woodblock and the oblique view of the spiral pattern on his belly almost exactly duplicates Waring's illustration of this Greek *oinoche* or wine jug decorated with solar circles. (Figures 22 & 44) Jarry merely changes the concentric sun circles to a deeply grooved creative spiral, an important personal hallmark, and adds rudimentary potlegs to steady the figure - tiny legs which are not articulated. Ubu's head is here not piriform, but corresponds to the ambiguous lotus bud of Egyptian decorative art, documented by Goodyear and Riegl. As we saw in Chapter 1, this pointed profile evokes the snout of the crocodile, seen from above, and is one of the major fear-inspiring configurations deployed in nature. The pointed shape of the hood-face here also corresponds to the Spanish Inquisitors' hoods, connoting cruelty and torture. This is Ubu's "masque véritable" that Jarry bemoaned not having been able to manufacture in time for the 1896 performance.

We have already evoked Achilles' shield as an object used by Homer to denote Achilles himself. The main impression given by the massive spiral incised into Ubu's belly is that of an African shield. The stomach is represented as shield and the hooded face as mask, reinforcing the protective cladding in which Jarry swathes Ubu's body and underlining the idea of the body as armour, which was to dominate twentieth-century art. (Fig. 49) These portrayals of strange outer shells provoke a dread in the beholder that the oddity within represents the *informe*. In shaping Ubu, Jarry is moreover conforming to the principles of apotropaic mimesis that we constantly meet in his work. Here is his own description of his creature:

Je ne sais pas ce que veut dire le nom d'Ubu, qui est la déformation en plus éternel du nom de son accidentel prototype encore vivant: *Ybex* peut-être, le Vautour. Mais ceci n'est qu'une des scènes de son rôle.

S'il ressemble à un animal, il a surtout la face porcine, le nez semblable à la mâchoire supérieure du crocodile, et l'ensemble de son caparaçonnage de carton le fait en tout le frère de la bête marine la plus esthétiquement horrible, la limule. (PL I 467)

Jarry's apparent condemnation of the Moluccan Crab's configuration may be tongue in cheek. Although its markings could represent a gruesome face, its round outline and straight tail is almost identical to Riegl's diagram of the lotus leaf and stem, presented as an aesthetic ornamental model for the ancient Egyptians. (Fig. 83) What we surely have here is another example of Jarry's sly, yet compulsive habit of satirizing academic discourse (here Riegl's rather than Marey's) through ridicule of the supporting diagrams. The *limules* will stage a mysterious reappearance in Messaline acting as stoppers to ancient wine-jars on the sea bed. Half in earnest, half in jest, Jarry presents Ubu's "beautiful" torso in the Véritable Portrait as a round Greek wine-jar.

In choosing the configuration of a Greek urn or jar for Ubu, Jarry produces a visual pun on his own name and thus accepts the identity of Ubu as his own. This is a statement of capital importance, which places connotative weight on oddly placed references to jars or vases elsewhere in his texts, as we shall see in Chapter 4. When he later quotes Henri de Régnier's description of one of his fictitious characters, Jarry reveals the procedure that he himself followed in selecting Ubu's configuration:

Ainsi M. Hangsdorff, l'amant des verreries, est moins conforme à ce qui l'entoure qu'il n'a choisi de s'entourer d'objets qui lui étaient pareils. Il est "petit et pansu comme une gourde. Sa tête, chauve comme un bouchon, semble fermer le vase de son corps, que parachevaient les anses des bras..."

(PL II 416)

Ubu's form cannot be construed as that of a crystal carafe, but certainly conforms to the cruder gourd. In fact the outline of the "Véritable portrait" precisely follows the shape of Haddon's water-carrying gourd, one of the phyllomorphic shapes mentioned in Chapter 1.

Water was, however, scorned by Jarry as a corrosive liquid, only good for scouring. His

second, refined configuration of Ubu shows an intentional transformation of the spherical outline which identifies it as a wine-bearing vessel or distinctive Greek *oinoche* associated with Dionysos, god of poetry. This is the profile sported by the Ubu of the publicity posters for the 1896 Théâtre de l'Oeuvre performance of Ubu-roi (Figs. 21 & 47) and, incidentally, had a recent literary precedent in Poe's tale 'The Angel of the Odd.'⁶²

Several commentators have suggested that Jarry set himself up in place of God. If this is so, it is not the Christian God but the Dionysos of Greek revels and wine-induced ecstasy. Dionysos was invoked by his epithet "dithyrambus". The dithyramb is an ancient form of choral lyric, originally an improvised celebration by a band of revellers led by an *exarchon* or *choregos*. As such, the poet does not merely sing the words but teaches a chorus song and dance movements. The poem indicates that the drinking of wine was integral to the performance. The inspiration for composing a suitable dithyramb came only to the poet who had experienced the god through the liquid medium that made the poet godly.⁶³ Jarry took his Dionysian mission of poet/*choregos* literally, as Chapter 6 will show. Playing a game of deadly seriousness, he chose the wine-jar as his "mask," his Other and named it Ubu. This is the declaration contained in his illustration.

One of the lesser known pictures that Jarry made of Ubu and the *Palotins*, one that Michel Arrivé even hesitates to classify as an Ubu picture, was a torn lithograph found on the back of Louis Lormel's manuscript of Faustroll. (Fig. 60) It depicts an elderly top-hatted man in the white tie and tails of the theatre-going bourgeois. His grained wooden head, thinness and dangling arm distinguish him as a marionette and the three *Palotins*, recognizably wearing their *justaucorps versicolores* and Phrygian hats, dancing in front of him, suggest that this is their

⁶² "His body was a wine-pipe, or a rum puncheon, or something of that character and had a truly Falstaffian air. In its nether extremity were inserted two kegs which seemed to answer all the purposes of legs." Edgar Allen Poe, 'The Angel of the Odd,' in The Works of E. A. Poe, Vol. IV, London, Lawrence & Bullen, 1895, p. 147. Is it a coincidence that André Breton includes precisely this story to represent Poe in Anthologie de l'humour noir?

⁶³ Stephen H. Lonsdale, Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 89.

master, Ubu, whom they protect, but who directs them at the same time. Was this perhaps a thin, sophisticated and cruel version of Ubu carved for the *Pantins* by Bonnard to show the bourgeois his own image more forcefully than the paunchy and comical version? Although of a later date, an alternative to Ubu might be the figure of the Director which appears in Ubu sur la butte. There is no surviving text to support an alternative Ubu, other than Jarry's concept of the tyrant-financier.

3.12 Conclusion

Jarry never openly commits himself to the Universalist philosophy but we can see his attraction to a single "langue mystérieuse" of ornament from the way that he manipulates it in his texts and illustrations. His greatest contribution to the art of the book was expressed in the high ideals of Perhinderion and L'Ymagier. It was in fact Lugné-Poë's admiration for L'Ymagier that prompted him to take Jarry on as his administrator at L'Oeuvre, transporting him to a key position of daily collaboration with the artists of the Nabi group on the lithographs and woodcuts for programmes and posters, among which the magisterial woodcut of Ubu would figure.

It was not until the advent of Dada and Surrealism that the striking suggestive value of L'Ymagier and Perhinderion and of Jarry's illustrations to Les Minutes and César-Antechrist was recognized. The Surrealist magazine Minotaure published an example of his woodcuts alongside those of Blake, Rops, Redon, Carroll, Minne and Beardsley.⁶⁴ It was the talent for suggestion and natural ability to simplify, possessed by primitive tribes, that Jarry marked out as a crucial gift, believed in and cultivated. The belief in this barbaric, abstract quality which Jarry observed and absorbed from the schematic scratchings of the uneducated artist permeates his illustrations and guided his inspiration as a writer. Even those of his woodcuts with an ostensibly Christian theme have an underlying pagan or heretical accent, calculated to shock or disturb, fulfilling the function of rupture or fragmentation, rather than that of

⁶⁴ Caméleo, Minotaure, no. 6., avril, 1935, p. 6.

illustration in its usual role of harmonizing with the text. From Jarry's determined espousal of the cult of the Child and the Pagan, we can understand what W. B. Yeats meant in hailing the reign of the "Savage God", after attending the première of Ubu roi. Ubu is the creation whose savage 'Umour' in the realm of art as much as drama, sets Jarry in quite a separate category from Maeterlinck, Elskamp, and Denis, placing him firmly within the cultural currents of the following century and marking him as a clear forerunner of Picasso and Miró.

The next chapter will examine Jarry's attitude to the art of others, his cryptic attack on the art critical establishment as a whole and his own experiments in rendering art as literature.

CHAPTER 4 THE VERBAL INTERPRETATION OF ART

PÈRE UBU: Cornegidouille! nous n'aurons point tout démoli si nous ne démolissons même les ruines! Or je n'y vois d'autre moyen que d'en équilibrer de beaux édifices bien ordonnés.

Epigraph from *Ubu enchaîné*

4.1 Introduction

We have seen that Jarry expressly rejected the portrait photograph as a medium for capturing the essence of a loved and familiar face. Others of his statements suggest that he placed literature above the visual arts as a medium of suggestion.¹ What precise value then does he ascribe to the painted image and indeed to the visual arts as a whole? Is there a distinction between the views of the clever, witty but provincial young newcomer to Paris, who turned his hand to art criticism and *transposition d'art* almost as literary exercises, and the mature artistic personality who slipped in and out of the polished carapace of Ubu at will? How much credence can we give to any of Jarry's statements? Can we devise a critical instrument that will identify the false ring of satire and even of flattery?

There is ample evidence that Jarry never lost his youthful habit of using his erudition to make a fool of his school-masters. In adulthood he simply refined the accomplished classroom antic into a disconcerting conversational and literary device. The *potachique* strain in the Jarryesque text has the same function as the *devinettes* or puzzle pictures of Épinal, in which the outlines of a second picture underlie the first. An heir to Rimbaud in this respect, Jarry cannot care less whether the reader can penetrate his pedantic language and specialised references and perceive his complex nonsense games and tricks. An informed analysis reveals huge swathes of motley plagiarized material and allusions to theories, which amount to demonstrations of their absurdity. Superficially, Jarry takes up a position opposing and indeed secretly ridiculing the theorists. At the same time he writes seriously about the matters which are close to his heart and about the work of those he wants to help. It is the reader's task to

¹ "La toile peinte réalise un aspect dédoublable pour très peu d'esprits, étant plus ardu d'extraire la qualité d'une qualité que la qualité d'une quantité." (PL I 406)

discover which is which.

By 1894 Jarry had familiarised himself with the theoreticians on aesthetics and some of the poems and prose pieces of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial can be analysed as pastiches of the theories then in vogue. On the practical side, a month at Le Pouldu had enabled him to observe the avant-garde *peintres-graveurs* at close quarters. Most importantly he learnt from and maybe acted as factotum for the bedridden Gauguin as he carved the outlines of his Tahitian paintings into woodblocks.² Jacquelynn Baas argues that Jarry took up the woodcut under Gauguin's tutelage and remarks that both men used commercial endgrain boxwood blocks.³ Jarry probably took advantage of the opportunity to borrow Gauguin's workbench and woodcutting tools. On return to Paris he moreover used Louis Roy, Gauguin's printer to pull the prints from some of his woodblocks of this period as well as Rousseau's lithograph for L'Ymagier. He was close to Armand Seguin and Roderic O'Connor who were experimenting with a new, simpler style of etching; he had sat on the cliff edge with Maxime Maufra as he painted from nature.⁴ He had the rare trust of Charles Filiger, exiled from Paris on account of a homosexual scandal, the reclusive and paranoid painter of Byzantine images, that he knew from the Salons du Rose+Croix and on whose worth he staked his own critical reputation. In Paris Jarry worked on colour woodcuts with another young artist, Maurice Delcourt at the workshop of Maurice Dumont, whose publication, L'Épreuve, provided a centre for experimental graphic techniques.⁵ Later, at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre he worked alongside several of the Nabis on a daily basis, particularly Sérusier, Verkade, Bonnard and Vuillard, as they poured their considerable talents into the ephemeral scenery of successive productions. Here, and later for the *Pantins*, he designed his own posters for the productions of Ubu roi.

² Jarry's following comment in a letter to Vallette testifies to this:

N'étant pas très bien je suis parti en touriste pour la Bretagne, avec Pont-Aven pour centre. J'y suis (hotel Gloanec) avec Gauguin, retenu par son accident.. (PL I 1039)

³ Baas and Field, op. cit. pp. 121-2.

⁴ "La banalité forcée s'universalise de préférer les dessins de MAUFRA à ses tableaux. (...) Rappelons pourtant la grève profonde, peinte de la falaise assis, jambes pendantes, le sable couleur de paupières que l'eau découvre de son couvercle à coulisses." 'Minutes d'art II' (PL I 1019)

⁵ See Warrack & Perkins, Illustrated Books, Prints, Posters and Drawings by artists from England, France, Belgium & Holland, Germany and Austria, Catalogue no. 27, Enstone, 1978, entry no. 82.

Because of the rarity of Jarry's first editions the role of colour in his work has been ignored. It is not commonly realized that almost all his woodcuts were either pulled in colour or on coloured paper. Nor do the current editions of his work do justice to either L'Ymagier's beautiful handpainted folio-size pullouts or to the folio editions of Perhinderion, whose large format spared the prints from being folded.

Wary of being posthumously duped by the author of Ubu roi, whose destructive humour, is often carefully disguised within superficially serious texts, written for his pleasure alone, art historians have been hesitant about the integrity of the criteria underlying Jarry's apparently inspired promotion of Henri Rousseau and Filiger. This chapter aims to show that, despite his lifelong inclination towards pastiche and parody, Jarry's non-conformist and daring promotion of such marginal artists as Gauguin, was in fact founded on genuine values, even if these were sometimes biased more towards the personal than the truly critical.⁶ The following chapters will moreover show that, for all his reluctance to put himself forward as a shaper of artistic taste, Jarry's aesthetic models of the marionette and the acrobat marked the final swing from one artistic ideal of beauty to another, first within the artistic community and then within the wider public. This shift was not only that recorded by Yeats at the première of Ubu roi, namely from the subdued, trembling suggestivity of Impressionist painting and of Mallarméan poetics to the objectivity of comedy and the crushing tread of "the Savage God,"⁷ but from the exaltation in literature of a rounded feminine form (Gautier and Mallarmé) and of the Symbolist ideal of the languid androgyne to the hard dynamism of the masculine form. We have spoken of the experiments of Marey and Muybridge. The capturing of the body in movement, reduced to bone, muscle and tendon, and the ideal of the lean athlete or dancer, beginning to appear in the work of Vallotton, Hodler and Lautrec, would

⁶ Picasso's biographer, John Richardson, puts forward the view that Apollinaire may have avoided introducing Picasso "to someone who was infinitely more sensitive to new trends in art than he was" thus forfeiting some of his power over him. Richardson rates Jarry "far more successful than Apollinaire at turning his back on nineteenth-century romanticism and envisioning subversive new concepts."

John Richardson, A Life of Picasso. Vol I, 1881 - 1906, London, Pimlico, 1991, pp. 364-5.

⁷ W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies London, 1953, p. 349.

shortly be given expression by Diaghilev's *Ballets russes*, especially in the person of Nijinsky. It has survived until the present day.

4.2 Context and chronology

The very nature of the Symbolist movement meant that the sister arts of painting and literature were drawn into a closer relationship of cross-referentiality than ever before. By the end of the nineteenth century it had become commonplace for painters to write, and for writers to address themselves to interpreting the work of contemporary artists. Hugo, Baudelaire and Gautier were leaders in this respect. Poetry and art were to be interchangeable; a poem could inspire a painting or vice versa - this was the principle underlying *Noa Noa* which Gauguin wrote as the literary accompaniment to his Tahitian paintings.⁸ Poets were expected to have an opinion about contemporary art and to help the public to understand it. It was in this cultural context that Alfred Jarry and Léon-Paul Fargue, both aspiring poets, accepted commissions to cover the avant-garde exhibitions of 1894 for two small periodicals, *Essais d'art libre* and *L'Art littéraire* with the active encouragement of the critic-publishers Remy de Gourmont and Félix Fénéon who went so far as to review their reviews and their early work.⁹

Brought to Paris to prepare for the competitive *École normale supérieure* exam at the *Lycée Henri IV*, Jarry had probably not been exposed to contemporary art before. His close friendship with Fargue during his formative first year in Paris meant that he frequented the galleries, dealers' workshops and exhibitions in his company and was fired with Fargue's enthusiasm for the Nabis and Neo-impressionists. His Breton childhood and late arrival to the Paris Symbolist arena in 1891 certainly prevented his absorbing the more decadent aspects

⁸ Gauguin talks about "eternalizing" the enigma of Nature in the work of art then goes on:

Et peut-être à travers l'oeuvre d'un *Art* la Nature recherchée, retrouvée par un autre *art* pour une autre oeuvre, enchaînerait-elle à la première une seconde épiphanie.

Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa*, ed. J. Loize, Paris, André Balland, 1966, p. 82.

⁹ See Félix Fénéon, *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, réunies et présentées par Joan U. Halperin, t. II, Genève, Librairie Droz, 1970, pp. 932 and 940.

of the movement, on which he directed his sardonic gaze. He regarded it as a waste of effort to write about artists and works of art already in the limelight. This did not exclude Jarry's friends within the Nabi and Pont-Aven groups, however his foremost criterion as a critic was to use his voice to help the solitary innovator, especially those working outside Paris in relative seclusion. The encouragement of Félix Fénéon is here discernible, in that Fénéon's own critical acclaim was graded according to innovation and surprise. We shall therefore be looking not only at artists such as Gauguin and Rousseau, whose present day acclaim has endorsed Jarry's critical judgement, but artists whose fame has not survived, bearing in mind that Filiger's work had been entirely forgotten, until reassessed by André Breton in 1951 on the basis of Jarry's support.

That Jarry himself, his ideas and his creation, Ubu, were sources of inspiration to both contemporary and later artists is uncontested, as was the anarchic spirit that he fostered. In the previous chapter we examined his own illustrations. It remains to record his individual approach to the art of others and his experiments in either explaining art or integrating it into a literary text. The fruits of his observation and his keen visual sensitivity fuelled his efforts as a literary experimenter to the benefit of his immediate successors, both writers and painters.¹⁰ Let us first set down the chronology of Jarry's various assays, whether spoof or serious, in the field of art interpretation:

- 1893 - *Transposition d'art*: poems based on a series of fantastic paintings, *Contes de fées*, exhibited in Paris at the Champ de Mars by the Norwegian artist, Gerhard Munthe and on Gauguin's exotic Tahitian series, exhibited at the Durand-Ruel Gallery.

- 1894 - Overviews of various avant-garde exhibitions, containing brief studies of several Nabi artists, crisp comments on Rousseau's *La Guerre*, the woodcuts of the Pissarro brothers and single works by many avant-garde artists such as the Swiss painters, Cuno Amiet and Hodler - also the non-exhibited landscape artist, Philippe Charbonnier and the *luministe*, Auguste Ravier,

¹⁰ Amongst the most important writers we should record are Apollinaire, Breton, Jacob, Marinetti, Salmon and Tzara, followed by Arnaud; amongst the painters Rousseau, Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso, Picabia, Rouault most immediately, followed by Miró, Matta, Ernst and Dora Maar. See Renée Riese Hubert, 'Ubu roi and the Surrealist *Livre de peintre*,' *Word & Image*, 1987, pp. 259-78.

- Two detailed studies: 'Filiger' and 'Vallotton.'
- 1894-5 - Commentaries on the Madonna and Child and sacred images of cruelty published in L'Ymagier.
- 1896 - *A paranoiac-critical* analysis of Dürer's Martyrdom of St. Catherine in Perhinderion.
- Theories on the theatre which include serious comments on art.
- 1898 - The 'islands' of Faustroll dedicated to the three artists, Bernard, Beardsley and Gauguin, transmuted into Jarry's own brand of fanciful literature.
- c. 1898 - Verbal art: the mysterious descriptions of as yet unidentified pictures in 'Clinamen', the chapter of Faustroll dedicated to Paul Fort, and which perhaps belonged to him.
- 1902 - A Brussels lecture titled Le Temps dans l'art and a brief critical overview of the ninth *Libre Esthétique* exhibition.
- 1902 - Book reviews which pay particular attention to illustration, for example Bonnard's illustrations to Verlaine's Parallèlement.

Although Jarry quite quickly turned his back on art criticism and declined to set himself up as a theoretician on behalf of the artists in his intimate circle, his early responses provide a telling mosaic of his personal preferences. But he makes an intrepid personal attack on his fellow art critics in his very first review, contradicting their views and implying that their traditional comparative style of criticism is invalid:

Avec raison M.E. Schmitt, du *Siècle*, a loué les éventails de Conder. A la fois joli, correct et classique; malgré cela on peut suivre le vol de ces ailes de lycénides sans l'escorte de souvenirs du XVIII siècle. - Et je ne vois pas que le *Nave nave moe* de Gauguin "rappelle une imitation des plus mauvais imitateurs de M. Gauguin."

(PL I 1015-6)

After this barrage, the quite serious pronouncements to which he commits himself are useful indicators of his early artistic tastes and provide an alternative facet to the popular, but only partial view of Jarry as Ubu, his deadpan mockery and logical absurdity laying traps for the

unwary public in the domain of aesthetics as much as in others. One can only repeat that the difficulty in interpreting the Jarry texts is chiefly to distinguish the spoof from the genuine.

4.3 Jarry's artistic principles and guiding theories

An artist is distinguished by the ability to distil the beauty which is closest to his own desires. Thus Jarry refuted the statement of Charles Filiger, that **everything** in nature is beautiful, implying that the perception of beauty is a special gift, not available to any but an elect few.

Tout est beau pour quelques-uns seuls **qui savent voir**; et que chacun du moins élit un beau spécial, le plus proche de soi. (PL I 1025)

As we see here this statement about the gifted beholder parallels his later statement in 'De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre' about the gifted and penetrating reader, where he compares textual interpretation to the interpretation of a theatrical décor:

Dans une oeuvre écrite, **qui sait lire** y voit le sens caché exprès pour lui, reconnaît le fleuve éternel et invisible et l'appelle Anna Peranna. (PL I 406)

Scenes based on the texts of Ovid and Homer were energetically rendered in the poetry of Jarry the schoolboy. He tended to take possession of literary passages or esoteric words and to cherish them like collector's pieces. This reference to the hidden murmur of Ovid's ever-flowing river, the voice of the fleeing nymph transformed and embosomed by the river Numicius, was a favourite image which remained with him until the end of his life, when the verse, "Amne perenne latens, Anna Peranna vocor", reappears in the chapter 'Le Roi boit' of La Dragonne,¹¹ referred to by Jarry as "le fleuve éternel et invisible au nom mystérieux dont nul ne sait le sens."

¹¹ The quotation:

placidi sum nympha Numici: amne perenne latens Anna Perenna vocor
comes from Ovid, Fasti III v.551 where the searching Dido and Aeneas find Anna's footprints on the river bank. The translation runs:

The conscious river checked and hushed his stream. She herself appeared to speak: I am a nymph of the calm Numicius. In a perennial river I hide, and Anna Peranna is my name.

Jarry's idea of Anna Peranna would, at first, seem to match Mallarmé's "toute chose non dite qui flûtise sous les vrais vers", Coleridge's music of the spheres, or Maeterlinck's audible light. It is the cosmic hum, perceptible only to true poets, just as a superficially ordinary combination of visual components will arrest and compel the true artist with a message that only he can interpret. But in the text of the *Fasti*, Ovid refers to the **jovial** feast of Anna Peranna, which is celebrated with song, dance and much drinking¹² - an important and so far unmentioned coloration where Jarry's personal philosophy is concerned. In fact Anna Peranna represents the *carnavalesque* in all its glory and her appearance in a chapter about drinking is no mere chance. On hearing her voice after a long quest, Dido and Aeneas "toast themselves and the day in deep draughts of wine." Indeed Jarry's choice of a Greek oinoche or wine-jar as the configuration of his *alter ego* tallies with this important statement on meaning in literature. Representing a powerful and joyful non-verbal undercurrent, the river-voice of the goddess Anna Peranna is the equivalent to Kristeva's hypotext.

Jarry uses his article 'Filiger' as the vehicle for his early ideas on art. Individual desire or affinity, he insists, is the force that transmits the dazzling message (equivalent to Anna Peranna's voice in the literary text) that impels the artist's selection - the force which arrests the beam of artistic attention on a single item and which is itself so powerful as to capture, pin and preserve this evanescent impression before the spinning beacon (*phare tournant*) whirls it away. He himself picks out three artists working at Le Pouldu, in isolation from the main group at Pont-Aven: Armand Seguin, Roderic O'Connor and Filiger. With the sure and economical strokes of a caricaturist he characterises them by their choice of subject and the particular shapes into which they mould them: Seguin's distinctive "spindle-trees" (*arbres fusées*) and dancers in silhouette; O'Connor's criss-crossing "scissor-trees," Filiger's stylized, elongated portraits - "ovale, presque losange."

¹² "The common folk come, and scattered here and there over the green grass they drink, every lad reclining beside his lass. (...) They grow warm with sun and wine, and they pray for as many years as they take cups. (...) There they sing the ditties they picked up in the theatres, beating time to the words with nimble hands: they set the bowl down and trip in dances lubberly." Ovid, *Fasti* III, tr. J. G. Frazer, London, Heinemann, 1931, pp. 523-542.

The technique of reducing an artist or writer to a distinctive mnemonic trait is one that Jarry would develop to a fine art, but the famous roll of one hundred and thirty five personalities published in the Almanach du Père Ubu, illustré actually only contains sixteen artists, and excludes Bernard, Bonnard, Filiger, Gauguin and Rousseau. André Breton's choice of the quotes, "Redon - celui qui mystère" and "Toulouse-Lautrec - celui qui affiche" as the opening gambit for his chapter on Jarry, implies a stronger bias towards art than was actually the case.¹³ It is important to remember that literature was Jarry's passion and that art was only one of the streams which fed his imagination. He occasionally used the work of artists as a ready reference point, when writing about landscape. This habit is particularly evident in Les Jours et les Nuits where we find the following example after Memling:

Puis voici les seigles mouillés et les arbres qu'on ne distingue bien qu'au coucher du soleil, car à cette heure-là ils sont très exactement demeurés ce que les a faits Memling, pas autre chose que de grandes plumes frisées. (PL I 753)

Indeed Jarry's art criticism shows that he seeks out the tree as a point of focus or halt in the general sweep of the gaze. The tree, with its very simple form, shows up stylistic variations very clearly and represents as sure a stylistic indicator of the artist as his signature. We have mentioned his references to O'Connor's "arbres ciseaux", Seguin's "arbres fusées" and Memling's "arbres plumes". The list goes on: Gauguin's "arbres sédimentaires"; D'Amiet's "arbres charnels"; Guillaumin's "arbres roux frisés (...) leur pelote ronde partout couverte têtes d'épingle en pierres précieuses"; we can also note a distinct correlation of trees with Jarry's obsessive motif of imploring hands that he here emphasizes in the pictures of Darbours and of Ravier (Fig. 82):

DARBOURS (...) surtout une lisière de forêt où les arbres lèvent purement leurs étroites mains diaphanes; (...) RAVIER (...) haies et buissons de gnomes ou mandragores levant leurs paumes aux yeux des astres. (PL I 1015-20)

¹³ Breton, OC II 1054-57

Jarry certainly seems to perceive a strongly human element in trees, as did Valéry. In a rare pronouncement about drawing, he compares the leaf, every one different and always in movement, to the human mouth:

La bouche seule, comme une feuille d'arbre, est différente selon tous les visages, et c'en est la seule partie qu'on puisse dessiner sans savoir dessiner, car on signifiera toujours par des traits courbés au hasard des lèvres et des mouvements de lèvres qui existent. Et même quand les voix sont pareilles, deux qui causent ont des bouches différentes.
(PL I 833)

With its emphasis on random movement and changeability, this kind of statement, which Jarry will spontaneously jot down in the middle of a novel, has a much truer ring to it than his more dogmatic pronouncements. These pertain to the canon of logical absurdity¹⁴ and are delivered with Ubu pomposity. Jarry's stated personal philosophy usually contains a number of equivalent values, which end by cancelling each other out. This is his hallmark and one which has come to be representative of Black Humour¹⁵. We should bear in mind that it may be an affectation intended to mystify the reader, but can we be sure? Let us summarize some of these theoretical pronouncements and implied beliefs:

1. all sounds and syllables (phonemes) which sound similar have the same meaning, whatever the language. Using his formula "pour qui sait lire," (ironically this time) Jarry cites the view of Victor Fournié ('Ceux pour qui il n'y eut point de Babel');
(PL II 441)

¹⁴ See Monroe C. Beardsley's definition of *Self-contraverting discourse*:

Its essential principle is to show that the speaker or writer utters a statement explicitly but in such a way as to show that he does not believe what he states, or is not primarily interested in what he states, and thereby calls attention to something else that he has not explicitly stated..

The disconcerting nature of Jarry's statements, which fall under Beardsley's heading of *Self-contradictory attribution*, such as "circles are square," is that he never implies that he does not believe what he states.

Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics. Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, New York, Harcourt Brace & World Inc., 1958.

¹⁵ I subscribe to Jane Taylor's definition of Black Humour as follows:

Black Humor (...) is posited on the refusal of all orthodoxies, all *doxa*, narrative, social or metaphysical. But Black Humor expects no positive function or result; the destruction of orthodoxies leaves not the potential for healing but a permanent void, in which laughter must be seen as recognition leading to something like acquiescence, and in which nothing replaces those reassuring but misleading certainties which have aroused laughter in the first place. It will therefore be the function of Black Humor, constituted in narrative or in verse, to demonstrate or figure the void which lies at the heart of all orthodoxies. Crudely expressed, Black Humor fiction will operate by setting up expectations, *δοξα*, in order to negate them; the more systems it can first appear to subscribe to, then destroy, the more disorientating, will be the effect on the receiver, and disorientation is precisely the effect sought.

Jane H. M. Taylor, 'The Danse macabre. Reflections on black humour,' *Comparative Criticism*, Vol. X, 1988, pp. 147-8.

2. all actions have the same aesthetic value (Jarry cites and validates Thadée Natanson's argument, expounded in an earlier Revue blanche article on Toulouse-Lautrec ('Barnum' PL II 332)
3. all myths derive from a primordial religion which takes slightly different forms in different cultures (review of Synésius, L'Arbre gnostique, PL II 594)
4. the basic pattern units within Nature themselves come from a limited stock, whose visual messages are ingrained in the collective unconscious of beast and man alike. - "C'est le lion qui s'honore de singer le fourmilion." ('La Bataille de Morsang' PL III 464)
5. the equivalence of opposites is logically 'demonstrated' by the movements of the Physick Stick of César Antechrist and reiterated in Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll. (PL I 289-91 & 730)

We know that all these arguments spring from the tenets of Pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions, and can be regarded in the same light as the rules governing Lewis Carroll's Looking Glass world, which we see in Alice's despairing protest to the Red Queen, "A hill *can't* be a valley, you know. That would be nonsense." Her statement encapsulates the disorientation of *la foule*, (what Jarry calls "la grande héméralope, qui ne sait voir qu'à la lueur connue") unused as it is to questioning received values. Jarry's refusal to establish a clear scale of differentials collapses the traditional system of hierarchies, abandoning each individual in a nonsense landscape where he has to improvise in order to survive.

There is an important editorial statement on the relative value of negative and positive criticism in the 'Livret' of L'Ymagier no. 3, not so far attributed to Jarry, but which smacks of his views and is written in his abrupt style. It deserves quoting in full:

Sur la critique - "Quand on ne parle pas des choses avec une partialité pleine d'amour ce qu'on ne dit ne vaut pas la peine d'être rapporté."

Ces paroles - qui valent la peine d'être rapportées - sont de Goethe.
Deux critiques: l'une négative, l'autre positive.

La critique négative veut s'exprimer avec une impartialité pleine de haine; elle se fait tribunal, évoque des coupables et les juge avec un stérile effort de conscience. Elle dit qu'un livre est mauvais, qu'un tableau est mauvais; elle appelle le bourreau afin que le bûcher soit allumé.

“Regarde et passe” - la critique négative n’a jamais ni cette indépendance, ni cette abnégation. Elle regarde, s’arrête, et crie son jugement.

Juges d’intelligence très jeune et de foi très naïve, il faut que le passant les entende et s’étonne de tant de certitude et se dise: J’aimais cela, j’avais tort.

Quand le bourreau paraît, le passant dit encore: Ah voici le bourreau! Nous allons faire une fin de joie et danser autour des cendres de nos vieilles amours.¹⁶

Goethe’s view, here cited, that personal feeling is the only true criterion against which a picture should be judged, matches all Jarry’s statements about judging art and his insistence that to see the paintings with one’s own eyes is worth far more than any dissertation he might make. The dictum “Regarde et passe” would account for the brevity of Jarry’s remarks on art and indeed his silence.

Jarry makes a strong distinction between “Exhibition Art” and sacred, possibly hidden art. Religious works used not to be hung on the wall for decoration but would be brought out at moments of devotion. We can see from his references to Filiger’s non-exhibited triptychs and his promotion of the works of Ravier and Guiguet, stored in George Thomas’s workshop, that he certainly disdains exhibition and popular fame as criteria for judging art. Indeed the chapter of *Faustroll*, dedicated to Bonnard and titled ‘Comment on se procura de la toile’, is a fantasy about stripping the *Musée du Luxembourg* of its traditional exhibits. Jarry manifests his disdain of exhibited art very clearly in this interview of Père Ubu by his Conscience. Following his usual irreverent style, interviewer and interviewee are abbreviated to CON. and P.U. respectively:

CON.: Êtes-vous allé à l’Exposition, Père Ubu?

P.U.: Vu qu’aucune manifestation de l’industrie humaine ne nous doit rester étrangère, oui, Monsieur, nous y sommes allé!

CON.: Combien de fois?

P.U.: Vous devenez indiscret! (...) une fois seulement et au plus; je suis entré par une

¹⁶ *L’Ymagier* no. 3, avr. 1895, p. 197.

porte et ressorti par une autre, ce que n'avaient pas l'esprit de faire les myriades de badauds capturés dans cet enclos comme en une souricière. (...) Quant aux baraques fermées et autres étables, je n'y ai point pénétré: je n'ai eu envie de contempler aucune des curiosités qu'on les disait recéler, parce que j'entends par "curiosité" un objet que je découvre tout seul, en mes explorations individuelles chez les peuplades barbares, je veux qu'on me laisse découvrir tout seul! (PL I 586)

Jarry's own belief in the importance of individual discovery and his uncompromising rebuttal of social, academic or historical conditioning could not be more clearly expressed.

'Beauty', conceived as a purely personal response, is the only criterion which guides Jarry in his early art criticism. Here is his testimony to the admiration of the simple peasantry for Filiger's religious paintings:

Point de louanges pour Filiger, la meilleure étant pour lui celle des paysans qui, après l'admiration des Georgin: ou Notre-Dame des Ermites en sa baraque-salon drapassémentée de toiles rouges (...) disent *Ce que vous faites est encore plus beau.*
(PL I 1026)

Having aligned himself with the peasantry and a spontaneous, uneducated reaction to a beautiful image, even as he writes, using phrases such as "la candeur de ses têtes chastes d'un giottisme expiatoire," Jarry becomes aware of succumbing to a double standard. In the closing paragraphs of this, his first and last published article on an artist, he formally states the absurdity of the procedure of providing a *compte rendu* which contextualizes and labels Filiger's paintings for a gallery public, used to having its tastes and opinions served up on a plate. Published in September 1894 in the Mercure de France, this very clear denunciation of art criticism as a valid procedure is crucial to understanding the subversive and satirical intent of most of Jarry's subsequent writing on art. His refutation of the art critical function is clear and uncompromising. Here are the main points of his truculent three-point declaration:

Il est très absurde que j'aie l'air de faire cette sorte de compte rendu ou description de ces peintures. Car 1er si ce n'était pas très beau, à les citer je ne prendrais aucun plaisir, donc ne les citerais pas;

2ème si je pouvais bien expliquer point par point pourquoi cela est très beau ce ne

serait plus de la peinture, mais de la littérature (...) et cela ne serait plus beau du tout;

3ème que si je ne m'explique point par comparaison - ce qui irait plus vite -
c'est que je ne fais point à ceux qui feuilletent ces notes le tort de croire
qu'il leur fait courte échelle. (PL I 1028)

Within the space of a single article and despite his personal crusade to rescue Filiger from obscurity, Jarry here abruptly turns his back on any future role as an art critic. He denounces the power of the written word as a valid medium for conveying the pleasure to be derived from the visual impact of a picture. Invoking beauty, a word which comes rarely to his pen, he stands by his own personal response to the paintings of the artists he had mentioned earlier: Bernard, Seguin, O'Connor and Filiger, but refuses to provide readymade opinions for pseudo-intellectuals, who fear to succumb to spontaneous visual delight before a painting by an unknown artist, as yet not admitted to the establishment. In 'Filiger' Jarry declares war on theories and states his opposition to the principle of art criticism. From now on he will seek to undermine the apparatus from within. Let us now see where Jarry's very erudite subversion of the art critical establishment will lead.

4.4 Parodying *transposition d'art*

The technique of basing a poem on a picture is something Jarry had already tried out in his first attempts at poetry. In 1888 he had written a poem called 'Enterré vivant' based on Goya's macabre etching Nada. In writing his cycle of six poems dedicated to Gerhard Munthe and to Gauguin he superficially aligned himself with Baudelaire's assertion that a sonnet could be the best way of interpreting a painting, thus rejecting academic responses to art.¹⁷ Poetry and art were to be interchangeable; a poem could inspire a painting or vice versa.

¹⁷ "Je crois sincèrement que la meilleure critique d'art est celle qui est amusante et poétique: non pas celle-ci, froide et algébrique, qui, sous prétexte de tout expliquer, n'a ni haine ni amour, et se dépouille volontairement de toute espèce de tempérament: mais, - un beau tableau étant la nature réfléchi par un artiste, - celle qui sera ce tableau réfléchi par un esprit intelligent et sensible. Ainsi le meilleur compte rendu d'un tableau pourra être un sonnet ou une élégie."
Charles Baudelaire, OC II 418.

Jarry's adult ventures into this genre, however, betray a close study of the most important theorists. His refutation of artistic theory is founded on close familiarity with the texts. In order to sabotage his enemy Jarry always carried out a thorough reconnaissance. The poems dedicated to the Norwegian painter, Gerhard Munthe and to Gauguin and also 'La Régularité de la chasse' can be analysed according to a number of theories on concrete or *ekphrastic* poetry. Jarry's treatment oscillates between spoof and serious. Many of his images rise far above the purely parodic.

True to form, Jarry ignores the most recent theories. His own espousal of a dynamic writing style to describe a painting seems to declare his allegiance to Homer who described the pictures engraved on the magic shield forged for Achilles by Hephaestus as if they were in the process of happening. Lessing quotes Homer's description as a unique example of a poet's success in stringing the static parts of an object into a dynamic whole. He contrasts Virgil's dull and static description of Aeneas' shield with Homer's lively account of Hephaestus' engravings as a series of noisy and dynamic scenes. In Chapters 17 and 18 of Laocoön Lessing expounds his concept of "das Nacheinander der Dinge," the sequential narration of events, which he designates as the province of the writer, and "das Nebeneinander der Dingen," or spatial arrangement of scenes, which is the artist's domain.

Following his philosophy of freeing the movement trapped in the static line, Jarry uses his writer's licence and opts wholeheartedly for the Homeric verb-based sequential style whenever he wants to enliven the description of a picture. By far the best example of this technique is his account of Dürer's Martyrdom of St. Catherine where the 'obvious' picture is described in static terms and the hidden or 'trapped' picture brought to life through dynamic narrative. Given Jarry's friendship with the Nabi Maurice Denis and on the evidence of his early refusal to *explain* paintings, we could hazard a guess that he agreed with Denis that it is the function of the writer to embody ideas in his work and that the sole purpose of a painter is to aspire to create a thing of beauty. This would have placed him in the opposite camp to the

young critic and Symbolist theoretician, Albert Aurier. Aurier viewed a painting as an "ensemble d'idées" and had named Gauguin as the initiator of the Synthetist style.¹⁸ Jarry would have had to conceal his position from Gauguin, for we shall see that he used *transposition d'art* as a vehicle for his own ideas rather than those of the artist. The jackdaw stole the jewel to decorate his own nest.

Whether or not Jarry transforms or deforms the artist's image into an invention of his own, his sharply visual writing style puts him in a theoretical camp where he was not alone. Lessing's ideas had formed the theoretical base of the Romantic aesthetician Theodore Jouffroy. Jouffroy put a high value on the imaginative response of the reader/receiver in relation to the poetic text, a belief to which Jarry was totally committed. He implied that this response could be governed by visual stimuli on a literal, sensual and also metaphorical level.¹⁹ Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial is a monument to this non-academic theory. If parts of it are fake, we can nevertheless assume from Jarry's continued preference for a highly visual writing style, that it is not entirely a dummy monument. He did after all present the collection as a patchwork of variable quality which he preferred to leave intact.

We do not know whether Jarry wrote the Tapisseries, which bear the dedication "D'après et pour Munthe," in May 1893 at the time of their exhibition in Paris or at a later date. The detail that they contain would suggest the former, implying a gap of six months to a year between their composition and that of the Gauguin poems, which must be placed anywhere between November 1893, the date of the Durand Ruel exhibition, to July 1894, the date that they were inscribed in the house book of the Pension Gloanec.

Critical attention has glossed over the Munthe poems, on account of Munthe's much slighter international fame to Gauguin's and the relative inaccessibility of the pictures on

¹⁸ "L'initiateur incontestable de ce mouvement artistique - peut-être, un jour, pourra-t-on dire de cette renaissance - fut Paul Gauguin."

G. Albert Aurier, 'Les Symbolistes,' Revue encyclopédique, no. 32, 1 avril 1892, pp. 475-87.

¹⁹ Cf. Théodore Jouffroy, Cours d'esthétique, Paris, Hachette, 2nd ed. 1863, p. 254 cited in David Scott, 'Writing the Arts: aesthetics, art criticism and literary practice,' in Collier and Lethbridge, op. cit., p. 63.

which they are based.²⁰ This is no reason to ignore Jarry's early attraction to an artist who had established his reputation in the 1880s as Norway's leading theorist and practitioner of abstract decorative art. Munthe's research into the ornamental repertoire of old Norwegian art from Viking times through to the Middle Ages, also his tendency towards the dark and mystical would have held strong appeal for Jarry. We must remember that it was the field of the decorative arts and especially the art of the book that was initially the focus of Jarry's interest, that his own woodcuts tended towards the abstract, in the manner of Vallotton and van de Velde and that in joining the effort towards rejuvenating the art of the book in France, his curiosity was focused beyond French borders and towards lesser known artists.

The personal ring of the dedication "D'après et pour Munthe" implies an actual meeting, dating, as we have said, from Munthe's 1892 visit to Paris, when he came to see a Swiss-born artist and illustrator whose fantastic themes, relating to mediaeval legends and flat, two-dimensional compositions very much matched his own. This was Eugène Grasset, whose innovative illustrations to *Histoire des Quatre Fils Aymon* of 1883 earned the exceptional designation of "très belles" in one of Jarry's spare reviews, when re-exhibited in 1894 and were also represented in *L'Ymagier*. Grasset was adept at shadow compositions²¹ and close friend of the Chat Noir proprietor, Rodolphe Salis, a fact which no doubt accounts for Munthe's visit there. Jarry too was skilled in shadow theatre. The nocturnal and dynamic atmosphere of the Chat Noir was his natural environment. It was an ideal outlet for the two-dimensional and ephemeral experiments of irreverent young avant garde artists. It is unlikely, however, that Jarry had the opportunity to see Munthe's work until the exhibition of his eleven watercolours at the *Champ de Mars* Exhibition of May 1893 - not within the main exhibition, but relegated to the tiny decorative arts section. Despite the thematic similarities between the Munthe and the Gauguin trilogies of poems, *Les Tapisseries* are definitely of

²⁰ They are currently on display in the National Gallery of Oslo and are reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Dreams of a Summer Night*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1986.

²¹ See *Trois femmes et trois loups*, 1892, reproduced in Philippe Jullian, *The Symbolists*, London, Phaidon, 1973, fig 50.

earlier inspiration and represent Jarry's first adventurous validation of an artist hardly known outside his own country - something that he seemed to regard as his private mission. Jarry thus stands out early as a risk-taker, placing long odds and prepared to lay his own literary reputation on the line even before it had taken off. This artistic recklessness and disregard for material stability, fame or status is what would distinguish Jarry throughout his short and erratic career. Let us examine the reasons why he staked his reputation on Munthe.

With Contes de fées Munthe had departed from his previous path of naturalist painting and set himself firmly within the realm of the fantastic and abstract. Although he himself did not accept the designation of "decorative artist" and was regarded on a par with the younger Edvard Munch at this time, the deliberate two-dimensionality of his work and his use of ancient ornamental motifs set him in the decorative category where Munch's haunted modern faces certainly do not fit. Despite the divergent sources of inspiration, his flat compositions meant that he had been working parallel to Anquetin and Bernard, on whose Japanese-based experiments Gauguin then built - also to Jarry's friend, Paul Ranson, the so-called "forgotten Nabi," ("celui qui tapisse.") Some of Munthe's motifs had been inspired by old tapestries and his work was later reinterpreted in this medium. Jarry's title Tapisseries is a play on the flat visual characteristics of the paintings and also on the obsolete verb *se tapisir* "to hide." The Tapisseries indeed conceal his own mischievous visions and intentions rather than Munthe's.

The hand-holding little girls of 'La Peur,' have the introductory function of a Greek chorus to the trilogy of poems and their "bras liés" deliberately refer to the typical "linked hands" motif pertaining to sacred ring dances on Greek kraters. The poem operates at different semantic levels. It introduces the academic theme of ekphrastic poetry and deliberately points to Keats's 'Ode to a Grecian Urn. 'La Peur' also announces the theme of female transition rites in archaic Greece, a theme which is developed in the next two poems and may refer to ritual procedures where initiates are terrorized by means of grotesque masks as a prelude to ecstatic dancing and finally the orderly ring dance which expressed self-

control.²² Jarry's selection of the three poems and their sequence was extremely careful. It displays knowledge that the paintings La Marâtre and Au Repaire des géants (Figs. 10b & c) illustrate episodes in a consecutive narrative²³ and relate to the text of an old Norwegian ballad which provides a further semantic layer.

The ballad relates the tale of the abduction of a princess by trolls and her escape. If we take it into account, Munthe's paintings La Marâtre and Au Repaire des géants can be seen in the light of illustrations *hors texte*, just as Manao tupapau, L'Homme à la Hache and Ia Orana Maria, can be regarded as *hors texte illuminations* of the text of Noa Noa from which they derive, building on the illustrations which Noa Noa already carried.²⁴ They each capture the pregnant or ekphrastic moment, or as Jarry later puts it, the most *plastic* moment of a more complex sequence of movements.²⁵ This is not to say that Jarry's wayward instincts incline him to adhering to the text from which the pictures spring.

Much to the inconvenience of Gauguin, Jarry's brand of *transposition d'art* was not intended to render the painter's intention but Jarry's own intention. It is likely that Gauguin realized Jarry was not a writer he could easily control. Despite a continuing mutual respect, the cessation of Gauguin's and Jarry's relations after the month together at Le Pouldu is significant, as is the absence of any contribution from Gauguin to L'Ymagier²⁶ and the lack of reference to his name in Jarry's article, 'Filiger,' in which Armand Seguin and Emile Bernard

²² See Lonsdale, *op. cit.* pp. 190-3 and Fig. 23.

²³ Jarry's choice bears no relation to the order in which the paintings were displayed.

²⁴ See Samson-Le Men, *op. cit.* p. 86:

La métaphore de la lumière enfin, qui se retrouve dans les mots "illustration" et "enluminure", provient d'une figure étymologique. "Illustratio", mot apparu tardivement en latin chez Quintilien désignait l'action d'éclairer, de rendre brillant, lumineux; la lumière est cette puissance active qui donne aux choses leur signification et permet de les comprendre.

²⁵ Wendy Steiner describes this as the concentration of action in a single moment of energy and Jarry "l'attitude qui devait déceler l'émotion plus intense" (PL II 637) Although both are intimately related, Steiner's view seems to define the task of the sculptor, Jarry's the sensitivity of the choreographer. Wendy Steiner, The Colors of Rhetoric, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

²⁶ The luxury format of L'Ymagier is thought to have struck Gauguin as incompatible with his primitive aspirations. 'Madeleine,' although attributed to him, is now known to have been copied by Seguin from the original, now lost monotype.

Cf. Baas and Field, *op. cit.* p. 64.

(The emphasis on Émile Bernard's work in the journal is also a likely cause of Gauguin's abstention.)

are given almost equal prominence.

However reverent his feelings towards the painterly talents of his chosen artists, the paintings which Jarry used as a springboard to his imagination were transmuted or 'deformed', in a non-pejorative sense, to serve his private vision.²⁷ This creative practice of so-called deformation is here explained by him in his article 'Toomai des éléphants' in terms of the ostrich's digestion (or alchemical trituration) to which we referred in the previous chapter and which constitutes his personal definition of *transposition d'art* and also *transposition de littérature*:

Expliquons-nous: un cerveau vraiment original fonctionne exactement comme l'estomac de l'autruche: tout lui est bon, il pulvérise des cailloux et tord les morceaux de fer. Qu'on ne confonde point ce phénomène avec la faculté d'assimilation, qui est d'autre nature. Une personnalité ne s'assimile rien du tout, elle déforme; mieux elle transmute, dans le sens ascendant de la hiérarchie des métaux. Mise en présence de l'insurpassable - du chef-d'oeuvre -, il ne se produit pas imitation, mais transposition: tout le mécanisme de l'association d'idées de l'oeuvre qui, selon une expression sportive ici fort juste, sert d'«entraîneur». (PL II 393-4)

As we said earlier, the phrase "tout lui est bon" echoes the dictum of the theologian, Chrysorrhas, the dedicatee of 'L'Acte prologal' of César Antechrist and who presides over Jarry's eclectic choice of illustrations. Jarry here points to the use of an **associative** technique of transposition which relies on the suggestive power of a painting or piece of literature. He implies that a masterpiece cannot be imitated, but can be "paralleled." Although both Rachilde's letter, complimenting him on 'Madrigal,' and Paul Léautaud's account of his compositional method belie Jarry's claim,²⁸ he here firmly insists on the unconscious nature of this associative process:

²⁷ The word *déformateur* was used pejoratively against avant garde artists by the critic Alphonse Germain in a well-publicised article in *La Plume*, no. 57, 1892, p. 57. By using it as a term of praise Jarry places himself in the vanguard of experimental art.

²⁸ "Il me parle du grand rôle chez lui, de l'inconscient. Quand il se met devant sa feuille de papier, il ne sait pas trop ce qu'il va écrire. Un état d'excitation tout à fait particulier. Puis un mot, une image visuelle, lui viennent. Tout un conte fait avec cela. Je n'y crois guère. Il donne au contraire, à le lire, l'impression d'une constante construction consciente, je suis tenté de dire: fabrication, avec une grande activité cérébrale." Paul Léautaud, *Journal*, t. 4, Paris, Mercure de France, 1954, p. 117.

Il va sans dire que toutes ces opérations cérébrales sont, de façon absolue, inconscientes: la conscience subsistant dans le fonctionnement d'un organe signifie qu'il a besoin d'être surveillé... parce qu'il ne sait pas encore marcher tout seul! La conscience chez un écrivain, c'est un mal de tête supérieur, et qui lui conseille l'urgence de se tenir tranquille. (PL II 394)

It is likely that there was a gap between Jarry's working habits as he wanted them to be and what they actually were. Rachilde goaded Jarry with the taunt that a volume of poems of the quality of 'Madrigal' would mean many laborious nights, many litres of wine and many women.

We shall return to Jarry's statements in our résumé of his portrayal of the creative process in the final chapter. Meanwhile we shall take the Tapisseries as an early example of Jarry's technique of transmutation in operation. We shall try to perceive his associative technique in action and to analyse his varying angles of approach to Munthe's picture from the erudite to the nonsensical and obscene.

4.5 Parodying the ekphrastic moment

Of the three Tapisseries, 'La Peur' betrays fewest signs of Jarry's irresistible parodic urge, although it does not entirely escape it. Despite the linguistic and metaphoric connotations of the phallic "poêle noir," Jarry retains a nursery-rhyme simplicity and lightness which succeeds. Yet his implacable logic forces him to drive the principle of ekphrastic poetry to its almost absurd extreme. "Ekphrastic poetry signifies motion through a static moment." This is the definition given by Wendy Steiner, who further describes the genre as "an attempt at an iconic embodying of stillness" rather than "a mere symbolic reference."²⁹ With "La Princess Mandragore," spellbound and the "trois Filles," frozen to the spot by the apparitions that they imagine, Jarry provides two perfect examples of the ekphrastic moment ³⁰ on a par with his

²⁹ Steiner, op. cit. p. 41.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 42-45. Steiner uses e.e cummings's "children singing in stone" as the perfect example of ekphrastic poetry.

theoretical example of Lot's wife, petrified into a statue of salt. Here is his main statement on the difference between the respective tasks of writer and artist, delivered with great clarity at his Brussels lecture of 1902, 'Le Temps dans l'art' and which is founded on Lessing's definitions. Jarry here presents the novelist's dependence on a sequential procedure as a disadvantage, by comparison with that of the artist, who is at liberty to depict several things going on at the same time:

Tous les arts empruntent la matière dont ils traitent au temps. On sait qu'il y a une seule différence entre les arts plastiques - peinture, sculpture - et la littérature, du moins selon ce qu'enseignent les professeurs de philosophie. C'est que la littérature est obligée de faire défiler successivement et un à un les objets qu'elle décrit : si un romancier a à parler, par exemple, d'un homme, d'un mouton et d'un arbre, il ne présentera pas à la fois au lecteur, mais l'un après l'autre, ou cet homme, ou cet arbre, et ce mouton. Au contraire dans un tableau, le spectateur embrasse d'un coup d'oeil un aussi grand nombre d'objets, simultanés, qu'il a plu au peintre d'en rassembler.

This is the more public of Jarry's two main comparisons of the written and the painted medium and we have to remember that it is designed for an audience of art lovers. A little known review that he had written on Albert Trachsel's *Rêveries dans la montagne* the previous year presents the opposite view, favouring the written medium, (albeit with a qualifying "peut-être"), when it comes to evaluating the final emotional reaction of the receiver:

Ces impressions ressenties devant des paysages furent immédiatement écrites, dit la préface, sous la dictée de la nature, et l'écrivain a mis à profit les procédés du peintre. Si, en effet, la plume a sur le pinceau ce désavantage, qu'on ne peut embrasser d'un coup d'oeil ce qu'elle trace, elle permet d'accumuler peu à peu chez le lecteur de petites sensations, d'ébranler à petits coups sa sensibilité, et peut-être d'obtenir une émotion finale supérieure. En outre, elle seule, assurément, peut exprimer les rapides changements de décor des montagnes, où les images sont subitement modifiées et où toutes les perceptions ne sont pas visuelles. De même qu'on distingue, dans les frais paysages écrits de M. Trachsel, le vert livide des glaciers lointains, on y entend le sifflet précipité de la marmotte, les ruades du taureau à l'étable envahi par le rut, et la faux de la faucheuse de coeurs, la fille de l'Alpe, aux attaches de chamois. (PL II 621)

The technique of accumulating impressions, which alternate between the aural, the visual and

the tactile is typical of Jarry's own, as we shall see in our final chapter. Although Jarry chooses Breughel's Massacre of the Innocents, as the main example for his lecture to a Belgian audience, a picture which, like many Breughels, depicts several small dramas taking place in different segments of the canvas, he is here less concerned with a variety of events than with the plastic effects of a single intense moment of emotion and the artist's ability to recognize and seize it ("pique et collectionne" as he had put it in his article of 1894).

Portraying God as the supreme artist, he takes the petrifying of Lot's wife as his example:

Ainsi donc le tableau ou la statue saisit et fixe un moment de la durée. Il choisit un mouvement d'entre les mouvements, naturellement le plus plastique, l'immobilise et l'entoure des accessoires qui étaient, pendant le geste, à portée du geste et le complétant. La légende de la femme de Loth n'est selon toute apparence, que l'invention de la première statue. L'Éternel a opéré, en cette circonstance, comme un véritable artiste: il a choisi, pour la fixer, l'attitude qui devait décélérer l'émotion la plus intense, donc la plus esthétique: l'attitude de la femme dévorée par la curiosité, de désir timide et de désobéissance et de terreur soudaine devant l'incendie de Gomorrhe. Alors l'Éternel a dit: "Attention, ne bougeons plus!" (PL II 637)

The analogy with Lot's wife seems to be original to Jarry. However in his early poetic demonstrations of *transposition d'art* he wilfully refuses to accept the half measure of arresting his subjects in mid-gesture. His intention is to take the convention of ekphrastic poetry to its literal extreme, in order to demonstrate its absurdity. His painted subjects are not permitted movement within his poem, any more than the painter's model.

'La Princesse mandragore' and its sequel 'Au repaire des géants' are probably unique for their period as examples of parodic *transposition d'art*. Munthe's paintings had not made an impact in Paris and, even directly after the exhibition, Jarry knew he would be writing for a readership with no visual image to which to relate the poems. In his self-appointed role of saboteur of Symbolism, he takes the stock Symbolist figure of a fairytale princess - a *princesse pâle*, after Moreau, Maeterlinck, Burne Jones and many others - and poetically transmutes her into a *princesse phalle*, assimilated to the mandrake, which, in L'Amour absolu, is used as an explicit metaphor for the erect penis. Jarry changes Munthe's title from

'La Marâtre' to 'La Princesse Mandragore' and in so doing, makes a statement about his appropriation of the subject and his right to make radical changes to suit his own interpretation of the Daphne myth. Taking paralysis through fear as his fundamental idea,³¹ the mandrake motif forms an overt link with his prose poem, 'La Plainte de la Mandragore' and privately alludes to the visual motif of a grotesque mandrake which dominates the painting, 'Au repaire des géants.'

Jarry here demonstrates that he can put anything he likes in his poem and no one will be any the wiser. He is declaring the complete autonomy of poetry and painting and indeed ridiculing *transposition d'art* as an invalid poetic conceit. The chameleone surface tone of the Minutes de Sable Mémorial collection, which changes unpredictably from the farcical to the erudite, even within the same poem, shows how Jarry deliberately applies the techniques of camouflage to literature. As we have seen, the science of camouflage, whether cryptic (dissembling) or sematic (warning), is at the very centre of his aesthetic code. His subversive intentions are not, however, aimed at the artist but at the public, (*la foule*), whom he can be sure would not have seen the picture and who would therefore take his "fairytale" poetry at face value.

'La Princesse Mandragore' is the first link in one of several intertextual chains within the corpus of Jarry's work. Let us use Jarry's own term *chapelet* from 'Linteau', which also implies irregular stones which can be hooked on and off each other and placed next to different stones revealing a series of constantly changing relationships. We should also pay attention here to his use of the words *abrupte* and *inattendu* since abrupt and unexpected juxtapositions would be a defining feature of all his future work. Jarry creates a chain linking three female figures. They are Munthe's princess, Varia/Mélusine of L'Amour absolu and the lexically similar Messaline. Jarry's argument follows those of Charcot's research into female hysteria, which were based on the premiss that the female psyche was softer and

³¹ The physical signs of fear on which the poem hangs are expressed in popular linguistic clichés such as: "he was rooted to the spot" and "his hair stood on end."

less resistant than the male, a malleable receptive substance on to whose surface certain surroundings and outlines could literally impress themselves, resulting in hallucination or hysteria.³² Jarry's own reading of the Dionysian mysteries would have supported this view.

Continuing the theme for which his previous poem 'La Peur' was the overture, Jarry here creates his own theatre decor of fear³³, which he would repeat and develop to great effect in his later pieces, 'Odin' and 'Au jardin du Priape.' This fear-inspiring forest decor is not present in Munthe's seashore landscape and depends partly on the distinct ornamental outlines discussed in Chapter 1. Jarry's evocation of non-existent snails and rabbits at first seems wayward:

Les lapins hors de leurs clapiers,
Les limaces, cendre d'un âtre
Pétri de boue et de limons,
Ont levé leurs fronts de démons
Vers la triomphante marâtre

(PL I 203)

But if we classify them according to their profile, the typical twin-horned outline associated with the devil assimilates them to the Palotins of 'Guignol,' whose antennae-ears define them as diabolical:

Et ils dressent comme des antennes leurs oreilles diaboliques et frétilantes. (PL I 185)

Likewise the inserted motif of the mushrooms, whose "têtes rasées" evoke the "crâne naïf" of the Sacred Phallus in Les Prolégomènes de Haldernablou, look forward to the more blatantly erotic motif of the puffball mushrooms (*Lykopodes*) of 'Odin,' the Parasol Mushrooms/myrrhines of Messaline and the sinister and surreal fungoid Roses of Lurance, which obscure Ellen Elson's carriage window in Le Surmâle and to which we referred in Chapter 3, section 7. The inclusion of fear-inspiring, fetishistic and erotic "masks" or clay models ties in with the idea of a primitive initiation ceremony, here performed by an older woman with magical

³² Henri de Régner's short story 'Hertulie et les messages' in rests on the same belief. Régner, La Canne de Jaspe, Paris, Mercure de France, 1898.

³³ "La peur dont on ne peut se distraire est de l'inoffensif tout en décor." (PL I 935)

powers (La Fée). It also leads into the climactic terror of the final verse, which represents the ekphrastic moment. If taken as spoof, Jarry's rendition of the Phallic Princess verges on the excessive:

La Princesse reste debout
Comme un arbre où la sève bout,
La Princesse reste rigide;
Et, passant sur son front algide,
Tous les ouragans des effrois
Lancent au ciel ses cheveux droits. (PL I 203)

Yet his language hardly differs from that of the sixteenth-century Spanish poet, Garcilaso, describing the transformation of Daphne,³⁴ and even has affinities with Mallarmé's shuddering, ice-bound swan and metaphor for the poet, in 'Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui.' Jarry's intent is only suspect, by virtue of intertextual similarities to the earlier impalement scene of 'L'Autoclète,' the piling on of uprightness, (*debout* phonetically matched with a superficially non-sensical *de boue* earlier in the poem) bubbling sap and the violent upward movement expressed in the final lines. The pretty details of the woodland scenery are suspiciously out of tune with Jarry's usual macabre style, belying an intent quite separate from the mimetic description of the picture. Whilst at one different level the three poems can be interpreted as nonsense and parody, their base in Greek popular culture provide a cohesive theme. The fascination of the Jarry text is this wavering between nonsense and sense, between the sham and the genuine. Parody so often runs side by side with a genuine subtext. The thread of terror and the suggested motif of the maenads' rites form a genuine unifying theme which binds the three poems and strikes a chord in the reader's inner recognition responses. Meanwhile, through minute description of visual detail, Jarry is constantly inflaming the reader's irritation at not being able to see the picture described, thus demonstrating the basic absurdity of the *transposition d'art* conceit. Art and poetry are valid

³⁴ "De aspera corteza se cubrían
los tiernos miembros, que aun bullendo estaban;
los blancos pies en tierra se hincaban,
y en torcidas raices se volvían."
Garcilaso, Sonnet XIII.

as independent entities. Tying them together only serves to hobble them and to prevent the soaring of the imagination. The presiding emblem of the earth-bound mandrake transmits this message.

As a poem, 'Au repaire des géants', the third of the *Tapisseries*, is clumsy and overloaded with confusing imagery. In parodic mode once again, Jarry's heavy use of the present participle in heraldic manner, (*flambant, frissonnante, bénissants, triomphants dormants, sanglantes*) is aimed at bringing out the absurdity of the laboured *Nebeneinander* technique of describing an energetic picture in static terms. Still in her role as phallic emblem, 'La Princesse pâle à la proue' is rowed with great frenzy towards a pre-Freudian cave. Yet the movement of the poem is carefully bracketed by the stillness of its beginning and ending whilst the Dionysian *danse frissonnante* of its whirling centre deliberately completes the theme of its predecessors, now depicting the delirious working out of the ecstatic dance that would have formed the climax to the female initiation rites of ancient Greece.

As the poem ends, Jarry displays a cryptic *oiseau tournoyant*, compared to a wheel, which is supposed to be guiding the Princess's boat and in fact two swan-like birds appear in Munthe's picture with a strangely contorted necks. Here we glimpse the actual motor principle behind Jarry's aesthetic theory. This "turning bird" denotes the mythical Jynx or Wryneck, tied to a wheel by Jason to fashion a magical instrument of seduction and indeed trance with which to bewitch Medea.³⁵ (Fig. 7) The visual motif is repeated in Jarry's reference to eddies (*noeuds*) in the water, which we will later identify more fully as a signifying points of *vertige* where the text no longer follows solid reality but subsides into the quicksand of unstable imagination. Jarry would later graphically formalize the trance-inducing, whirling motion of the jynx with the pattern of Ubu's *gidouille* - the cabbalistic spiral, which he viewed as the motion of the creative process itself. His theories on this would be developed further in his article 'La mécanique d'Ixion' and in *Messaline*, to which

³⁵See A.S.F. Gow, IUNX, ROMBOS, RHOMBUS, TURBO, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1934, pp. 1-13. and Marcel Detienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis*, Gallimard, Paris, 1972.

we shall return in our final chapter.

Munthe's painting is entirely **deformed** to suit Jarry's purpose (his sea is calm; the princess is seated in the stern.) Ending as he began, with a visual motif that could form the pattern on a vase, Jarry homes in on a typical fear-inspiring or sematic configuration, most frequently seen on the wings of butterflies and moths, the ocellus, also a decorative motif, used here by Munthe to denote daunting door studs. He translates them into one of his own private fear-inspiring emblems, the single-celled amoeba (*monère*), whose spiral track was the subject of the much wider ranging scientific discussions concerning the occurrence of the spiral in Nature, begun by Goethe³⁶ and which is therefore implicitly linked to the spiral motif of the previous verse:

Impassibles parmi, très lentes,
Reines des épouvantements,
Voici ramper aux murs dormants
De grandes monères sanglantes.

(PL I 205)

In the next chapter we shall see that Jarry relates the movement of the *monères* to the gliding movement of female forms in general, reptilian, threatening and evocative of Mélusine herself, half-woman and half-serpent.

As we have said, Jarry's previous two poems portray subjects artificially frozen with fear. 'Au repaire des géants' is the only one of the three where he attempts, or feigns an attempt to translate the painter's portrayal of movement. His clear distortion of Munthe's picture and the absurd accumulation of adjectival verb forms is not a condemnation of the artist, but points to his scorn for contemporary *transposition d'art* - even Gautier's, which tended to show the subject of a painting as a static object rather than the dramatic product of an artist's vision. At the same time the three poems testify to Jarry's admiration for Munthe himself and for the

³⁶ Cf. 'On the Spiral Tendency in Plants' [1833] in Goethe's Botanical Writings p. 142 and Philip Ritterbush, The Art of Organic forms, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968, fig. 15 showing Schaeffer's amoeboid movement.

powerful native sources of his inspiration. Parallel with this, the Tapisseries provide an allusive but systematic visual register of the three stages of the primitive female transition rituals of archaic Greece, emphasizing the creative power of fear, trance and a spiral motion.

4.6 The Caesar figure as intertextual icon and self-projection of the writer as military hero

Let us now look at Jarry's treatment of the work of Gauguin, whose committed quest for primitive sources of inspiration and self-exile in Tahiti had caught his imagination. Of the three poems that he wrote based on Gauguin's paintings, Jarry chose not to publish two. L'Homme à la Hache has a significance within Jarry's text, from which the other two poems would have detracted. We have already argued that Jarry did not respect the *ut pictura poesis* principle where it led to a pedestrian, mimetic description in the static, spatial manner defined by Lessing. He decided to interpret the central figure of Gauguin's painting as an archetypal emblem of mobile masculinity and it is this single element that he seeks to emphasize in his sonnet. Because of the Greco-Roman connotations introduced by Jarry's Caesar image, the Celtic roots of this archetypal figure and the poem's clear derivation from his early poem 'La Menée de Hennequin,' have gone unnoticed. (PL I 125-6) The myth of Herne the Hunter must have impressed Jarry in his early life and underlies all the other images in the poem. The surface transformation of the humble working figure of the woodcutter into a Caesar and paradigm of the artist, nonetheless makes the poem a thematic nexus or, in Jarry's terms, a *carrefour* in his work. The main pieces which are superficially linked to L'Homme à la Hache through the Caesar figure are the following:

- the chapter 'Consul Romanus' in Les Jours et les Nuits
- Mnester's Chant in Messaline
- 'L'Ile fragrante' of Faustroll,
- César-Antechrist
- Ubu roi

At the simplest figurative level L'Homme à la Hache (originally called 'Le Fendeur du bois' by Gauguin) is literally 'The H-man' - an ambiguity intended by Jarry. In the previous chapter we saw Jarry's tendency to look at things from all angles ("Le Pan des îles Sandwich, phallique de forme (...) **debout** il se coiffe de la mitre et regarde de deux yeux grossissants (...) **couché**, semblable au seuil du caïman sacré.")³⁷ The graphic image of this poem is the letter 'H' lain on its side, for Jarry shows us a horizontal upper line of the horizon, ("A l'horizon par les brouillards") a horizontal lower line of the shore, ("Au rivage que nous fermons"), which are joined by the stretched vertical of the upright Caesar as statue. This configuration is acknowledged by Jarry in his dialogue between Ibicrate, the Geometrician and Mathètes in chapter 39 of Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll:

L'Égypte érigea ses stèles et obélisques perpendiculaires à l'horizon crucifère et se distinguant par le signe *Plus*, qui est mâle. La juxtaposition des deux signes, du binaire et du ternaire, donne la figure de la lettre H, qui est Chronos, père du Temps ou de la Vie, et ainsi comprennent les hommes.(...) Et de la dispute du signe Plus et du signe Moins, le R.P. Ubu, de la Cie de Jésus, ancien roi de Pologne, a fait un grand livre qui a pour titre pratique, par l'engin mécanique dit *bâton à physique*, de l'identité des contraires. (PL I 729-30)

This passage thus explicitly makes the connection between L'Homme à la Hache, César-Antechrist, and Ubu.

In Chapter 3, p. 166 we mentioned Daniel Compère's point that the letter 'H' has the form of the guillotine and is thereby related to the axe through its cutting blade.³⁸ Certainly Jarry allies his masculine ideal to connotations of the archetypal hunter/warrior, whose signifying accoutrement, as with the planet Orion, is a sharp weapon. He accentuates this image with that of the freshly carved boat as blade itself, cleaving its way through the water in furious territorial pursuit, bearing its own carver-warrior poised to strike. ("Lui (...) / Taille une barque en un tronc d'arbre, / Pour debout dessus nous poursuivre")

³⁷ See also 'Récit de Balkis' on the female silhouette: Voici le corps étranglé artificiellement au milieu qui a la prétention de figurer le signe de l'infini quand il est couché. (PL I 912)

³⁸ Compère, op. cit., p. 76.

This is a far cry from Gauguin's docile, androgynous woodcutter depicted in graceful, langorous pose with downcast eyes and whose bent arms form a triangle, not the pure extended vertical of the poem. Gauguin's figure moreover has his back to the sea, signifying none of the fierce, territorial vigilance of Jarry's. Nor does the poem contain many echoes of the much-quoted, forest episode narrated in Noa Noa, where Gauguin accompanies the native boy, Jotepha, to find a piece of rosewood. We must emphasise that Jarry's appropriates the Gauguin woodcutter figure in order to transform it into a sign or hieroglyph, relevant to his own texts - and that this visual hieroglyph represents the aggressive male principle or rather male overlord, as we shall see below. We shall later have occasion to contrast it with the curled up, enspiralled hieroglyph represented by Mnester in Messaline. The term, *hiéroglyphes évocatoires*, that he uses in his review 'Le XIème Monstre', can be applied throughout his own work.

The echoes which Jarry chooses to emphasise in both L'Homme à la Hache and 'L'Ile fragrante' are, by his own choice, associated with local ritual or legend rather than reality, and depict the feller-boatman as king. Here is Gauguin's description of the Areois' ceremony of coronation and surely the passage with which Jarry associates him when depicting him as King of the Fragrant Isle and naked except for the blue and white 'diadem' around his hips:

On plaçait ensuite la statue du Dieu sur un brancard sculpté que les prêtres portaient devant et le nouveau roi, assis sur les épaules de quelques chefs suivait processionnellement l'idole jusqu'au rivage (...)

Au rivage on trouvait la pirogue sacrée (...) Après y avoir introduit l'idole on ôtait ses vêtements au roi que le grand prêtre conduisait, nu, dans la mer (...) Quelques instants après, le roi, consacré par ce baiser de la mer, montait dans la pirogue sacrée, où le grand prêtre lui ceignait autour des reins le *Maro Ourou* et autour de la tête la *taoumata* bandeaux significatifs de la souveraineté.³⁹

In this passage we can find firstly a reference to a statue on a kind of plinth, to which Jarry is able to ally Greco-Roman connotations, secondly the confusion of identities between idol and

³⁹ Gauguin, Noa Noa, ed. J. Loize, Paris, 1966, pp.164-5.

king and finally the image of the king in a boat.

Two further passages of Noa Noa may have honed Jarry's personal hunter-killer vision of Gauguin's tree feller. The first describes Gauguin's own sensation of being pursued by a furious local deity, deriving from the excited cries of the Tahitian rowers:

Les rameurs pour s'exciter criaient en cadence (...) J'eus la sensation d'une course folle: les redoutables maîtres de l'océan nous poursuivaient.⁴⁰

The second gives a more detailed portrait of one of these aggressive sea deities as follows:

Ce dieu, espèce de Neptune, dormait au fond des mers dans un endroit qui lui était consacré. Un pêcheur commît l'imprudence d'y aller pêcher, et son hameçon s'étant accroché aux cheveux du dieu, le dieu fut éveillé. Furieux il monta à la surface, pour voir qui avait l'audace de troubler ainsi son sommeil, et quand il vit que le coupable était un homme, il décida aussitôt que tout la race humaine périrait.⁴¹

With respect to Jarry's vision of Gauguin's treefeller as a ferocious Emperor-deity, we mentioned in note 7 to Chapter 2 a painting that Gauguin called Matamoe, whose Tahitian meaning translates literally as "Closed eyes," but which he translated as Mort, perhaps giving the treefeller's axe the same attributes that European legend gives to Death's scythe. It shows the tree-feller as a distant, tiny figure in a clearing dominated by two mountains, separated by the dark crevasse that Jarry calls the "entredeux surnois des monts," the grotto, which Gauguin designated as the place where all the evil spirits or *tupapaus* congregated as dusk fell.⁴² The existence of this picture, which Jarry seems to know, does not, however, detract from his personal interpretation, portraying a vengeful Caesar figure, partly inspired, as we have argued, by Herne the Hunter, as evoked in his early poem, 'La Menée de Hennequin,' (PL I 125-6) and which, in his article 'Ceux pour qui il n'y eut point de Babel,' he classifies as a universal type: "Le grand chef: celui qui mord, le loup, celui qui porte l'arme tranchante."

⁴⁰ Gauguin, op. cit. p. 196

⁴¹ Gauguin, op. cit. p. 193

⁴² See Charles F. Stuckey, 'Matamoe: (le paysage aux paons)' in Gauguin. Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989, p. 132-3.

(PL II 442) Jarry's figure stands on an indeterminate base which changes with surreal and frightening swiftness from chariot to marble plinth to pursuing boat:

Lui, sur son **char** tel un César
 Ou sur un **piédestal** de marbre,
 Taille une **barque** en un tronc d'arbre
 Pour debout dessus nous poursuivre. (PL I 210)

Let us pause for a moment to consider Jarry's uniting of the Areas' ancient coronation ritual, fusing idol and new king, with the legend of the Sea-God as Death-Bringer in his personal image of *l'homme à la hache*, for, as we argued in the last chapter, this figure contains the idea of the Artist as Destroyer-Creator and implicates Gauguin, if not Jarry himself. In Jarry's case, he cannot only be represented as a carver of shapes out of wood, but as a poet. There is strong evidence of an intertextual reference to a poem of Jarry's associate, Gustave Kahn, 'Thème et variations' from his collection Les Palais nomades of 1887, which represented his experiments in *vers libre* and on which Jarry built his own. He later indicated the debt through his dedication to Kahn of the chapter 'Du Château-errant, qui est une jonque,' a reference to Kahn's Les Palais nomades from which the following verse comes:

Se chauffer comme un bon lézard
 Au rythmes raffinés des arts;
 Sur les doux divans des hasards,
 Domine son rêve en César;
 Finir loin des ports en jonque bizarre.

The similarities of the *lézard/César* rhyme; the reference to the arts, dream and also to the strange boat travelling "loin des ports" are so numerous and so similar to Jarry's 'L'Homme à la Hache' that we need have no hesitation in recognizing Jarry's quite normal procedure not this time of pastiche but once again of "literary collage," similar to his borrowing from Les Chants de Maldoror, that we saw demonstrated in César-Antechrist. Jarry's presumed *lézards/les arts* pun is interpreted by Kevil to indicate a homage to Gauguin as the god, at whose feet the arts grovel and, in his view, is a legitimate and innocent literary procedure.

This procedure, that we mentioned earlier, and which is termed “unconscious parallelism” by Jarry, is tellingly set out in his article ‘Toomai des éléphants’ in relation to the unconscious ‘plagiarism’ from Kipling’s Jungle Books committed by the writer Georges d’Esparbes. (PL II 393-5) There is little doubt that Jarry is making an oblique justification of his own borrowings from a variety of authors, to many of whom he gives their due credit in Faustroll’s list of the Elect. We have cited the several passages from Noa Noa which Jarry assembled in his mind to build up a mythical persona for the icon of Gauguin’s tree-feller, distinct from the actual young native indicated in the text.

It is true that Jarry retained the neo-Platonic ideal of physical perfection dear to the Symbolists, together with the symbolic use of the marble statue in which to embody it. This is nevertheless always a moving statue like the Greek automata, ancestors of the puppets that we shall be discussing in the next chapter. The icon of ideal and beautiful masculinity and the images that he created for L’Homme à la Hache are carried forward to embellish the figure of Valens in the chapter significantly titled ‘Consul romanus’ in Les Jours et les Nuits. But, as an extension of this, we would like to introduce a concept which is very personal to him and which he mentions, that of the great military general (César) as artistic genius.⁴³ He displays a fascination with past military campaigns, seen as the product of a brilliant mind and which generate fantastic adventures. This is evident in the content of Perhinderion, and particularly from the two following examples: first a Pellerin engraving portraying the arrival of Napoleon’s army at the top of the St Bernard Pass, which carries a detailed legend describing Napoleon’s care to rest the women, prearrange a mountain-top banquet and his ingenious procedures for helping the horses to transport the cannons;⁴⁴ (Fig. 67) second a facsimile of two gripping chapters by Sebastian Münster, the cartographer, describing the adventures and

⁴³ “Un général intelligent *serait* un grand mage. mais il faudrait qu’il n’eût pas été entraîné par une plus rigoureuse ascèse, à la soumission au magnétisme en retour.” (PL I 764)

⁴⁴ “Enfin, après la marche la plus pénible, arrivés sur la crête de ce terrible Mont, nos braves soldats y trouvèrent un excellent dîné préparé par les soins du premier Consul. Jamais Bonaparte ne déploya de plus grands talents qu’au pied du Mont-St-Bernard: son habileté et la profondeur de son génie se fut remarquer jusque dans les moindres détails.”
Perhinderion, no. 1, mars 1896.

afflictions of Alexander the Great's army as it advanced into Asia, illustrated with delightfully naive woodcuts, depicting man-eating monsters (probably hippopotami and crocodiles) which infested the infrequent freshwater lakes where the army could camp and rest. (Figs. 68a & b) (Appendix I) Jarry focuses not on battles, but on the critical transitional stages between them and the peculiar, if not fantastic places of encampment. If there is an argument here, he seems to indicate that a general's real talent and imagination is demonstrated in the care of his army between battles and on his ability to provide them with food, water and rest in extraordinary circumstances. It counterbalances his autobiographical portrayal of the unimaginative practices of the modern French army in peacetime, given in Les Jours et les Nuits and temporarily distances him from the disturbing hypothesis equating military excellence, intelligence and the racial superiority of the Aryan which had started to circulate.⁴⁵ There is a definite accent of the child's adventure storybook in the Münster chapters, quite different to the religious accent provided by the Dürer engravings, the majority of Épinal prints⁴⁶ and Bernard's engravings. Jarry's insistence on reproducing entire chapters demonstrates a particular interest in the content as well as the form of the mediaeval text. Whereas L'Ymagier had a section titled 'Pages des vieux livres' and another titled 'Monstres', Jarry has here integrated the two into a narrative text. The prominence of the *mare* motif magnified to *étang*, as site of the unexpected and perilous is very noticeable.

It is appropriate to end this discussion of the heroic Caesar figure as Jarry's model of artistic genius by focusing on these overlooked excerpts from Sebastien Münster's account of Alexander the Great's Asian campaign that he took for his own and on which he lavished so

⁴⁵ Cf. Waring's observations on the swastika symbol or fylfot being connected with blue-eyed, fair-haired races, well-gifted mentally and possessing war-like genius. Waring, op. cit., p. 92.

⁴⁶ Even here Jarry deviates from the norms of L'Ymagier, by including Le Chemin de Fer, a special hand-coloured pull depicting the railway, printed alongside a short history of the railway and a song about it, indicative of an irrepressible boyish enthusiasm for trains.

much expense and devotion to publish with the original mediaeval typeface.⁴⁷ As much, if not more than Ubu, this “appropriated” or ready-made text represents Jarry’s expression of his artistic ideal, both in spirit and form. The child poring over the picture book and the little boy immersed in the excitement of military exploits and mythical monsters represents an earlier and more genuine self than the extrovert adolescent and clever scholar who gained the admiration of his classmates by translating the Latin footnotes to the obscene passages in their Greek set texts and discomfiting his teachers with his knowledge.⁴⁸ We therefore propose this fantastic text of Sebastian Münster’s as of equal importance to the Ubu texts in understanding Jarry’s artistic values and his implicit advocacy of a return to child-like responses. As his only fully independent gesture as sole writer, editor and publisher and one which absorbed all his financial resources, it must carry greater authenticity than any of his absurdist and mystifying broad-brush statements on language and art.

This glimpse of Jarry’s true preferences is almost too brief to catch. The year of 1896 marked his emergence from the shadow of Remy de Gourmont. It was the first moment that he had been free of the constraints imposed on him by the older editor, whose artistic and literary tastes were founded on massive erudition, the first moment that his individual taste could declare itself, uncluttered by Gourmontian requirements. Ideally Jarry would have preferred Perhinderion to be a collector’s piece containing full-size reproductions standing on their own, unburdened by editorial comment. Here is his declaration of intent laid out in Perhinderion no. 1:

Perhinderion est un mot breton qui veut dire Pardon au sens de Pèlerinage. Comme

⁴⁷ Jarry refused to back away from his project of producing this beautiful facsimile, the pouring of the fifteenth-century typeface for it and the extraordinary typesetting difficulties, despite the mounting costs, which finally bankrupted him.

See Sebastien Münster, ‘Comment Alexandre le grand partist de Macedonie et entra en Indie avec grande force et vertu: et des choses qui lui sont advenues en chemin.’ in De la Cosmographie Universelle. Livre V. reproduced in Perhinderion no 1, mars 1896.

⁴⁸ Cf. Jarry’s review of Eugène Demolder’s Le Cœur des pauvres, offering a rare example of self-revelation.

Dans ses contes pour les enfants, on admire que sache se faire si simple le poète de romans truculents ou fantastiques. Il a placé ses scènes dans le cœur des pauvres, parce que c’est le plus pareil à celui des petits enfants.(...) Il y a dans ce livre des contes qui nous émeuvent à rire et à pleurer, de ces grandes larmes et de ce grand rire que l’on ne savait plus retrouver depuis qu’on ne sait plus avoir huit ans. (PL II 618-9)

sur les places entourées d'un talus, au pied des sanctuaires, les colporteurs viennent à des dates, aux doigts appendues les images rares, six fois l'an en Perhinderion ressusciteront les anciennes ou naîtront les nouvelles estampes. (PL I 995)

Although the tone indicates a commitment to popular imagery, the actual content, consisting of Dürer, Münster and Georgin's military prints, is less crude than the pictorial content of L'Ymagier. Georgin's and Bernard's prints are exquisitely handpainted. Despite its slimness, Perhinderion is a thing of beauty and ranks with the outstanding handmade books of the century. The format was larger than L'Ymagier's and the quality of both print and paper higher. Apart from Jarry's preface and the legends to the pictures, Dürer's Martyrdom of St. Catherine is the only engraving to carry an editorial commentary. To this extraordinary commentary we shall return in Section 8.

There were only two numbers of Perhinderion and it marked a watershed in Jarry's career. With its foundering, he and his supporters (mainly Schwob and Rachilde) began manoeuvres to put the puppet play Ubu on stage at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in order to save him from financial ruin. After the cataclysmic *première*, described by Yeats, the Jarry of Perhinderion, whose artistic aims had been turning towards mediaeval image reproduction, was totally engulfed in the absurd persona of Ubu, to the extent that most of his coevals were unable to distinguish between the two. The year 1896 shows two very different sides to Jarry's artistic personality and interests. To the great advantage of twentieth-century art and drama, the theatre, rapid, vital, evanescent and insistent of compromise, claimed his fate against the more introverted and obsessional perfectionism imposed by the art of the Book. The lure of the grotesque, which appealed to his innate subversive and satirical nature, drew him away from neo-classicism and the principles of idealist art, to which some of his closest colleagues, such as Paul Sérusier, remained faithful and to which Émile Bernard switched.

4.7 Jarry's anti-realism, seen through his 'pell mell' aesthetic, his support of Rousseau and his disregard for period in art.

In drawing the analogy between Jarry's Caesar figure of L'Homme à la Hache and Sebastian Münster's account of Alexander the Great's adventures we have leapfrogged the important phase of L'Ymagier in Jarry's artistic development. This was partly covered in the previous chapter and but ^{it} is only appropriate here to try to isolate Jarry's statements on art. We have mentioned the difficulty of separating Jarry's editorial contributions from those of Remy de Gourmont, however there is a distinct difference in their written styles. It is certain that Gourmont found Jarry impossible to control, as Fargue's letter shows ("Gourmont m'engage vivement à partir te chercher par les cheveux".) Gourmont's self-imposed reclusiveness, led to dependance on Jarry for the practical organisation of the journal. This may account for its random character, as the following editorial remark seeks to justify:

Pourquoi, après tant d'images, le Livret ne serait-il pas, à lui tout seul, une petite revue, documents, curiosités, traductions de textes peu connus, selon le pêle-mêle de trouvailles de la fantaisie ou de la nécessité?⁴⁹

Although not formally signed by him, the phrase "pell-mell of discoveries" is Jarry's trademark and accords not only with his later crucial comment on the benefits of collecting forms and colours at speed, mentioned in Chapter 1, but is linked to the high artistic esteem that he gives to acrobats, as opposed to actors, here indicated in his article on Barnum's Circus:

Ce n'est qu'un grand cirque a-t-on dit. Soit; mais imaginez une arène dans laquelle vous en versez trois autres de dimensions respectables. (...) Dans les airs s'enchevêtre une forêt vierge d'agrès nécessaires à plusieurs douzaines de funambules et gymnasiarques (...) Au-dessous grouille un peuple de clowns, une harde de chevaux.

Quelle supériorité sur les acteurs ont ces grands artistes acrobates qui trouvent naturel de se livrer à leur travail périlleux, pêle-mêle avec vingt autre numéros sans même savoir si c'est eux qu'on regardera!
(PL II 333)

⁴⁹ L'Ymagier no. 2, janvier 1895.

This passage could indeed be taken as an implicit art poétique for Jarry, where the combination of risk, speed and randomness characterises the creative act, a combination which very much appealed to the future Surrealists. The ideal work of art in his perception would approximate to this disconnected *assemblage* of varied entities - not quite a cabinet of curiosities - more like an oddly stocked aquarium, the evanescent fresh water *mare*, or the ocean itself, with its *VÉGÉTATION DE FOLIE*, and where species are strictly segregated according to depth, yet remain unpredictable, unclassified and constantly shifting. Certainly the description of Barnum's several different layers, as he portrays it, matches Jarry's own many-layered text.

It is important to note Jarry's stated editorial policy of allowing a random quality to prevail in the *Livret* if not the magazine itself. Certainly the contiguous publication of the work of contemporary artists with mediaeval woodcuts seems to have been his conception, begun with Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial, (his own literary and graphic work, printed side by side with fifteenth-century woodcuts), and continued in Perhinderion with the contiguous publication of Dürer's and Émile Bernard's engravings. As we have said, Gourmont's enthusiasm had been mainly for the *Images d'Épinal* which were to blend with mediaeval ballads and woodcuts, very much in the ambiance of his previous book Le Latin mystique. Seeking to establish his superior credentials, while his youthful ex-protégé was launching a competing publication, Gourmont succumbed to an extraordinary and tedious attack of *folie de grandeur* in publishing a list of seven of his Gourmont printer forebears in L'Ymagier, no. 7. Nothing could emphasize more the difference between Gourmont's philosophy of 'value through antiquity' and Jarry's natural impulse towards innovation and breaking with tradition.

Jarry's support of Henri Rousseau is a crucial matter in assessing his attitude to art and it is appropriate to examine it within the context of the L'Ymagier. Dora Vallier argues that he commissioned Rousseau's only lithograph, La Guerre, (Fig. 69) quite early in 1894, well

before the painting of the same title was executed.⁵⁰ This argument can certainly be supported from the point of view of a family and personal friendship, established since childhood and already so sound, that after the lapse of Jarry's lease, and when his uncle's terminal illness had detained him unexpectedly in Brittany, it was Rousseau who undertook the responsibility of rescuing the irreplaceable belongings connected with Jarry's artistic activities: puppets, Japanese lantern and the highly significant easel, and of writing to assure him of their safety.⁵¹ He sent best wishes to Jarry's father and to the "chevaliers de la palette," his fellow artists in Pont-Aven. Two important facts from this letter need stressing: firstly Rousseau's friendship with several of the Nabis and secondly Jarry's status as a regular amateur painter, although only three of his oils are on record as surviving.

Vallier's argument for the early date of Rousseau's La Guerre rests on the hypothesis that Jarry gave him a careful briefing on L'Ymagier's intended subject matter and may have shown him François Georin's engravings of Napoleon's military campaign early in 1894. Certainly the magazine opens with two horrifying woodcuts depicting Noah's Flood, which show a great many naked corpses - a fact she does not mention. Her argument that Rousseau based the composition of La Guerre on the central jumble of corpses in Georin's Bataille des Pyramides, depicting Bonaparte versus the "Mameloucks" (Fig. 41) and which appears with it in L'Ymagier no. 2, must nevertheless be combined with Yann Le Pichon's discovery of a near-identical engraving in the socialist newspaper L'Égalité illustrating a serialized novel, Le Tsar.⁵² (Fig. 42) The central cabbalistic triangle of the final painting is created by the angle of a dead man's knee. Jarry is known for his habit of drawing material from popular

⁵⁰ Vallier, op. cit., p. 52.

⁵¹ "Je suis allé chercher votre chevalet ainsi que la boîte aux célèbres acteurs, j'ai rapporté la lanterne japonaise qui ne fera pas mal dans les arbres: j'ai commencé aujourd'hui vous ayant attendu; et je vais y travailler dure [sic], de façon à ce que je puisse vous faire de suite lorsque vous viendrez. (...) Vous êtes libre de commencer votre déménagement sitôt que vous le désirez, nous attendons vos ordres."

Letter dated 26 June 1894, quoted in Noël Arnaud, Alfred Jarry, Paris, La Table ronde, 1974, p. 112.

⁵² Yann Le Pichon, The World of Henri Rousseau, Oxford, Phaidon, 1982.

magazines⁵³ and may even have connived in the composition of this picture. Although the procedure could be considered as anti-art or plagiaristic and is inimical to all the procedures of academic art, we know that Jarry considered any material, whether its provenance was “low” or “high” as a valid resource. The result was what mattered. Rousseau’s well-known tendency to copy an existing illustration and his use of the pantograph is here betrayed. The “pell-mell principle” was utterly hostile to his nature, and his careful efforts to conform to what he understood to be the subject matter of L’Ymagier are worth emphasizing.

Quite as important as the military theme represented by Georgin in the section headed Costumes is the section headed Les Monstres. If Rousseau indeed asked to see the illustrations that his would accompany, he would have seen Jarry’s two primitive Demon pull-outs (Figs. 1 & 4) and also eight late eighteenth-century Indian woodcuts destined for a section called Les Dieux, to which Jarry’s earlier reference to Shiva’s chariot alludes. Rousseau’s female portrayal of War falls outside the Western artistic tradition. We would argue that it represents a meticulous alliance of the war theme, as expressed by Goya’s Los Estragos de la Guerra and Breughel’s The Triumph of Death, but placed outside time by the total lack of costume, and the uniting of both the Monster and the Gods themes in the person of a ferocious female figure, similar in conception to the Indian goddess Kali; furthermore that Rousseau created his amazingly original figure through a painstaking, piece by piece attempt at conformity - not only conformity to all the themes of his friend’s magazine, but to Jarry’s dislike of period detail, as later expressed in his lecture on Time in Art:

“Si l’on veut que l’oeuvre d’art devienne éternelle un jour, n’est-il pas plus simple, en la libérant soi-même des lisières du temps, de la faire éternelle tout de suite?

(PL II 641)

Rousseau’s monstrous female representation of War running, airborne, beside her galloping horse possesses a barbaric and timeless quality entirely worthy of the as yet unleashed Ubu.

⁵³ In La Dragonne he reveals his source for the Anna Peranna legend was an Italian magazine, not Ovid:

Il but dans l’obscurité et un vers lu dans son enfance en un magazine, au sujet d’une curiosité italienne, chanta dans son cerveau le fleuve éternel et invisible au nom mystérieux et dont nul ne sait le sens.

(PL III 455)

In relation to Jarry's gesture of confidence in commissioning La Guerre, his two brief reviews of the subsequent painting are hardly relevant. What is noticeable here is his omission of any mention of the central figure and his concentration on the incidental details of the decor: the horse; the blackened leaves; the clouds; the corpses:

De H. ROUSSEAU, surtout la Guerre (Elle passe effrayante...) De ses comme péroniers [sic] le cheval tend dans le prolongement effaré du cou de sa tête de danseuse, les feuilles noires peuplent les nuages mauves et les décombres courent comme des pommes de pin, parmi les cadavres aux bords translucides d'axolotls, étiquetés de corbeaux au bec clair. (PL I 1023)

"Elle passe effrayante..." are the first three words of Rousseau's own caption and is not Jarry's comment. His description has the effect of leaving a blank spot in the middle of the picture precisely where 'La Guerre' is supposed to figure, sending a clear message to the reader to go and see it for himself. He withholds his description as a gesture of provocation. As he had said earlier of Manet, "De celui-là qui l'aime doit mieux n'en point parler, et dire: Allez-y voir."

The implied vacuum at the centre of the picture, whilst the ground itself is shown racing forward, leads us back to Jarry's important notion of *l'hors-du-temps*, to which Rousseau was probably trying to conform. The sprawl of dead bodies and attendant carrion represent the essential and inevitable result of war, past, present or future. In 1902 for his lecture on the timelessness of art given to a Belgian audience Jarry selects Breughel's Massacre of the Innocents and demonstrates how the artist has showed complete disrespect for period detail and reduced this well-known biblical event to its essential nature: the act of a massacre by the military, taking place within his own time and surroundings:

L'artiste ne s'est pas embarrassé de rechercher quels étaient les costumes et les détails des costumes des soldats d'Hérode il y a deux mille ans. Il a simplement illustré ce fait: **une soldatesque qui massacre des petits enfants**. Comme décor il n'a pas cherché autre chose que les rues d'une ville flamande qu'il connaît bien; avec un manque de vergogne sublime, il a étendu sur sa toile un ciel brumeux du Nord et un tapis de neige. [My emboldening] (PL II 638)

Breughel's procedure is also that of Jarry's other favourite artist, Dürer, who transposes Christ's Passion to Germany. This is not simply a question of neutralizing (or removing) the costume element as Rousseau did, but, in Jarry's vision, of staying still within time.

Discontinuous life (*vivre*), as opposed to continuous being (*être*), takes place shut within the mould of what Jarry calls "the guitar box of Time." Jarry's idea of a time travel, consisted precisely of making the human body transparent and therefore immune to the eroding action of time - outer physical events would simply pass through the body, a theory which seems to owe less to H. G. Wells than to Kleist's concept of 'das Zeitlose' or Poe's poem, 'Dreamland,': 'out of SPACE and out of TIME', as we can see from his personal vision of a Time Machine:

Une machine qui nous isole de la Durée, ou de l'action de la Durée vieillir ou rajeunir, ébranlement physique imprimé à un être inerte par une succession de mouvements, devra nous *rendre transparents* à ces phénomènes physiques, nous les faire traverser sans qu'ils nous modifient ni déplacent.(...)

Etre immobile dans le Temps signifie donc traverser (ou être impunément traversé par, comme un carreau de vitre laisse sans rupture passage à un projectile, ou mieux la glace se reforme après la section d'un fil de fer, et un organisme est parcouru sans lésion par une aiguille aseptique) tous les corps, tous les mouvements ou toutes les forces dont le lieu successif sera le point d'espace choisi par l'Explorateur pour le départ de sa MACHINE A ETRE IMMOBILE. [Jarry's emphases] (PL I 737)

Anticipating Eliot's "still point," Jarry's ideal is therefore the power to remain still, the immortal power of Dionysos, whilst everything else moves frenetically around one. He will revert to it in his speculative *Looping the loop* ("L'acrobatie et la vitesse seront très naturellement un jour d'être immobile") and in 'La Bataille de Morsang.' His vision of the poet as transparent, able to pass through material objects or to be passed through, encapsulates the very essence of later Surrealist poetics as formulated by Breton, Tzara and Eluard, "where the idea of transparence, of the penetration of surfaces, of passing the frontiers of the real is the ideal."⁵⁴ It should be allied to his idea of "the crystal *hors-de-forme* of

⁵⁴ I am citing J. H. Matthews, *Surrealist Poetry in France*. Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1969, p. 6.

Being" (*être*) that he defines in *Etre et Vivre* (PL I 341) and to the unstated but implicit idea contained in 'La Régularité de la chasse' and that underlies all his works, of himself, the writer/time-traveller, as a transparent glass vase or jar. Indeed, he makes no distinction between the consistency of glass and that of water.⁵⁵

The portrayal of the human body as a transparent vessel allowing the soul clear passage from the material to the spiritual world also occurs in the poem 'Berceuse du mort pour s'endormir', a so-called lullaby, which, of all Jarry's poems, André Breton declared to be his favourite:

Puissent mes os rester intacts
dans leur fourreau de chair compacte,

rester intacts jusques l'heure
où se débat le corps qui meurt

où la peau fait comme une vitre
transparente à l'âme, et se vitre

l'oeil de méduse à tentacules...
Des poulpes noirs autour circulent,

faisant des ronds avec leurs mains
pour figurer les lendemains. (PL I 193)

Theosophical beliefs relating to the escape of the soul are here oddly blended into a quaint and somewhat macabre nonsense poem, whose nursery-rhyme cadences and whirling images of butterflies turning into playing cards ("Leurs ailes jaunes sont des tuiles/ dont on bat des cartes mobiles") vividly evoke the wandering mind of a person sinking into death. Transparency of the skin figures as sign of the departing soul both in 'Le Sablier' and chapter V of *Messaline*,

⁵⁵ Jarry's allusive question, "Et qu'est-ce que le verre, sinon une eau immobile?" from his crucial article on "forceful forms" and their action on space, 'Du mimétisme inverse chez les personnages d'Henri Régner' would later be developed by André Breton in his idea of surreality contained within reality (Jarry's idea of an *autre monde*) contained in this world):

Tout ce que j'aime, tout ce que je pense et ressens, m'incline à une philosophie particulière de l'immanence d'après laquelle la surréalité serait contenue dans la réalité même, et ne lui serait ni supérieure ni extérieure. Et réciproquement, car le contenant serait aussi le contenu. Il s'agirait presque d'un vase communicant entre le contenant et le contenu.

André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p. 46.

'Le Père du phénix.'

The question of stillness and movement is central to the discussion of *transposition d'art*. It is time to reexamine our fundamental query about Jarry's attitude to art and to art criticism, viewed now through his leading role in deciding the content of L'Ymagier and through his encouragement of Rousseau. His influence is best seen by comparing the final numbers of the magazine, edited by Gourmont alone, to the ones where he was still present. With Jarry's departure L'Ymagier lost its modern accent and swung emphatically towards archaism. What is most lacking from the last three numbers are the contributions from a good selection of contemporary artists.⁵⁶ We can therefore confidently claim that much of Jarry's energy went into promoting innovation and the marginal artist. We have mentioned the absolute value of friendship in his creed. He perceived that both Seguin and Filiger were living at the limit of their means. A part of his artistic mission was to promote new trends and to encourage the unrecognized innovator with solid financial assistance, not just with the ephemeral gesture of a review.⁵⁷ Since L'Ymagier was to be launched with the lavish patronage of Remy de Gourmont's companion, Berthe de Courrière behind it, he saw and seized the chance to do this.

There are distinct signs that Jarry encouraged Rousseau to use in his painting the same method of appropriation that he himself used in the composition of his literature. We have already discussed a possible cooperation between the two artists in the composition of La Guerre. There is further evidence of collaboration revealed in Rousseau's method of painting figures on to a 'fantastic' background, deriving from a totally different source from the foreground figures. Both are usually copied. That Jarry may have provided Rousseau with a respectable precedent for this method is likely from his use of a seventeenth-century manual

⁵⁶ Jarry had obtained contributions from Eric Forbes Robertson, Roderic O'Connor, Émile Bernard, Maurice Delcourt, Filiger and Seguin, including his copy of Gauguin's 'Madeleine.' Apart from an occasional Bernard, only Georges d'Espagnat continued with Gourmont.

⁵⁷ Letters from both artists testify to this fact. See Dossier 22-24 of the Collège de Pataphysique, 8 sept. 1963, pp. 10-18 and the exhibition catalogue Hommage à Filiger, Musée départemental du Prieuré de St-Germain-en-Laye - Yvelines, 1988, pp. 10-11.

on fencing, which gives elaborate illustrations, portraying the various fencing positions superimposed on a background of biblical scenes, each scene taken from a different bible. The example chosen by Jarry for Perhinderion, never subsequently published or commented upon, depicts the building of the Tower of Babel. (Fig. 72) The date of the background illustration is several centuries earlier than the foreground illustration. It would seem that he was once again making a point about the irrelevance of period detail - of fidelity to time in art. Nor does he make any editorial statement as to the relative "importance" of the two scenes. He describes both in his legend. As we shall see with The Martyrdom of St. Catherine, the beholder is at liberty to let his gaze wander past the foreground image into other, perhaps "more eternal" parts of the picture if he wishes. Perhinderion is not just a collection of Jarry's favourite images; the images that he selects are chosen to encourage the reader to fantasize, to let his imagination wander to alternative images and to see beyond immediate reality.

Henri Rousseau's role in the fictitious world of Faustroll is a unique one. He is not given kingship of a definite island with a particular landscape. Jarry puts him in charge of a very uncontrolled machine, dubbed Mechanical Monster. This is the highly mobile Painting Machine, brother to the *Bâton à Physique* of the "images gyroscoposuccessives" and with which he is to overspray the pictures collected from the (thinly disguised) Musée du Luxembourg:

Et ayant braqué au centre des quadrilatères déshonorés par des couleurs irrégulières la lance bienfaisante de la machine à peindre, il commit à la direction du monstre mécanique M. Henri Rousseau, artiste peintre décorateur, dit le Douanier, mentionné et médaillé .
(PL I 712)

This is not a description of Rousseau's actual procedure as a painter, which we know was painstaking and laborious, with careful attention to copying detail. It is a description of how Jarry would have liked Rousseau to paint: that is without thinking, and in fact spouting paint freely on to the canvas. This painting machine of Jarry's fantasy is the opposite of Rousseau's pantograph. Here is an extract from his description of its random action which, top-like,

anticipates the sexual dance of Mnester in Messaline and which proceeds to paint the thirteen fantastic pictures described in 'Clinamen.'

Comme une toupie, se heurtant aux piliers, elle s'inclina et déclina en directions indéfiniment variées, soufflant à son gré sur la toile des murailles la succession des couleurs fondamentales étagées selon les tubes de son ventre, comme dans un bar un *pousse-l'amour*, les plus claires, plus proches de l'issue. (PL I 714)

Equally impoverished, Jarry and Rousseau became very close. Rousseau's son died in January 1897. When Jarry was evicted from 78 boulevard de Port-Royal, he moved in with Rousseau for the period August to November 1897, just after La Bohémienne endormie had been returned to him after exhibition. It would be justifiable to ask whether the *pousse l'amour* (Rainbow Cocktail) and its graded colours perhaps refers to the multi-coloured stripes of her dress, squeezed straight from the tube. Might Jarry have had a hand in the original inspiration of this strange horizontal dream composition with its accoutrements of *guitare*, *bâton* and the oddly transparent water jar (*jarre*)?⁵⁸ It is the only vertical element in the picture and placed in the signature position above Rousseau's own. In this discussion of Jarry's quiet attack on academic art and theory and his campaign in favour of the free working of the imagination, we should entertain the possibility that he might have taken the chance to influence the compositions of an artist so close to him, who had not been subjected to formal training and whose pictures were in any case being sold in bric-a-brac shops as canvases for overpainting. Speaking in 1896 about the abstract effects which he found best suited to theatre decor, Jarry said that he favoured the technique of an untutored artist:

Le décor par celui qui ne sait pas peindre approche plus du décor abstrait, n'en donnant que la substance. (PL I 406)

Rousseau's backgrounds to paintings such as La Bohémienne endormie are certainly stripped of clutter.

⁵⁸ Vallier speculates that Rousseau's letter offering this picture to the mayor of Laval for an extraordinarily high price was instigated by his co-Lavallois, Jarry.

There is strong reason to stress the give and take between the two men at both a practical and artistic level.⁵⁹ Rousseau was an avenue into popular culture for Jarry. He entertained the local shopkeepers with his fiddle and had a repertoire of songs and ballads which fed Jarry's interests. What is important here is first Jarry's practical encouragement towards Rousseau and later, much more than his reviews, the value of his literary tribute in giving him charge of the futuristic Painting Machine, emphasizing his confidence in him as a prophet of future art. Contrary to much critical opinion, I would side with Dora Vallier in arguing that Jarry's support, together with that of Gourmont and Vallotton was sincere⁶⁰ and that his promotion of Rousseau was a part of his campaign against the art establishment and against realism in art. Let us now pass to an example of a Jarryesque *compte-rendu* of 1896 which proposes the active exercise of fantasy on the part of the beholder, where the artist's conscious purpose and the title of the picture must be disregarded and which probably constitutes his most radical aesthetic statement.

4.8 'Considérations pour servir à l'intelligence de la précédente image,' viewed as *paranoïa-critique*

We know that the first number of Perhinderion was a financial catastrophe for Jarry and used up most, if not all of his recent inheritance. The typesetting difficulties imposed by the wayward spelling of Sebastian Münster's text and the unfamiliar characters of the font meant that Jarry had to agree to setting the sequel in a conventional typeface. Not only this, but his declared aim of publishing Dürer's Great Passion "plate by plate," uncommented, thus executing the task that had been Émile Bernard's ambition, was never accomplished, despite the fact that Bernard was encouraging Jarry's efforts from Cairo and using Perhinderion as a

⁵⁹ The second half of Jarry's poem, '*Une forme nue...*' and his portrayal in it of Helen of Troy as a cruel personification of War contains a distinct reflection of La Guerre in these lines:

De morts la plaine est couvert
Pour faire à mes pieds un plus doux tapis,
Un tapis d'amour qui palpète et bouge;

(PL II 265)

⁶⁰ Vallotton's anonymous review of Tigre surprenant une proie, in Gazette de Lausanne, 1891 is cited by Certigny, op. cit. p. 444.

publicity medium for the sale of his earlier woodcuts.⁶¹ Indeed, Jarry's mischievous choice of "La Vierge aux lapins," symbolizing fertility, for L'Ymagier and The Martyrdom of St. Catherine, (Fig. 43) for Perhinderion leads one to wonder how personally committed he was to the Dürer Passion project. This section will demonstrate that Jarry's and Paul Valéry's thinking on aesthetics and art were following similar lines, partly on account of their common interest in the imaginative theories of two British scientists, Faraday and Kelvin. Although not an *auteur pair*, Valéry was one of the dedicatees of Faustroll and will figure prominently in the final chapter.

In the composition of The Martyrdom of St. Catherine, Dürer had followed his usual procedure of transposing his subject to a contemporary German context. He shows a bejewelled but demure, middle class woman kneeling in front of a flaming, spiked wheel. The reader-beholder is given the choice of seeing only what is in front of him and of being relegated to Jarry's day-sighted *foule* category, or of following him beyond the surface subject of the picture. The sadistic overtones of the picture are overt. The combination of the towering male executioner, his sword ready to plunge, in conjunction with the submissive woman kneeling by the spiked wheel, carries an erotic and misogynistic message, perhaps not intended by Dürer but certainly recognized by Jarry and repeated by him in the novels Messaline and La Dragonne.

We know from the truculent remarks at the end of his article, 'Filiger' that to give a *compte rendu* of a work of art was against his principles. By omitting to give a definite title to the picture he is describing, Jarry sidesteps this issue. The work of art, that he describes, is not of the artist's making but one that he himself has discerned. Jarry's interpretation is utterly at odds with normal nineteenth-century forms of art commentary, but were symptomatic of changing attitudes about perception in general. Henri Bergson's theories had helped to cause an atmosphere of change and disturbance and a turning away from the actual and the

⁶¹ Perhinderion carries an advertisement for these, giving Madame Bernard's address.

superficially visible towards the abstract.

Leonardo da Vinci's theories were being reevaluated, especially in connection with Bergson's arguments on *Espace* and *Durée*. The young Paul Valéry had already made some challenging comments about the reception of works of art, as here in one of the marginal summaries to his 1894 study on the methods of Leonardo:

*Une oeuvre d'art devrait toujours nous apprendre que nous n'avions pas vu ce que nous voyons.*⁶²

Here is a summary of Leonardo's theory of pictures beneath the surface as expressed in his Treatise on Painting, and which had caught Valéry's imagination:

Si tu regardes des murs souillés de taches ou faits de pierres de toutes espèces pour imaginer quelque scène, tu peux y voir l'analogie de paysages au décor de montagnes de rivières, de rochers, d'arbres de plaines, de larges vallées et de collines disposées de façon variée. Tu pourras y voir aussi des batailles et des figures au mouvement rapide, d'étranges visages et costumes, et une infinité de choses que tu pourras ramener à une forme nette et complète.⁶³

Valéry's passionate support of the possible and potential derives from Leonardo's observations. Here is a small fragment of his declamation:

Celui qui n'a pas regardé dans la blancheur de son papier une image troublée par le possible, et par le regret de tous les signes qui ne seront pas choisis, ni vu dans l'air limpide une bâtisse qui n'y est pas (...) celui-là ne connaît pas, quel que soit d'ailleurs son savoir, la richesse et la ressource et l'étendue spirituelle qu'illumine le fait conscient de *construire*.

Valéry's insistence on *le possible* and *l'arbitraire* in his Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci very much chimes in with Jarry's fancy for Clinamen, the swerving atom and his theory of Ixion's wheel, which "wobbles" unpredictably into other universes. His study also contains observations on phenomena that he describes as "ces informes haillons d'espace qui

⁶² Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, Pléiade, vol. I, p. 1165

⁶³ A. Chastel, Léonardo da Vinci par lui-même, Paris, 1952, p. 100, ms. 2038 BN dated 1492.

séparent des objets connus, et traînent au hasard des intervalles.” We shall be looking at his argument on so-called *lignes de force* in Chapter 5.

Jarry’s ‘Considérations pour servir à l’intelligence de la précédente image’ can be analysed either in the context of Leonardo’s remarks, as publicised by Valéry or transposed to a modern context. Placed within the framework of Salvador Dalí’s so-called *paranoiac-critical* method thirty years later, it becomes entirely valid as an **imaginative** interpretation.⁶⁴ This ties in with our argument of the previous section with regard to the work of Rousseau and also Jarry’s choice of the GRAN SIMULACRO, showing two unrelated pictures superimposed.

As we have pointed out, the first oddity to attract attention in Jarry’s commentary is its vague and pompous title, ‘Considérations pour servir à l’intelligence de la précédente image.’ Not only is the picture’s title glossed over, but the commentary follows, rather than precedes the plate.⁶⁵ Is this a deliberate error, distancing the writer from his work, following Monroe Beardsley’s definition of logical absurdity and contraverting discourse? This could also be a double bluff by Jarry who, regarding this ‘alternative’ interpretation as perfectly valid within a pataphysical context, nevertheless refuses the reader the satisfaction of knowing whether he is serious or not. Jarry’s intention was, nevertheless, perceived by André Breton to be describing a fantastic visual alternative to the scene which is actually happening and thus perfectly in tune with Surrealist philosophy. His hypothesis that Jarry’s account was based on Leonardo da Vinci’s observations, (which were by no means alien to Dürer’s own), supports the theory that it is an important and valid forerunner of Dalí-like *paranoia-critique*. He does not mention Valéry’s possible influence in the affair. Here is Breton’s version of Leonardo’s words in an article on automatic writing:

Léonardo de Vinci recommandait à ses élèves en quête d’un sujet original et qui leur convînt, de regarder longtemps un vieux mur décrépi: “vous ne tarderez pas, leur disait-il, à remarquer peu à peu des formes, des scènes qui se préciseront, de plus en plus (...) Dès lors vous n’aurez plus qu’à copier ce que vous voyez, et à

⁶⁵ The Pléiade edition “corrects” this positioning.

compléter à besoin.⁶⁶

Now let us see how Jarry deals with Dürer's engraving. He dispenses with the ostensible subject of the picture in a single perfunctory sentence, using present participles to impose a static flattening on the events which have led up to it, as follows:

Les roues du supplice s'étant brisées avec explosion et mort des bourreaux, et le ciel ayant foudroyé et tonné des pierres, cependant que le feu terrestre s'écartait de Sainte Catherine elle eut le col tranché par le fer et ainsi finit. (PL I 998)

He then continues with the strange statement:

Il y a autre chose dans cette image, ou mieux **cela plus complètement écrit selon l'éternité par les tailles du bois.**

Jarry is thus announcing that he is going to describe a picture within a picture - not the one intended by Dürer, but **a more eternal one** that he (Jarry) discerns emerging from the unconscious strokes of the artist's burin in the wood. The novelty of this procedure in 1896 within a journal devoted to mediaeval or mediaevalesque images is extraordinary.

In her discussion of Salvador Dalí's *paranoiac-critical* method, Dawn Ades defines it as "the ability of the artist to perceive different images within a single configuration."⁶⁷ Partly quoting Dalí's own words, she subsequently describes this ability as "spontaneous irrational knowledge [which] enables the subject to pass from the 'world of delirium' on to the 'plane of reality' through the discovery of new and objective significance in the irrational."

Ades's description exactly applies to the spontaneous mental process that Jarry championed and which the Surrealist group later sought to emulate under the name of

⁶⁶ André Breton, 'Le Message automatique,' *Minotaure*, no. 3-4, 12 déc. 1933, pp. 55-65.

⁶⁷ The definition given by Dalí himself is as follows:

A spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the interpretive-critical association of delirious phenomena.

Dawn Ades, *Dalí*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1982 & 1995, p. 119 and p. 126.

“automatism.” As demonstrated in Chapter 1, his mind constantly seeks different potential identities within the same basic outline. The poem ‘Au repaire des géants’ encapsulates this method: bear’s mane=sawblade=crenellated walls=dancing flame. Indeed L’Amour absolu, which displays the associative image cascade of star=hand=sea urchin=horse chestnut=lashed eye, evokes several Surrealist authors.⁶⁸ His objective in writing Les Jours et les Nuits and L’Amour absolu was, moreover, to record the visions and dialogues of dream, hallucination and delirium and to put them on an equal footing with the observations and pronouncements made in a state of sober and rational wakefulness.

We have seen Jarry’s habit of turning a figure through ninety degrees to obtain an entirely different visual impression (“couché... debout...”). This is precisely Dalí’s method in obtaining his Paranoiac Face, derived by tilting a photograph of some natives sitting outside their semi-circular hut. (Fig. 44) Jarry leads the reader to the outlines of a much larger image of the “Sainte Décapitée,” whose outline he traces along lines which ostensibly describe other people and objects in the picture.⁶⁹ Her head can then be interpreted as “cut off” by the figure of the fleeing man, as Jarry here says:

Son cou tranché expire selon l’arête dure des radius de l’homme fuyant, dans le prolongement du seul des traits du nuage qui tonne qui soit non plus estoc mais glaive.

The configuration of the head and the breasts of a sleeping woman is a typical one common to many foothills descending from a steeper range. “The Sleeping Woman” figures as a frequent local feature all over the world. In both L’Amour absolu and Le Surmâle Jarry contrasts the image of woman unconscious, subject of his curiosity and even tenderness, with the woman

⁶⁸ We can be categorize these under *toothed shapes* and *circular shapes* - important ingredients in the technique of “visual” poetry adopted by Breton. It is noticeable that these correspond to the shape of the jynx or love charm, as given by A.S. Gow (Fig. 7)

See Roger Cardinal, ‘BRETON, ‘Au beau demi-jour de 1934,’ in Peter H. Nurse ed. , The Art of Criticism. Essays in French Literary Analysis, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1969 p. 262 & p. 257 (figure).

⁶⁹ See André Breton, ‘Alfred Jarry, initiateur et éclairer: son rôle dans les arts plastiques,’ Arts, oct. 1951, repr. in La Clé des champs, OC 308-21. But are Jarry’s and Breton’s perceptions of the saint’s head the same? Jarry’s indication of a large head configured by the contours of the far hill does not correspond to Breton’s reconstruction. By imposing his own interpretation, Breton actually cuts across what Jarry was trying to do in terms of nudging the beholder towards free reverie and a personal interpretation.

awake, regarded as dangerous adversary. For this reason we would suggest that his eye rested on the far hills of Dürer's engraving when he speaks of a **large** decapitated head.

We can though relate Dalí's obsessive image of the praying mantis, which formed the basis of his *paranoiac-critical* theory, to Jarry's obsessive curiosity about the dead or sleeping woman, in strict contrast to woman awake and regarded as threatening. Grotesque caricatures, his aggressive prostitute-heroines, Messaline and Jeanne de Sabrenas, play out their roles overtly and die by the sword at the hands of armoured military figures exerting an overtly symbolic male authority, whereas in no fewer than three novels, Jarry portrays woman inert with the careful attention of an archaeologist who has stumbled on a new site.

The following excerpt, from the chapter, titled 'La Découverte de la Femme' is Jarry's description of André Marcueil's examination of Ellen Elson from Le Surmâle, believing her to be dead after being subjected to his record-breaking sexual efforts:

Il ne l'aurait jamais vue, si elle n'eût pas été morte. (...) Marcueil découvrit en soulevant les paupières d'un index délicat, qu'il n'avait jamais vu la couleur des yeux de sa maîtresse. (...)

Les dents étaient des minutieux joujoux bien en ordre (...)

Les oreilles, à n'en pas douter, avaient été "ourlées" par quelque dentellière.

Les bouts des seins étaient de curieuses choses roses qui se ressemblaient mutuellement, et à rien autre.

Le sexe avait l'air d'un petit animal éminemment stupide, stupide comme un coquillage - vraiment, il en avait bien l'air - mais non moins rose.

Le Surmâle s'aperçut qu'il était en train de découvrir la Femme, exploration dont il n'avait encore pas eu le loisir. (PL II 260-1)

A reverse scenario to that of the Sleeping Beauty, this passage represents one of three such "reveries" written between 1897 and 1907, where an unconscious woman is subjected to male scrutiny and evinces Jarry's awareness of his inhibitions about woman awake which actually

counterpoints a sexual curiosity about woman that he usually masks.

Jarry would later repeat his visual *rapprochement* of a woman's head with the contours of a hill as one of several instances in *Messaline* where body and landscape interreflect. In this passage describing the dressing of Messalina's hair, her coiffure is represented as a miniature of the anamorphic, tree-clad hillside reflected in her mirror, just as the hill of Dürer's engraving forms St. Catherine's head in this writer's interpretation of Jarry's vision:

Et voici que l'ornatrice lui a mis tous ses peignes dans le chignon, et qu'ainsi deux têtes se comparent, toutes pareilles et de même taille, côte à côte dans le miroir: la colline frisée de platanes et de lierre, à grand renfort de corail, d'écaille et d'or émaillé, et la toison aux reflets de cimes et d'abîmes de Valérie Messaline, touffue par les esplanades, ou qui s'épand de vasques en vasques de porphyre rouge, sur des colonnades polychromes. (PL II 85-6)

At the moment that Messaline's maid places a diamond *aigrette* as the finishing touch to the empress's coiffure, the fountain on the highest terrace bursts into action. The city and the empress are one.

Applying the same principles to Dürer's picture, Jarry goes on to describe a large 'ghost' executioner, constructed according to the Beuron method, from the geometrical lines of the picture:⁷⁰

La pluie du ciel choit selon les deux côtés d'un triangle dont ces tailles horizontales sont la base: la base emplie s'incurve (forme pluviomètre) et crée le bras droit du bourreau, levant manteau et épée du bras droit.

Apart from the deliberate contrast of the 'static' first paragraph, the whole piece is designed as a dynamic narrative in the Homeric style. Pinning the picture to the double wheel of torture as its fulcrum point, whose motion he compares to that of a fan opening, Jarry sets it turning in imitation of the wheel itself:

⁷⁰ We must here anticipate Ubu's important declaration: "Je ne fais plus de peinture; (...) Je fais de la géométrie." (PL I 591)

Et il y a une manivelle pour mouvoir la roue, et cette roue est double et les deux moitiés tournent en sens inverse, comme aussi s'ouvre l'éventail. Les flammes coulent selon cette rotation comme l'eau d'un moulin et les tailles du sol de la colline se précipitent vers elles, qui les continuent, et les arbres au-dessus sont d'autres tailles horizontales empilées qui descendent de la réserve de droite, sans un nuage, et alimentent la giration de la roue.

We have come a long way from L'Homme à la Hache, the statue become man or god, who leaps into the boat he has carved out of a log, yet the procedure is similar and the figure of an upright man wielding a sharp weapon, ("celui qui porte l'arme tranchante"), has the same connotations. This extremely mobile, slipping image of his own, that Jarry's vision creates, of Dürer's horizontal gouges in the wood surface representing a pile of logs, which roll of their own accord towards the wheel in order to fuel its movement, is designed to force the reader's imagination out of idle receptivity. The reader himself is supposed to 'turn' the handle of the 'Catherine Wheel' as fast as he can, to set off sparks in his imagination and to take part in the whirling spiral of creative vertigo.

Jarry is quite clear about the importance of an active contribution from reader, beholder or spectator when he sets out his theories on the theatre, evolved the same year, and in which he encourages the spectator to take part in a parallel act of creativity :

S'il y a dans tout l'univers cinq cents personnes qui soient un peu Shakespeare et Léonard par rapport à l'infinie médiocrité, n'est-il pas juste d'accorder à ces cinq cents bons esprits (...) le plaisir actif de créer aussi un peu et à mesure et de prévoir?
(PL I 406)

Ubu roi's 'eternal' decor was designed with the same intent. The snowy plains beneath a blue sky, pendulums which turn into doors, a gallows with two hanging men, a green palm tree with a boa-constrictor at the foot of the bed, an elephant with a scarlet sun nimbus - this amazing visual assortment, partially described by Jarry on the occasion of the première, allows the spectator his own choice of decor and triggers his fantasy.⁷¹

⁷¹ P. Lie, 'Comment Jarry et Lugné-Poë glorifient Ubu à L'Oeuvre,' Cahiers du collège de Pataphysique, nos. 3-4, p. 48.

Before we leave this question of 'hidden' configurations, raised by Jarry's extraordinary and provocative 'Considérations pour servir à l'intelligence de la précédente image,' in which he does not at all acknowledge Leonardo's theories, we should speculate whether Dürer himself may have been sympathetic to the idea of dual configurations. Dürer's watercolour held by the the Louvre, titled View of the Val d'Arco of 1495, (Fig. . .) shows the profile of an old man formed by the natural rock fissures. The fact that this curiosity had caught the great artist's attention perhaps led Jarry to follow a private hunch and to infer that Dürer might have included less distinct anthropomorphic outlines in the wild mountainscapes which form the backgrounds to many of his engravings. For Jarry, artistic genius implied the impossibility of being understood by one's own era and the necessity of writing secret messages into one's work that would be sought and understood by future generations.

A less serious solution is also possible. In a recent analysis of Rimbaud's "now-you-see-it-now-you-don't" literary technique, Roger Little compares it to the puzzle pictures or *devinettes* published by Épinail.⁷² It runs true to the schoolboy disrespect that Jarry never shed to attempt a transposition of a popular form of 'low' art on to a work of 'high' art. The whirling motion that Jarry further imposes on the picture is one to which we have referred in relation to the creative spiral of Ubu's *gidouille* in his own woodcut, but which can equally be related to the stroboscopic effects, also mentioned by Little and to Jarry's *phare tournant* metaphor, that he uses as a potent allegory for the alternating effects of light and darkness in L'Amour absolu and which had been inspired by the actual beacon in the *Musée de la Marine* at the Louvre. (PL I 920)

In comparing the picture's structure to that of a fan at the start of his commentary, Jarry is invoking a quite different now-you-see-it-now-you-don't effect. This everyday adjunct to feminine apparel, on which the picture constantly appeared and disappeared and which half hid

⁷² See Roger Little, 'Rimbaud: the shaping of a vision,' in Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge, Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 261 and figs. 27 iii & iv.

the face, was intimately integrated into the feminine gestural patterns of his period and perhaps a focus of his fascination. Jarry certainly shared with Mallarmé a fascination with the mysterious quality of the *pli* or *ptyx*, the concealing fold, representing presence in absence and the very symbol of self-cancellation.⁷³ In his poem 'Autre éventail' Mallarmé makes a rare analogy between the visual uncertainty, represented by the fan's movement and structure in terms of **trembling** space, and uncontrolled vertigo, which exactly matches Jarry's arguments:

Vertige! voici que frissonne
L'espace comme un grand baiser
Qui, fou de naître pour personne,
Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser

Sens-tu le paradis farouche
Ainsi qu'un rire enseveli
Se couler du coin de ta bouche
Au fond de l'unanime pli!⁷⁴

These verses which present the idea of the fan as a trembling and treacherous visual barrier between reality and a lurking *paradis farouche*, bubbling with primal laughter, is fascinatingly close to Jarry's perceptions of visual reality itself as a huge, potentially self-collapsing fan. Jarry expresses the concept of a fold or crack in reality in *Messaline* when the hill that she is descending suddenly plunges into an unexpected crevasse: "La colline s'échancrait, sans prévenir le pas, d'une faille immense." (PL II 102) This collapse of the landscape forms the prelude to hallucination. Lucullus' hippodrome is similarly a fold or crack in reality.

Apart from Catherine's head, some of the forms that Jarry describes in the underlying picture that he perceives in 'The Martyrdom of St. Catherine' conform to precise geometrical figures and to the strict geometrical methodology laid down in Dürer's notebooks. The concept of the 'secret geometry' of the universe was much in the air in the 1880s and 1890s. The two Nabi theoreticians, Paul Sérusier, 'celui qui mesure' and Maurice Denis, ['celui qui]

⁷³ In 'La Vérité bouffe' Jarry refers to the theory of "espace feuilleté" developed in 1857 by the German mathematician B. Riemann. (PL II 453) The concept of superimposed surfaces or realities is the same

⁷⁴ Mallarmé, OC 58.

mystique', were propagating the ideas of Father Didier Lenz, under whom they had studied at Beuron Abbey in Hohenzollern. Lenz taught the 'holy measurements' of the Egyptians and Greeks with compass in hand. His ideas were incorporated by Filiger in his meticulous Chromatic Notations, which date from 1907, (after Jarry's death), and whose symmetrical exactitude made an antithetical statement to the broken, folded and tilted forms of the Cubists.

As to the instrument of St. Catherine's martyrdom, to which the saint herself has been assimilated, the Catherine Wheel is schematically represented not as much by the spiral as by the ancient symbol of the fylfot or footed cross, (better known in post-1940s vocabulary as the swastika),⁷⁵ which stamps the skin of the very oldest of Greek figurines, perhaps representing points of energy. There is reason to believe that Jarry linked the fylfot to the schematic representation of somersaulting acrobats. These are Homer's *κυβιστητηρε* (kubistitire) the word that Jarry 'stole' and deformed into his own word, the ambiguous *cubiste* already mentioned in Chapter 1 and to which we shall return in Chapter 6. In changing his mind by choosing to publish this engraving and its extraordinary 'alternative' commentary, rather than to start out on his declared project of publishing the Grand Passion, Jarry makes an important statement about his artistic beliefs. The image of the Catherine Wheel has been described by Roger Cardinal in terms of "the giddy instants of poetic vision," when speaking of André Breton's later use of this motif⁷⁶ and it is certainly interesting that Breton fastened on Jarry's usage. We would argue that in choosing the motif of the Catherine Wheel Jarry is not so much making a statement about the vertiginous nature of artistic and poetic inspiration, but about the open, unprejudiced state of mind which is needed on the part of the beholder or reader in order to 'receive' the artist's underlying 'eternal' message.⁷⁷ As we shall see in the final chapter, he is also constantly indicating the quicksand

⁷⁵ We have already seen that Jarry probably modelled his Véritable portrait de M. Ubu on an illustration from Waring, op. cit.

⁷⁶ Cardinal op. cit. p. 262.

⁷⁷ That Breton certainly understood Jarry's intention is clear from his account of Nadja's two approaches to reading Jarry's poem, *Parmi les bruyères, pénit des menhirs*: the first swift, to scoop up the superficial images, and the second more measured.

nature of reality itself, which is only as 'real' as human perceptions are true. In his article, 'Ce que c'est que les ténèbres' he speculates on the existence of an *autre monde*, which is not elsewhere, but here, and to which our senses are not adapted. (PL II 434) Moreover in 'Pataphysique' he argues that the weight of both the future and the past renders true perception impossible. Here Jarry refers to the slippage between perception and hallucination, which, he maintains, will always be provoked by foresight and by memory:

Il ne voyait pas pourquoi ne pas dire: l'hallucination est une perception fausse, ou plus exactement: *faible*, ou tout à fait mieux: *prévue* (*souvenue* quelquefois, ce qui est la même chose). (PL I 794)

In our final chapter we shall be indicating similar slippage between hallucination and perception - points of subsidence or *enfouissement* in the text where it gives way into reverie or dream. The spiralling eddy or whirl visually symbolize the weak points where reality suddenly becomes less solid. Unlike Valéry's Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci, Jarry's 'Commentaire pour servir à l'intelligence de la précédente image' is not structured or carefully argued with reference to an accepted artistic authority but nevertheless constitutes a serious statement of belief and represents an attempt to teach the reader how to look at a picture. He upholds the superior validity and **eternal** quality of underlying forms, discerned through reverie, demonstrating once again his belief in the unconscious part of the mind as the writer's and reader's most valid and fertile resource.

4.9 The islands of Faustroll and the criterion of friendship.

Les Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll, Pataphysicien condenses into a literary elixir the works which inspired Jarry and to which he owed his personal imaginative world. It contains his most intelligent speculative ideas - some extraordinarily prophetic. It is written light-heartedly with a swift rhythm. Here there is no need for the reader to surround himself with reference books unless he wishes. The text can be enjoyed at surface level as a series of

sparkling and vivid, if absurd impressions, fulfilling Jarry's stated aim of 'Linteau' and which acts as Jarry's earliest instruction to his readership:

Qu'on pèse donc les mots polyèdres d'idées, avec des scrupules comme des diamants à la balance de ses oreilles, sans demander pourquoi telle et telle chose, car il n'y a que regarder, et c'est écrit dessus. (PL I 173)

In 'Pataphysique,' the chapter of Les Jours et les Nuits, cited above, Jarry describes the world as an immense boat with Sengle (himself) at the tiller. The literary device of using a boat is one which has been analysed by both Suzanne Bernard and Roland Barthes. Whereas Barthes calls this device "the travelling eye",⁷⁸ Jarry's use of the terms *l'arche* or *l'as* indicate that he prefers to think of his boat as a "travelling arse." The semantic links to the German word *Arsch* and to the English word *arse* are all too obvious. Faustroll's boat is also sieve - a Nonsense boat of whimsical adventure like that of the Jumbles. Jarry nevertheless endows it with solid credentials of seaworthiness provided by the English scientist, C. V. Boys. The literary convention of visiting "islands" is taken from Rabelais' Book V and the spirit, if not the purpose of the forthcoming voyage, is underlined with this quote from Gargantua XVI:

S'enqu Coastant quelz gens sçavans estoient pour lors en la ville, et quel vin on y beuvoit. (PL I 674)

Faithful to the configuration of Ubu/Jarry as oinoche or wine jug and to the memory of Anna Peranna, the motifs of drinking and hospitality, (the sacred Greek custom of welcoming the stranger), perhaps provide the most important scale of values within this joyful dream voyage, whose interpretation still awaits a critical analysis worthy of its inspiration and complexity. It is the work into which Jarry put his best-loved texts and pictures, his energy and his humour. We said earlier that friendship was an absolute value in his creed. Most of the Faustroll "islands" are dedicated to friends, and the majority of his literary and art criticism of later years

⁷⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Nautilus et Bateau ivre' in Mythologies, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1957, pp. 80-82.

is devoted to validating the work of talented friends, (Bonnard for example.)⁷⁹ These are the pieces which have the truest ring. From his editorship of *L'Ymagier* onwards Jarry saw his literary and artistic role as a practical and 'phynancial' one to help the marginal and unrecognized artist and never to betray an artistic friendship. His choice of friends was nevertheless carefully judged.

No commentary of Jarry's writings on artists would be complete without referring to the three "islands" visited by Faustroll and Bosse-de-nage, whose "kings" are Aubrey Beardsley, Emile Bernard and Paul Gauguin (in strict alphabetical order). The names of the islands are well-chosen. Beardsley is King of the Country of Lace. Enacting a Judgement of Solomon, Jarry dubs Bernard King of Pont-Aven's *Bois d'amour*, endorsing his claim as true originator of the synthetist style developed there and of which his *Bretonnes dans la prairie verte* of 1888 was the manifesto. Combining his own happy memories of Pont-Aven with the bright splashes of colour distinctive of Bernard's *Bretonneries* Jarry here produces a joyful visual cocktail:

Le ciel s'épanouit aussi, un soleil creva dedans comme dans une gorge le jaune d'oeuf d'un *prairie-oyster*, et l'azur fut bleu rouge; la mer tiédit jusqu'à la fumée, les costumes reteints des gens furent des taches plus éclatantes que des gemmes opaques.
(PL I 679)

The piece proceeds to describe people dressed in "sapphire velvet" and meadows of blue and yellow. No other piece of Jarry's is so replete with variegated colour, but it matches the gorgeous submarine landscape from 'L'Abdullah de la mer' which he selects from Mardrus's *Livre de milles nuits et une nuit* and clearly marks the progression in Jarry's tastes and literary style since the bleak internal landscape of 'Le Sablier.'

Gauguin is meanwhile to be found on the Fragrant Isle, (from *noa-noa* = fragrant) and transformed into the superhuman regal native of Jarry's poem, *L'Homme à la Hache*:

⁷⁹ Jean Laude registers the two categories of groups of artists and writers the one formed through personal friendship and the other "those who rally round a specific program or ideology." As a marginal writer himself, Jarry sought out and defended other marginals and was utterly unsuited to any ideology-based grouping. Jean Laude, 'On the analysis of poems and paintings,' *New Literary History*, vol. 3, Spring, 1972, pp. 471-86.

Le roi de l'île était nu dans une barque, les hanches ceintes de son diadème blanc et bleu. Il était drapé en outre de ciel et de verdure comme la course en char d'un César, et roux comme sur un piédestal.

Here Jarry finally makes the explicit correlation between the artist and his woodcutter subject; between Gauguin's woodcuts and the boat hollowed out of the felled tree:

Il élague avec une hache des images de bois vivant, les pousses qui défigurent la ressemblance des Dieux. (PL I 683)

Jarry makes no distinction between the literary, the visual and the musical islands - they are kingdoms of individual imagination. (Claude Terasse has an island of wonderful plant-instruments.) Each island is an imaginative synthesis of its "king's" works. Once again, it is notable how few artists figure amongst the twenty four dedicatees, indicating Jarry's strong bias towards reading as a more fertile imaginative activity than looking at pictures. ("La toile peinte réalise un aspect dédoublable pour très peu d'esprits.") Pierre Bonnard is the fourth artist but has no "island" of his own. Aubrey Beardsley is the only artist whom Jarry allows passage to his literary universe subsequent to his renunciation of art criticism in 1894. The privilege is particularly noticeable when set against his complete critical disregard, that we mentioned earlier, of the brilliant Edvard Munch. A brief and otherwise undocumented personal friendship would seem to lie behind this breach of principle.

Jarry instantly identified with Beardsley as a kindred spirit in the skill of subversion through art.⁸⁰ Moreover his own stark, uncluttered style of woodcut aspires to Beardsley's stylistic aims. His masterly use of white space follows a trend toward abstraction to be seen in the woodcuts of van de Velde, Maurice Denis and Vallotton but simplifies still further. Jarry's tendency to work within a very small format requires particular dexterity in the handling of the woodblock and imposed extra discipline on his spare designs.

⁸⁰See John Stokes, 'Beardsley/Jarry: The Art of Deformation,' in Oscar Wilde: myths, miracles and imitations, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 110-125.

Jarry was introduced to Beardsley by Henry Davray the *Mercure* translator in April 1897 as one of the few relatively fluent English speakers in that circle. Jarry had after all translated Coleridge and R. L. Stevenson. Their nearness in age, their satirical bent and their interest in esoteric pornography provided a strong common bond. From the macabre world of Poe to the exotic debauchery of Latin and Greek literature their tastes ran parallel. Although the taboos infringed by Jarry's *Ubu roi* were of a different nature to those attacked by Beardsley's *Lysistrata* series and *Satires* of Juvenal, Jarry and Beardsley recognized each other as fellow satirists and in 1897 they were the current *enfants terribles* of their respective countries.

Like Rousseau, Beardsley paid Jarry the compliment of drawing his portrait, a portrait reputed to have been burnt. Jarry returned the compliment with a literary portrait, 'Du pays de Dentelles.' This careful piece evokes the quality of transparency that we talked of earlier. Jarry's insistence on the very pure light refers to the innovatory Beardsleyan technique of leaving large areas of blank white space, set against unrelieved black. He also evokes Beardsley's extremely delicate line with a favourite childhood image, the *fil de la Vierge*, the dew-hung strands of gossamer characteristic of the Breton meadows, described in *Les Jours et les Nuits*, itself a masterly study in juxtaposed darkness and light; in dream and reality - the literary equivalent of the Beardsleyan world. Here is Jarry's evocation of Beardsley's treatment of light:

Le roi des Dentelles l'étirait comme un cordier persuade sa ligne rétrograde, et les fils tremblaient un peu dans l'obscurité de l'air, comme ceux de la Vierge. Ils ourdirent des forêts, comme celles dont, sur les vitres, le givre compte les feuilles. (PL I 677-8)

Thus in two sentences he captures the typical trembling Beardsleyan line and the contrast of frost on glass against black forest. The piece alludes to various pictures, but the above description is enough to summarize the artist's technique. In Chapter 1 we coined the term "grotesque of suffocation" referring to Beardsley's use of scales or roses as a motif in his graphic technique of "clustering", where the macabre value of the reptilian scale is transferred

to the rose-petal. In Chapter 1 we argued that Jarry may have used Beardsley as a visual source both for his proto-surreal description of the scaly water surface of the Styx in 'Le Récit de Balkis' and 'Le Récit de Roboam,' and for his novel reversal of the rose's symbolic value in Le Surmâle from emblem of life and love to emblem of decay and the macabre. We would further suggest the strong possibility that Jarry drew from Beardsley's boudoir drawings, especially the illustrations to The Rape of the Lock, when writing his description of Messalina's coiffure and for his rather uncharacteristic detailed description of her dressing table, listing a collection of explicitly sexual knick-knacks and deities.

The wording of 'Du Pays de dentelles' would seem to relate to the scene of Mnester's dance in Messaline. Here is the mysterious sentence:

Et comme Pierrot chante au broullamini du pelotonnement de la lune, le paradoxe de jour mineur se levait d'Ali-Baba hurlant dans l'huile impitoyable et l'opacité de la jarre.
(PL I 678)

We shall see this phrase, "le pelotonnement de la lune," repeated in Messaline.

We know that Aubrey Beardsley used the initials A.B. in his drawing of the sultan in the Ali Baba series to make an allusion to himself.⁸¹ We also know that Jarry identified both with the pale lunar Pierrot of the *Commedia dell'arte* and with Mnester, his own creation. At the moment of this chapter's publication in May 1898, Beardsley was still alive and staying in Dieppe. The jar referred to here is almost certainly an allusion to Jarry himself, whilst the reference to opacity is possibly to Beardsley's inability to read and understand his work.⁸² This sentence is in any case a perfect example of Jarry's habit of inserting coded messages for his friends and underscores the character of Faustroll as a work of friendship rather than scholarship and an allusive personal memorial.

⁸¹ Brigid Brophy, Beardsley and his World, London, Thames & Hudson, 1976, p. 99.

⁸² Beardsley's letter to Mabel of 26 April, 1897 describes a lunch party at Laperouse as follows:
Rachilde and some long haired monsters of the Quartier were with us. They all presented me with their books which are quite unreadable.

Henry Maas, J. L. Duncan & W. G. Good, ed., The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley, London, Cassell, 1971.

4.10 Conclusion

Our proposal that Jarry subverted the traditional canons of art criticism in the cause of art holds good. He continued to oppose the establishment and to encourage the innovative, the provocative and the marginal, whether this was in the field of art or of art criticism which had become a somewhat stultified genre of its own. The question of verifying the “true” text against what Michel Arrivé calls *langage-mensonge*⁸³ still remains a tricky one. At first glance his *compte rendu* of St. Catherine’s Martyrdom appears to belong to this category, but, in the context of the theories of Leonardo da Vinci, and even more lately, of Victor Hugo, we can see that Jarry is putting forward a new and equally valid way of looking at a picture. In judging an arrangement of lines on a flat surface the beholder is entitled to whatever interpretation most pleases him. The painter or engraver does not have control over the beholder’s imagination. Let us remember Jarry’s chapter ‘Les héméralopes’ from *Les Jours et les Nuits*, republished by André Breton in *L’Anthologie de l’Humour noir* as one of his characteristic texts, in which he pleads for alternative ways of seeing things:

Puisse ce chapitre faire comprendre à la foule, la grande héméralope, qui ne sait voir que des lueurs connues, que d’autres peuvent la considérer comme une exception morbide, et calculer les ascensions droites et déclinaisons d’une nuit pour elle sans astre; qu’il lui fasse pardonner ce que dans ce livre elle trouvera sacrilège envers ses idoles. (PL I 788)

Earlier in the same novel Sengle/Jarry deplores the conditioned reaction of the would-be intellectual Lieutenant Vensuet (Vain Souhait), who is unable to offer an enthusiastic personal response to his blow by blow account of a *Commedia dell’arte* mime performance at the music hall. Vensuet is portrayed as a typical dry academic who is at a loss to respond to new experiences without reference to Latin quotations and the accepted canons of art:

Sengle, après un militaire demi-tour, accentuait les deux premiers pas de sa fuite, désolé qu’on sût, comme une vieille dame, de l’histoire de l’art et des citations latines et des idées générales. (PL I 760)

Jarry could not give a much clearer refutation of academically-based criticism.

⁸³ See Michel Arrivé, *Les Langages de Jarry. Essai de Sémiotique littéraire*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1972.

We have suggested that the value of friendship is sacrosanct to Jarry when selecting whom to write about - he also regards the values of children as the truest ones, that is, whatever makes an eight year-old laugh or cry. Turning to literature, his own selections are often biased towards the fantastic world of the child. He pounces on each volume of J. C. Mardrus's translation, *Le Livre des Mille nuits et une nuit*, comparing it to the opening of a great wine. Jarry claims that his response response is to yell "«Ya Allah» en nous trémoussant (...) et nous convulsant de plaisir." In the cases when he delivers a sophisticated and tortuous argument, it is unlikely to be authentic, however scholarly its credentials. There he is usually aiming at the pompous academic. In the context of both child humour and artistic truth we should, moreover, examine his concept of "la vérité bouffe:"

La vérité serait peut-être même toujours bouffe, si comme nous l'écrivions précédemment, sa découverte se reconnaît à ce qu'elle déclenche le rire.

"Comic truth" he regards as an "eternal" truth, as opposed to received truth or historical truth, handed down by tradition and custom:

Parmi les vérités de seconde ordre - entendons: les plus variables, et celle qu'on ne reconnaît point spontanément, mais d'après l'autorité et la tradition - parmi celles-là classons la vérité historique.

Celle-ci est temporaire; la vérité bouffe est éternelle. (PL II 453)

As we stated in the introduction, "eternal" is a highly charged word in Jarry's aesthetic vocabulary. It constitutes his personal guarantee to the reader that his words can be taken at face value. We have seen it used of the alternative picture that Jarry discerned in Dürer's engraving and of *Ubu roi*'s multiple decor.

As regards art and Jarry's attitude towards its value, he refuses the categories of "good" or "bad." He uses "beautiful" but insists on a personal judgement and rejects all received values.⁸⁴ In reviewing the performance of the actress and dancer, Liane de Pougy, he is

⁸⁴ "Maintenir une tradition même valable est atrophier la pensée qui se transforme dans la durée; et il est insensé de vouloir exprimer des sentiments nouveaux dans une forme "conservée." (PL I 414)

prepared to confirm the expertise of her miming and the lightness of her dancing but declines to comment on her beauty: “Sait-on si l’admiration des Vénus antiques est autre chose qu’une tradition?” (PL II 338) Beauty, according to Jarry, should be original and his concept of it needs to be seen in the light of his concept of a monster as “toute originale inépuisable beauté” (PL I 972) Jarry often places *le beau* in opposition to *le banal*.⁸⁵ His view looks forward to what he would later call “l’horriquement beau” of Marinetti (PL III 636). He uses the term “paroxysme de la beauté” in connection with a strange garden ornament of his own invention, the glass ball of Sidon, which mysteriously vanishes from the gardens of Lucullus in *Messaline* and which has an allegorical significance to which we shall return in the final chapter. For Jarry then, beauty lies in the sudden discovery of the unexpected and is inseparable from surprise. His aesthetic mean derives much more from Lautréamont’s habit of discerning beauty in the conjunction of unmatching elements, such as the notorious meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table, than from traditional concepts of harmonious or heavenly beauty. Jarry’s concept of beauty encompasses the cruel, the evil and the monstrous. As he says in his article on Filiger, “Maldoror incarne un Dieu beau aussi sous le cuir sonore carton du rhinocéros.” Genius was the only thing that mattered. His dictum from ‘Le Temps dans l’Art’, “Du moment que le peintre a du génie, c’est le peintre qui a raison”, is quite clear on this point.

Fantasy and the ability to deform or transform reality according to a personal vision were Jarry’s main criteria for a painter or writer. He never actually claims the genius for himself and, in ‘Linteau’ admits the possibility of minds more intelligent than his. We must reiterate once again that Jarry’s self-appointed task was to encourage the innovative, the provocative and the marginal. The next chapter will look at a different form of art to that of “lines on a flat surface” and a different form of truth, conveyed this time through the mask and the moving marionette.

⁸⁵ See his review of Georges Lacombe’s painted sculpture, *Isis*. (the emboldening is mine):

Le bois sculpté de LACOMBE serait **banal** malgré la crissante garance des deux fleuves coulés des mamelles, sans la chevelure ligneusement **belle**, suite des torsades de la forêt qui la diadème et l’enterre. (PL I 1017)

PART III THE MARIONETTE AND THE DANCER

CHAPTER 5 JARRY'S ROLE AS A 'LITERARY PUPPETEER'

5.1 The context

Combining precocious erudition with manual dexterity, Jarry is unusual in having achieved acclaim both as an innovative writer of fiction and as a skilful puppeteer. In an era of censorship, the marionette theatre provided him with a unique satirical medium and had a profound influence on his dramatic theories. The paradigmatic figure of the marionette is also evident in his literary texts where it has two main aspects. The first is as a potential receptacle for diabolical forces and conduit for man's primitive instincts. He makes a clear link in his texts between the living tree, with its particular profile, and the puppet which is carved from it. The diabolical marionette with its ability to suck the spirit from its animator and to act alone, uninhibited by the learnt codes of behaviour and morals imposed by society, is represented by Ubu's Palotins. We do not find any images of the marionette as a poor, dangling, powerless object in Jarry's texts. The second aspect of the marionette on which Jarry focuses is the mechanistic. His bleak portrayals of man-as-marionette express his denial of the possibility of absolute communion between human beings and declare the insoluble isolation of the self entombed within a repetitive mechanism. In the novels *Les Jours et les Nuits* and *Le Surmâle*, a mask aesthetic is at its most conspicuous, acting as illusory facilitator of the age-old human effort to achieve spiritual union through physical contact. The macabre satirical and erotic overtones of *Le Surmâle* bespeak a vision of a Futuristic performance with mechanical toys. Although Jarry deploys and pays minute attention to the language of gesture, it must be emphasized that his concept of the marionette as automaton does not rely on a predetermined gestural code. This will vary according to the essential character of the marionette (what he calls "l'essence première du masque") and, like Clinamen, the swerving atom, the marionette

can veer off course and behave entirely unpredictably.¹

Jarry's interest in satire, psychic transference and the philosophical dilemma of human relationships were equally stimulated by puppetry. We know from Henri Rousseau's letter quoted in the previous chapter, that his box of puppets ("boîte de célèbres acteurs") was amongst his most treasured possessions. Puppet mime was thus a hobby which he turned to his advantage at a time when the plastic expression of ideas was highly topical. Before Firmin Gémier took the part of Ubu for the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre première in 1896, Jarry had often performed Ubu roi as a private entertainment for his friends, first in a tiny room near the Boulevard Port Royal and, after his mother's death, in a larger flat on the Boulevard St. Germain. Most puppeteers become adept in one of the three main methods of manipulation: glove, rod or strings and express a strong preference for their chosen method. Two versions of the Père Ubu puppet have survived, one glove and one stringed. (Figs. 62 and 74) The original Théâtre des Phynances also ran a shadow version of Les Polonais, mainly because Jarry's schoolfriends, the Morin brothers objected to the difficulties of puppet manufacture. As in the husband and wife partnership of Paul and France Ranson, it is probable that Charlotte Jarry made the clothes for the puppets and Alfred the heads. Rachilde has vouched for the older of the two surviving Ubu puppets as by Jarry's hand. When Jarry's literary powers began to fail him, leaving him without income, his friends rallied, creating openings for him to exploit his fame and talents as a puppeteer both in Paris and in Brussels. At his conference in Brussels Jarry insisted on the importance of manufacturing one's own puppets to guarantee perfect control. His isolated benefit performances before élite, intellectual audiences were packed to capacity.

Jarry's practical involvement with puppets was not a residue of his childhood. He embarked on the Théâtre des Phynances at the age of fifteen with the Morin brothers and his sister Charlotte, by then twenty three. By bringing the scripts of dialogue and his handmade

¹ Jarry's predilection for the exceptional and the non-conformist is exemplified by the phenomenon of Clinamen, the swerving atom, title of the chapter that he dedicated to Paul Fort.

puppet troupe to Paris, he demonstrated a determined decision to continue his puppet performances and thus fixed the bearings of his ultimate artistic route. His talent as mimic and entertainer meant that his private performances, initially for his classmates at the *Lycée Henri IV* were soon in demand in the more erudite circles that he sought to enter. A natural satirist, Jarry enlarged his sphere of influence from being the classroom wit and baiter of school authority to the jester of the Parisian avant garde. Père Hébert, the Physics master who, of all the teachers at the Lycée de Rennes and for whatever reasons, left the deepest impression on the boys' minds, also took on mythical proportions during his transformation to the monster, Père Ubu, archetypal tyrant and despicable bourgeois.² As a puppet type he was recognizably cast in the mould of Kasperle, Polichinelle, Punch and Papa Guignol, as the receptacle of and medium for man's primitive and baser instincts, especially greed, cruelty and cowardice.

For all that puppetry was in vogue as an ancient craft and suited the 1890s quest for archaic sources of inspiration, it must be stressed that Jarry's original purpose and his delight in the medium was its suitability as a vehicle for satire. The utter unreality of the marionette theatre within a tiny protected space makes the taboo possible. In taking Ubu outside the tiny magical space of the puppet booth and placing this cruel, stupid, amoral force on the public stage, endowed with a human tongue and walking on the ground in a human body, however disguised, Jarry unwittingly provided a focus for the anxieties of the time and an impulse for destruction and change, a social role which Artaud later described as: "aimantant, attirant, faisant tomber sur ses épaules les colères errantes de l'époque pour la décharger de son mal-

² The traditional view of M. Hébert as stupid and the object of Jarry's deep hatred cannot pass unquestioned. His stupidity is unlikely in the light of his publications and the fact that he had attended *l'École Normale Supérieure*, whose entrance exam Jarry failed three times. Henri Béhar deduces from Charlotte Jarry's notes that the Jarrys and the Héberts were friends. He interprets Charlotte's account to mean that Hébert's daughter Alice may have been an active member of the *Théâtre des Phynances*, and that *Les Polonais* was performed in front of her parents. What is unclear is when the transition from live acting to puppetry took place. In my view both Alice Hébert and her father were rendered as puppets. Here is the critical paragraph:

A Rennes - le théâtre à Phynances commença dans un vieux paravent... La jeune Alice, blond d'or, fille aînée de M. Hébert, professeur de physique, était merveilleuse en soie bleue - l'ours en peluche et la sorcière aussi.

(PL III 700)

See Béhar, *Les Cultures de Jarry*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1988, p. 82.

être psychologique”.³ As we have said, W. B. Yeats, a chance member of the audience, instantly perceived that *Ubu roi* marked a critical cultural transition, here bidding a wistful farewell to his own artistic era:

I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity has displayed its growing power once more. I say, after S. Mallarmé, after Verlaine, after G. Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.⁴

Henceforward Jarry became the prisoner, even the puppet of his creation, called upon to be Ubu, to shoulder the burden of being the Jester of the Paris avant-garde and of casting the formless dread of the coming mechanistic century in a laughable form. Henri Béhar, whose chapter ‘La contre-culture’ rightly assigns Jarry a general posture of protest in society,⁵ refers to his mechanical voice and pale made up face as ‘a uniform.’ In the last ten years of his life Jarry’s status in artistic circles was that of the poverty-stricken troubadour. At the *Closerie des Lilas*, the Montparnasse café which was a meeting point for the artists and writers around Paul Fort and Apollinaire, it was accepted that Jarry’s Ubu clowning act would be paid for in food and drink at the expense of his tablemates. His alleged deathbed words: “Le Père Ubu va essayer de dormir,” are quoted by Jean Starobinski as implying a total identification with his creature.⁶ Starobinski goes on to recall the ancient tradition of the folk-fool,⁷ and his role as the community’s sacrificial victim.⁸ Within these terms of reference, as “sauveur

³ Antonin Artaud, ‘L’Anarchie sociale de l’art,’ in *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, t. VIII, p. 287, quoted in Julia Kristeva, *Polylogue*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, p. 158.

⁴ Yeats, op. cit. p. 349.

⁵ Béhar, op. cit., pp. 221-90.

⁶ “Depuis le romantisme (...) le bouffon, le saltimbanque et le clown ont été les images hyperboliques et volontairement *déformante* que les artistes se sont plu à donner d’eux-mêmes et de la condition de l’art. Il s’agit d’un autoportrait travesti, dont la portée ne se limite pas à la caricature sarcastique ou douloureuse. (...) Jarry au moment de mourir, s’identifiant à sa créature parodique: *Le père Ubu va essayer de dormir*; Joyce déclarant: *Je ne suis qu’un clown irlandais, a great joker at the universe*; Rouault multipliant son autoportrait sous les fards de Pierrot ou des clowns tragiques; Picasso au milieu de son inépuisable réserve de costumes et de masques;” [etc]

Jean Starobinski, *Portrait de l’artiste en saltimbanque*, Geneva, Editions d’art Albert Skira, 1970, p. 9.

⁷ The *fou-couronné* is the mysterious subject of the difficult text, ‘César-Antechrist parle,’ (PL I 266-7) and aesthetic focus of the poem, ‘La Pluie de chasse’ (PL I 258)

⁸ Starobinski op. cit. p. 113.

dérisoire,” Jarry artistic role was therefore to open the way for a fresh regenerative force. Due to the fact that, in the pre-radio and television era, singing was a normal part of daily life, the particular form of sadistic burlesque generated by Ubu roi ‘escaped’ into the intellectual community in the form of the ‘Chanson du décervelage’ as well as the Ubu jargon which, for example, peppers the Gide-Valéry correspondence during 1897 and 1898.

5.2 European puppeteering as a taboo activity and Jarry’s historical position within this framework.

To return to Jarry’s earlier role as an actual puppeteer it might be useful to designate some loose categories of European puppet experts as follows:

- 1) The illiterate craftsman-puppeteer, who makes his own puppets, earns his living from puppetry and may be an itinerant showman. His whole family will be involved in the business and he inherits or builds up his own repertoire of plays for which his puppets are custom-made. Polichinelle, Punch and Judy, the Turkish Kharagheuz and Papa Guignol belong to the repertoire of the irreverent vagrant showman who has now been replaced by theatre-based puppet groups.
- 2) The chroniclers of puppeteering, who may not have been full-time puppeteers, but collectors of puppets or writers of puppet plays. The most comprehensive French works were written between 1850 and 1900 by Charles Magnin, Ernest Maindron and the Breton puppeteer, Louis Lemerrier de Neuville, indicating the sudden surge of interest in the subject at that time.
- 3) Serious artists and musicians, such as Haydn, whose imagination has been caught by the puppet theatre. Haydn experimented with cheap fairground instruments and composed five operettas for the puppet theatre of Prince Nicholas Esterhazy; Pierre Bonnard made many of the heads for the Nabi Puppet theatre before and during his friendship with Jarry; Paul Klee made as many as two hundred puppets, ostensibly for his son. Jarry comes into the category of the intellectual or ‘literary’ puppeteer, together with E. T. A. Hoffmann, George Sand, Paul Klee and Sophie Täuber-Arp.
- 4) From Plato onwards, some of the greatest European writers and thinkers have been struck by the peculiarity of marionettes as a form of expression and have written for or about them. Amongst these are Cervantes, Goethe, Kleist, Lessing, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Gautier, Nerval, Gide, Maeterlinck, Claudel and Ghelderode. Puppets are often considered a more effective medium for works which are too complex for the conventional stage such as Faust, Don Quixote and The Tempest.

The young sculptors Aristide Maillol and Georges Lacombe were pressed into service as scene painters and makers of puppet heads for the small evanescent theatres set up by their friends. The skill of puppetry was seen as one of the few remaining forms of folk art, rooted in furthest antiquity, and which transmitted the colourful colloquial language of street and village in its crude unpurified state. As such, it fulfilled the requirements of the young generation of avant-garde artists who had attuned themselves to archaic and primitive sources of inspiration. Through studying the principles of Far Eastern puppet theatres and by drawing on the skills of the local pavement professionals the intellectual avant-garde gathered enough expertise to launch a movement of 'literary' puppeteering. As Jean Starobinski has remarked, the decline of Pierrot and Harlequin as clown, acrobat or puppet on the street was marked by their sudden appearance in the literary and artistic domain, often with a macabre or tragic cast - residual images appropriated by "des écrivains 'cultivés'".

In France the beginning of this movement had been heralded by the glove puppet theatre established by George Sand at her *château* at Nohant in 1847 with her son Maurice who published their eventual repertoire of one hundred and twenty plays in 1890. As we have said, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Sand could be considered Jarry's nearest counterparts in combining literary fame with puppeteering skill, but Jarry's satirical and subversive intent sets him in a different category. The so-called literary puppet theatres often sprang from an intimate and private entertainment between friends or from the creative playful relationship between parent and child. Both the Théâtre des Phynances which launched *Ubu* and the Théâtre des Nabis made use of large private attics. A vehicle for crude and cruel schoolboy humour, *Ubu roi* was not a puppet play for small children.

There were two Breton writers to whom Jarry would have turned for both literary inspiration and practical knowledge in the field of puppet animation. The first was Villiers de L'Isle Adam, whose *Eve future* had explored the theme of automata⁹ and on whose *Le*

⁹ Jarry refers to Hadaly in his article 'De quelques romans scientifiques.'

Vieux de la Montagne Jarry modelled his play of the same title. The second was Louis Lemercier de Neuville, whose publications on puppeteering, Jarry would have been bound to follow.¹⁰ In 1862 Lemercier de Neuville had embarked on two projects, first the Théâtre Érotique in the Rue de Santé aided by Théodore de Banville, Champfleury, Maillol and Bizet and then, helped by Gustave Doré, his own silhouette theatre, the *Pupazzi*. Even more transitory than their pavement counterparts, these were followed by the more serious Petit Théâtre de Marionnettes founded by Henri Signoret and continued by Maurice Bouchor. Working with rod puppets, similar to Javanese precepts, the Petit Théâtre's repertoire included Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Molière plays and drew favourable comments from the critics by comparison with the Comédie Française. The following condemnation of the Comédie Française actors by Anatole France summarized a widely held view that they eclipsed the characters they were supposed to represent with their over-forceful personalities:

Leur talent est trop grand, ils couvrent tout. Il n'y a qu'eux. Leur personne efface l'oeuvre qu'ils représentent. Le nom et le visage trop connus d'un comédien de chair et d'os imposent au public une obsession qui rend l'illusion impossible ou très difficile.

France's account also encapsulated the hieroglyphic quality of marionettes as follows:

Elles ont une grâce naïve, une gaucherie divine de statues qui consentent à faire les poupées et l'on est ravi de voir ces petites idoles jouer la comédie (...) Ces marionnettes rassemblent à des hiéroglyphes égyptiens, c'est à dire à quelque chose de mystérieux et de pur, et quand elles représentent un drame de Shakespeare ou d'Aristophane, je crois voir la pensée du poète se dérouler en caractères sacrés sur les murailles d'un temple.¹¹

France's words clearly express the growing interest in a more schematic type of acting.

The idea of sacred writing - the *Mané-Thecel-Pharès*, to which Jarry several times refers, -

¹⁰ Jarry would have had access to Louis Lemercier de Neuville's Histoire anecdotique des marionnettes modernes, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1892, (in addition to an earlier historical work on Polish military heroes, coincidentally titled Galerie Polonaise).

¹¹ Anatole France, "Les marionnettes de M. Signoret," La Vie littéraire, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1899, t. II, p. 148.

precisely represents the marionette aesthetic as expressed through the ancient Javanese shadow theatre known as *Wayang purwa*. Its Muslim basis prohibits the manufacture of puppets in human form, resulting in the distortion of the human body into sharply profiled ornaments or body masks.¹² Paul Claudel, who became an aficionado of Japanese Joruri and Bunraku, likewise referred to the puppet as “une parole qui agit.”¹³

Puppets are poised between the sacred and the sacrilegious and the secrets of their manipulation are well guarded by each troupe or puppeteering family. Puppeteering has traditionally been an ambulant trade, close to conjuring, whose dual association with vagabondage and magic has constantly brought it into disrepute with both Church and State. Perceived as a threat by the established theatre, the puppeteer's booth has the transience of the gypsy caravan and can vanish overnight. Pepys's diaries, however, demonstrate its appeal to the gentry and common people alike, which saved it from extinction and guaranteed its most talented practitioners a steady income. Manuals recording the manipulation techniques and tricks of the trade would have betrayed the secrets of a puppeteer's livelihood to potential competitors and are hard to find.¹⁴ Lemerrier de Neuville only mentions a couple of standard movements out of the entire repertoire. They are as follows, for grief:

La marionnette portera ses deux moignons sur la face, pendant que le poignet fait des mouvements saccadés de haut en bas;

and for joy:

en écartant les moignons à diverses reprises comme s'il applaudissait.¹⁵

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are signs that Jarry drew heavily on contemporary

¹² Jarry uses the *Wayang purwa* puppets as a point of reference in describing Georges Pissarro's woodcuts as follows:

J'aime mieux ses bois et eaux-fortes du Carton Jaune qu'il remplit avec Félix (...) et surtout les gestes pointus de grêles gens, wayang (pourra ou gedod [sic]) javanais sous les arbres noirs contre l'air transparent. (PL I 1019)

¹³ Paul Claudel, 'Le théâtre japonais,' in *Mes idées sur le théâtre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, pp. 80-93.

¹⁴ The *Carnet Pitou*, displayed at the *Musée d'Arts populaires et traditionnels* as Ms. 53.31, is a hand-written record of the tricks and techniques of rival theatres such as Holden's and the *Chat Noir*.

¹⁵ Lemerrier de Neuville, *Nouveau théâtre de guignol*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1898, p. 8.

research into the mechanics of human movement as recorded in the publications of the photographer, E.-J. Marey and the specialist on ancient Greek dance forms, Maurice Emmanuel. We shall be examining this debt more closely below.

Records of early puppet performances are equally rare and, where France is concerned, first relate to a family called Brioché or Briocci, whose uncanny skill led to one of the brothers being pursued as a wizard during a tour to Switzerland. The base plot of *Ubu roi*, originally titled *Les Polonais*, aside from its clear connections to *Macbeth* and others of Shakespeare's plays, may have a frail thematic link to a puppet performance of 1656 recorded in Hamburg which depicted the King of Sweden being shot by the Poles and carried off to Hell.¹⁶

Puppets originally had a sacred function, deriving from the moving idols placed in temples and holy places to amaze the gullible. The travelling puppet show seems to have a very long history, interwoven with that of the vagrant entertainer and has only recently vanished from park, town square and beach to the exclusive intellectual domain of the theatre. Each culture has its own brand of puppets: the English Punch and Judy, the Italian Pulcinella, the Lyonnais Guignol, the German Kasperle, the Indonesian *Wayang-golek*, the Japanese *Joruri* and so on. The etymology of the name "marionette" has not been absolutely settled but was in common use by the end of the sixteenth century and is thought to be a diminutive of Marion, deriving from the statues of the Virgin Mary animated by hidden springs. This derivation seems to be at odds with the devilish connotations of marionettes. A diminutive of the common man's name Mario seems more credible. A fifteenth century ballad of Villon's catches a more barbaric flavour with the word "mariotte":

A basteleurs traynans marmottes
A folz et folles, sotz et sottes
Qui s'en vont sifflant cinq et six,
A marmouzets et mariottes,

¹⁶ Max von Böhn, *Dolls and Puppets*, tr. Josephine Nicoll, London, Harrap, 1932, pp. 313-4.

Je crye à toutes gens merciz.¹⁷

Although the art of puppeteering has always been lucrative and even patronized by royalty, it has remained on the fringes of respectability. Its popularity has often been seen as a threat by the mainstream theatre in France, Germany and England. In 1690 actors succeeded in having marionettes banned from the two main Parisian fairgrounds and many booths were destroyed by the authorities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Viewed as a semi-live doll, the marionette's magical character, combined with its satirical function and coarse colloquial language gave it a bad reputation in times of religious austerity.

Because they have no sacred form of puppetry peculiar to their religions, European puppeteers have appropriated a mixture of puppet forms from past or currently intact cultures. As individual performers, they tend to fall into three distinct camps: proponents of glove, rod or string. Each will fiercely defend the delicacy and complexity of his particular technique. As we have seen, rod puppets are supposedly the most apt at performing the slow hieratical gestures of mystical plays; glove puppets are the most ancient and particularly suited to farce, deriving a rough vitality from the total identification of hand and puppet; the more delicate manipulation of stringed puppets, coordinated with the speaking of the dialogue in different voices, is fraught with difficulty and requires special gifts, as well as a painstaking apprenticeship. It apparently gives the most lifelike impression if correctly mastered.

The persecution of Brioché demonstrates how the European perception of the marionette has tended to link it to evil, supernatural forces. Furthermore a record from 1622 recounts trials against people accused of keeping so-called marionettes in their homes as oracles or familiars.¹⁸ This would seem to agree with Shakespeare's conception of them, for when

¹⁷ Quoted in Charles Magnin, *Histoire des Marionnettes en Europe depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1852, p. 76.

¹⁸ The accusation, for which the penalty was hanging or burning was as follows:
d'avoir tenu à l'estroit et gouverné en leur maison des marionnettes (qui sont des petits diabolotiaux, ayants d'ordinaire forme de crapauds, aucunes fois des guenons, toujours très hideuses)
Magnin, *op. cit.* p. 116.

Prospero renounces the spirit world in his final speech of *The Tempest*, he refers to fairies as “demi-puppets.” More recent testimonies uphold this view. In particular the theatre director, Gaston Baty, was convinced that some of his marionettes emitted an evil force. It is a view that Antonin Artaud, who believed that the marionette speaks to the buried emotions within the psyche of the spectator, goes some way towards explaining with his following description of an African Voodoo doll:

L'apparition d'un Etre inventé, fait de bois et d'étoffe, créé de toutes pièces, ne répondant à rien et cependant inquiétant par nature, capable de réintroduire sur la scène un petit souffle de cette grande peur métaphysique qui est la base de tout le théâtre ancien.¹⁹

This accords with the fetishistic character of the marionette as a creature of black magic, which was close to Jarry's own perception, as we shall see later. His handmade marionette of Père Ubu (Fig. 74) is indeed hardly more more than a roughly sewn together poor black rag with cutout felt hands and a mastic head of primeval crudeness, differing greatly from the puffed up magnificence of his exotic Ubu illustrations. Guided mainly by avarice, cowardice, cruelty, greed and sloth, Ubu's reactions are predictable as a puppet type. It is notable, however, that Jarry did not conceive of Ubu as a fixed profile, but more as a Protean conduit for man's base instincts, subject to chance, which could appear in several forms. He experimented with a variety of visual or physical materials in assembling several unsettling hybrid profiles of Ubu. His changing illustrations, drawn from a number of sources and his different textual descriptions demonstrate his procedure.²⁰

¹⁹ Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, Gallimard, 1964, p. 65.

²⁰ In *Ubu roi* and 'Le Bain du roi' Ubu has a heavy tread, but in 'L'Acte héraldique' of *César-Antechrist* Ubu and the Palotins appear as glowing, ripe, ready to hatch metaphysical eggs and progress by rolling, the very stuff of present day science fiction. The biological connotation of the word “germent” is suited to travelling seed cases like coconuts:

Au premier plan, Ubu, puis les trois Palotins semblables à des sphères grossissantes, germent. (...)

UBU: Semblable à un oeuf, une citrouille ou un fulgurant météore, je roule sur cette terre où je ferai ce qu'il me plaira.
(PL I 293)

5.3 Jarry's position in the Symbolist Theatre with regard to the marionette aesthetic

Much weight has rightly been given to the links between Jarry's literary and dramatic code and the aesthetic ideal of the marionette.²¹ The marionette's equivocal status on the borders of fantasy and reality had endeared it to the nineteenth-century German Romantics, who energetically promoted puppetry as an independent dramatic form.²² The marionette aesthetic and the figure of the golem was particularly evident in the work of E. T. A. Hoffmann, himself a puppet enthusiast, and of Achim von Arnim, who believed that the puppet theatre was connected to the old mysteries. Jarry's strong feeling for the grotesque aligns him with these authors, from whom he probably drew the macabre mandrake motif, whose treacherous gesture of supplication is so significant in his work. It was moreover in Germany that the growing dissatisfaction with live actors originated. In the preface to his Marionettentheater of 1806 the German playwright S. A. Mahlmann was already declaring the superiority of wooden marionettes to the "wooden" performances of actors in the State theatres.

This movement against the theatrical actor was not so strongly felt in France until the end of the century, when the Symbolists incorporated a rather formal kind of marionette aesthetic into their theatre productions, attempting to minimize the human and the real with slow hieratic gestures and a monotone delivery. There was no greater exponent of the marionette aesthetic than Maurice Maeterlinck who wrote his early plays for marionettes and rejected the flesh and blood actor as an appropriate interpreter of his work.²³ His plays were produced

²¹ See especially Henri Béhar, Jarry Dramaturge, Paris, Nizet, 1980, ch. 6 'Apports de la marionnette: le théâtre mirlitonnesque', Brunella Eruli, Jarry. I Mostri dell'Immagine, op. cit., ch. 4, 'Apparizione e riflessi verso una drammaturgia schematica' and Didier Plassard, L'acteur en effigie, Lausanne, L'Age d'homme, 1992, ch. 1 'Entrée en scènes des effigies.'

²² Dubbing Germany "ce pays de rêves," the puppet expert, Charles Magnin argued that it was only in Germany that the concept of mixing the plastic with the real could be born, continuing as follows:

La vie presque communiquée à la matière par l'union de l'art et de la science; (...) ce qu'on cherchait vainement ailleurs, sous une forme aussi saisissante et aussi poétique, L'IDÉAL DE LA MARIONNETTE.

Magnin, op. cit. pp. 266-7.

²³ Maurice Maeterlinck, 'Menus propos - Le Théâtre' in La jeune Belgique, IX, Brussels, sept. 1890, pp. 331-2.

one after the other by the young French producers Paul Fort and Lugné-Poë, who did their utmost to introduce the principles of the puppet theatre to the Théâtre d'Art and Théâtre de l'Oeuvre productions, using stylized figures and gestures and monotonous voices. Lugné-Poë even experimented with a gauze screen in front of the stage, similar to that used by puppeteers to conceal the strings of the marionettes from the audience, causing the actors to appear even more wraith-like and distanced from reality than usual.

Jarry joined earlier commentators in his rejection of the affected 'theatrical' gestures used in acting by comparison to the almost awkward but 'universal' gestures which can be executed by a marionette. Here Adrien Remacle writes about the convincing illusion produced by marionettes who deliver us from what he calls "L'exécrable geste appris, banal" and hails the marionette as an almost pure vehicle for the dramatist's text, eliminating the barrier between spectator and poet:

Et encore la lenteur hiératique de leurs mouvements, l'invu de leurs gestes régulièrement saccadé, l'absolu, le rigide de leurs attitudes, tout cela est très artistique, parce que tout cela crée un monde à part, reculé de nous, loin de la rampe, où le réel des idées et des types se présente à notre esprit nu, grâce à l'irréalité évidente de la représentation.²⁴

This jerkiness of gesture can in fact be transformed into a fluid and seductive beauty by the addition of music, according to Maindron. Both Jarry and Claudel felt that musical accompaniment was an indispensable ingredient to creating the hallucinatory atmosphere which draws the audience into complicity with the puppet. In his authorial speech at the première of *Ubu roi* Jarry here apologizes for the absence of the proper music:

Il était très important que nous eussions, pour être tout à fait marionnettes, une musique de foire, et l'orchestration était distribuée à des cuivres, gongs et trompettes marines, que le temps a manqué pour réunir. (PL I 400)

²⁴ Adrien Remacle, 'Petit Théâtre. Le Sage de Khéyam de Bouchor,' *Mercur de France*, avril 1892, p. 355 quoted in Robichez, op. cit. p. 76.

As we have said, Jarry's relationship with puppetry depended on its satirical and subversive aspect, rather than the mystical aspect favoured by the Symbolists, thus his contributions to the repertoire of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre were regarded by Lugné Poë with profound hesitation. His puppet performances of *Ubu roi* were a source of great amusement for the élite few, but its transfer to the public stage from the protection of the intimate puppet booth was a risky step. Despite the cosmetic adjustment, of an 'r' to the word *merde*, its liberation from the private to the public domain represented a major infringement of social *mores* and the breaking of a taboo.

The taboo and the magical have always been interrelated. Childhood play forms a lifelong collusive relationship between humans and dolls. Dolls are confidantes and precious companions in the child's underworld which may be one of frequent punishment and wakeful solitude in the dark. They will happily speak the child's forbidden thoughts on his behalf and must be kept close. There is no cure for the bereavement caused by their loss.

One of the most telling summaries of the the peculiar relationship which bonds the puppet with its human spectator has been given by a twentieth century French puppeteer, André-Charles Gervais, who worked under Gaston Baty and who compiled a body of advice for prospective glove puppeteers. Here he defines that extra effort of concentration and complicity which the puppet demands in order to transmit its message:

Le jeu de la marionnette se situe dans l'illusion. Il exige des spectateurs une puissance créatrice, une faculté de transposition, de transfiguration (...) Au cinéma, nous trouvons notre rêve tout préparé, directement assimilable, digéré pourrait-on dire.(...)

Le paradoxe de la marionnette est dans sa capacité d'exprimer plus que le comédien parce qu'elle a moins de moyens; c'est de nous découvrir plus largement la vie parce qu'elle ne la possède pas; c'est de nous faire accéder au rêve parce qu'elle est en bois et de nous obliger à lui donner une réponse parce qu'elle est muette.²⁵

This effort on the part of the spectator fully accords with Jarry's views on an active

²⁵ André-Charles Gervais, *Marionnettes et marionnettistes de France*, Paris, Bordas, 1947, p. 35.

contribution to the creative process by the audience for whom a work is performed, written or painted. Gervais' abhorrence of "predigested" entertainment which prevents the spectator's own fantasy and mental selection processes from operating very closely reflects Jarry's following statement from the important chapter 'L'Adelphisme et nostalgie' in Les Jours et les Nuits:

Car servir les aliments à l'esprit broyés et brouillés épargne le travail des oublies destructives de la mémoire, et l'esprit peut d'autant plus aisément après cette assimilation recréer des formes et couleurs nouvelles selon soi. (PL I 770)

The type of assimilation to which Jarry refers, depends on his vision of an imaginary "machine à engrenages" - an external geometric projection of the human skeleton, as had been envisaged by Leonardo da Vinci, capable of rapid locomotion and of recording images passing at speed, which could subsequently be used as a kind of reserve of forms and colours for the human creative process to work upon. We have already referred to this vision in Chapter 1 in connection with Jarry's frequent reliance on the form and motion of the wheel, and will need to look at it again in our concluding chapter on dance.

5.4 The puppet as embodiment of the Uncanny

The climate of interest in the occult and in psychic phenomena which prevailed during the 1880s and 1890s indeed fitted the aesthetic of the marionette. Jarry is said to have attended Madame de Blavatsky's séances. His association with the members of the Salon du Rose+Croix and, in particular the Sâr Péladan, drew him into this world. The perception of a mechanical being transferring the spirit of a dramatic work to a receptive audience more effectively than a human actor tuned in with the idea of psychic transference. Even closer to the spirit world, the shadow theatre thrived in the same atmosphere. The Chat Noir theatre of Rodolphe Salis provided an outlet for the work of young poets, whose work was read aloud and "illustrated" with a shadow accompaniment. Henri Rivière's 'coloured' shadows were an

interesting forerunner of Jarry's dramatic experiment with mobile heraldic arms.

At this time there were about ten permanent outdoor puppet booths or *casteleets* in Paris, manned by well-known talented performers, such as Duranty, some boasting hundreds of exquisitely made puppets. One of the advantages of the puppet theatre was that the same glove or 'body' could be used with a great variety of heads. Most booths had some two hundred to four hundred puppets, with continuous additions to refresh their repertoire. Although most puppeteers preferred to make their own puppets, there were one or two master puppet makers whom one could watch at work and peruse the ranks of puppet types that they stored. At Edouard Fruit's *atelier* Maindron noted that, even at rest, they emitted an uncanny and disturbing atmosphere:

J'ai vu là des Polichinelles superbes et des Mariées idéales qui m'ont troublés l'esprit.²⁶

Certainly the puppet's power to disturb seems to be effective whether at rest or in action, denoting a kind of emanation or potential which ties in with Jarry's idea, not only of the marionette being a schematic thought, which simply awaits its executor, but a vibrating core around which a marvellous chrysalis will gradually take shape. Casually adumbrated, in a review of another writer's work, is the idea which permeates all his own serious texts and one which Kandinsky was to argue much more fully, that the spirit creates its own form. Jarry here applies all the features of marionettes to what he calls the "stone-muscled" fictitious characters of Henri de Régnier²⁷ :

Leur personnalité exubérante exsude, en quelque sorte, son atmosphère spéciale et qui n'existerait point en leur absence (...) Dans un autre ordre de vibrations, ce seraient des portraits qui, à la manière des chrysalides se tisseraient tout seuls, à leur mesure,

²⁶ Ernest Maindron, *Marionnettes et Guignols: les poupées agissantes et parlantes à travers les âges*, Paris, Librairie Paul Paclot, 1900, p. 191.

²⁷ In visual terms Jarry's concept is also closer to Kandinsky's, who would sometimes wrap his subjects in a cocoon of expressive colour (The Woman in Moscow) than to that of his contemporary Munch, who was surrounding his subjects with ripples of fear and anxiety - a reactive, emotional aura, rather than the projection of a character profile or perhaps the pictorial representation of the astral body.

l'or de leur cadre.

(PL II 415-6)

The marionette or mask indeed provides the purest and most exaggerated plastic expression of a certain spiritual quality, emotion or idea. Some puppets indeed express no more than a single emotion. (Fig. 26) As we have indicated before, Jarry's aesthetic theory integrates entomological research into types of camouflage. His article 'Du mimétisme inverse chez les personnages d'Henri de Régnier' shows an intimate knowledge of recent research into camouflage and mimesis. Jarry argues that Régnier's characters project themselves, taking up extra space and exerting the precepts of *sematic* or warning camouflage²⁸ (Ubu would be in the same category). He sometimes deploys the precepts of *cryptic* camouflage for his own characters, such as Marcueil, who cultivates a feeble and elderly appearance, "plus falot et plus lamentable qu'un masque de carnaval" (PL II 200) in order to conceal his threatening powers.

In Chapter 1, note 18, we cited Roger Caillois' tentative theory which proposes, from a purely scientific perspective, that there was a finite repertoire of certain profiles or limited sign system at Nature's disposal. Talking about fear-inspiring profiles, he suggested that all living creatures have an innate recognition response to certain terror-inspiring outlines and that the approach of a sham hornet provokes the same avoiding response as would the real creature. As we argued in Chapter 1, Jarry was certainly familiar with the Batesian theory of mimicry, to which Caillois refers, since he deliberately deploys the outlines which herald the archetypal predator or evil omen both in his literary texts and his illustrations. Among these are the spider, the snake, owl masks and toothed jaws. Caillois hesitantly suggests that the alligator's mask and the frightening mask of the tiny lantern fly derive from a single terrifying prototype. (Fig. 76) Jarry's casual 1903 allusion to the lion and the Lion Ant ("C'est le lion qui s'honore de singer le fourmilion") seems to take the theory for granted. (PL III 464)

²⁸ H. W. Bates reports that, according to legend, a lantern fly had emerged from the Brazilian forest and slain an entire boatload of natives. Its terrifying alligator profile had inflated its size and abilities to amazing proportions in local folklore. Proceedings of the Entomological Association, London, 1864, p. 14.

In several accounts of marionette performances the reviewers report an uncanny effect emitted by wooden marionettes, whether mobile or inert, such as experienced by Maindron. Edmond de Goncourt noted his discomfort and unease whilst watching a performance of the English conjurer-puppeteer, Thomas Holden,²⁹ a feeling which typically afflicts the spectator of marionette performances. Paul Margueritte experienced the same sensation before Signoret's complex rod puppets, as he describes here:

Tandis que le nom et le visage trop connu d'un comédien de chair et d'os imposent au public une obsession qui rend impossible ou très difficile l'illusion, les fantoches, impersonnels, êtres de bois et de carton, possèdent une vie falote et mystérieuse. Leur allure de vérité surprend, inquiète. Dans leurs gestes essentiels tient l'expression complète de tous les sentiments humains.³⁰

The minimalistic, exaggerated physical features of the marionette amounted to a sign - a sign conveying a message from the invisible world and which could concretize human emotions in a few archaic gestures. More than one commentator has compared the animation of marionettes to a magical ceremony of trance and possession³¹ - this is certainly how animation is approached by professional puppeteers, even today, and accounts for the odd feeling of bewitchment that the best performances engender.³² Lemerrier de Neuville actually attributes a kind of automatism to the manipulation of glove puppets, similar to the instinctive movements of the pianist, immersed in and taken over by his music:

La main prêtée au personnage s'agite **à l'insu de l'opérante**, et souligne ses paroles comme les doigts d'un pianiste habile se placent instinctivement sur les touches qui

²⁹ Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, t. 12, 5 avril 1879, Monaco, Impr. Nationale de Monaco, 1956, p. 17.

³⁰ Paul Margueritte, *Le Petit Théâtre (Théâtre de marionnettes)*, Paris, Librairie illustrée, 1888, p. 7.

³¹ "Toccare la marionetta, infonderle la vita o risvegliare in essa dei movimenti sopiti o deminticati, conferirle la parola o interpretare i suoni che emergono dalla materia attraverso la stratificazione del tempo, diventa quasi una cerimonia magica di possessione."

Brunella Eruli, 'Jarry nel Paese di guignol: "L'Abbé Prout" di Paul Ranson,' *Studi di Filologia de Letteratura*, no. 1, 1977, p. 78.

³² According to the testimony of Luis Zornoza Boy of the Norwich Puppet Theatre, the magical bond between spectator and puppet often fails altogether if the concentration of the manipulators falters, leading to huge variations in the quality of successive performances. Apprentice Japanese *Bunraku* puppeteers would be punished for any such lapse.

doivent émettre tel ou tel son (...) ³³

Jarry himself was remembered for the “gleam of madness” that used to come into his eyes both in the heat of a puppet performance and during the seemingly incoherent stream of his conversation.³⁴ Lemer cier de Neuville’s observation would seem to accord with his views on unconscious creativity and that an original piece of writing can only be produced as an unconscious and spontaneous jet, yet Jarry’s Brussels lecture insists on the importance of the manipulator having made his own puppets and thereby maintaining total control of them. A strange puppet might well not obey the manipulator and, unlike the latitude that he was prepared to allow to language, the manipulation of his puppets was one area where Jarry was not prepared to leave anything to chance.

5.5 Jarry’s puppet lore as revealed in his dramatic theory and his literary texts.

Jarry’s own remarks on gesture in ‘De l’inutilité du théâtre au théâtre’ betray a rare example of his own stock of puppeteering techniques:

L’erreur grave de la pantomime actuelle est d’aboutir au langage mimé conventionnel, fatigant et incompréhensible. Exemple de cette convention: une ellipse verticale autour du visage avec la main et un baiser sur cette main pour dire la beauté suggérant l’amour. - Exemple de geste universel: la marionnette témoigne sa stupeur par un recul avec violence et choc du crâne contre la coulisse. (PL I 408-9)

This device to express surprise matches that described by Gervais almost to the letter:

Votre poupée apprend une nouvelle importante (...) elle sursaute. Comment le fera-t-elle? (...) par un léger recul de la tête en arrière (...) ³⁵

³³ Louis Lemer cier de Neuville, *Histoire anecdotique des marionnettes modernes*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1892, p. 96.

³⁴ “Un léger souffle de folie passait dans l’oeuvre comme dans la vie de Jarry, et d’aucuns disaient qu’une lueur étrangement phosphorescente apparaissait au fond de ses yeux.”

Albert Haas, ‘Souvenirs de la vie littéraire à Paris’, reprinted in *L’Etoile-Absinthe*, nos. 51-52, p. 24.

³⁵ Gervais, op. cit. pp. 46-47.

There is huge body of techniques and movements through which the puppet manipulator may bring about the numerous gaits, gestures and emotions of the small doll which he controls. Gervais describes ten different kinds of gait which would help to distinguish between the roles of say, Mistress and Wife, who might have similar body profiles. The Mistress would be distinguished by a “gliding gait” for which he specifies:

Faire rouler les hanches par une ondulation de la main très aisée, sans raideur ni saccades.

and

Bien marquer cependant le mouvement des épaules.

In the following passage from the chapter ‘De sinople à une ermine en abîme’ of L’Amour absolu’ Jarry gives a telling example of this predatory gliding gait, probably drawn from his own observations, to emphasize the difference between the two guises of Madame Joseb, the one as Emmanuel’s mother and the other as Varia, temptress and siren, whose movement evokes the progress of the hunting ermine or stoat, swift, silent and sinuous as here described:

Elle glissait d’une ondulation rapide et moirée comme le dermeste des fourrures.

Ou comme la tête de paon, mieux hésitante que celle de la couleuvre, parce qu’une aigrette de verre filé à la mesure amplifiée de son amplitude, en enregistre le tremblement.

Emmanuel reconnaissait surtout l’insinuation de patineur sur le gel ³⁶ entre les bruyères roses, là-bas, de la bête héraldique. (PL I 938)

Playing with the word *insinuation* as combining the idea of both insinuation and the sinuous, Jarry’s compositional method is clearly demonstrated in this passage. He summons the exaggerated choreography deployed in the marionette theatre as a literary resource to focus on the central idea of movement. The archetypal movement, as sinuous arabesque, remains

³⁶ Skating was often referred to by theorists on movement such as Bergson because, unlike dancing, the line of the movement was instantly traced on the ice.

stable; its vehicle as stoat, viper, skater or Vamp changes its form. The meaning or the thought, here the idea of a sly, predatory beauty, is encapsulated in the movement rather than the object. Although Jarry's expertise in puppet movements is hardly referred to, it can be easily traced in his literary texts and underpins most of his proposals for the theatre. Here he makes the claim that, when masks are used, the actors only need a limited number of stock positions of the head to indicate the entire range of emotions: six frontal and six profile:

Et l'expérience prouve que les six positions principales (et autant pour le profil qui sont moins nettes) suffisent à toutes les expressions. Nous n'en donnons pas d'exemple, parce qu'elles varient selon l'essence première du masque, et que tous ceux qui ont su voir un Guignol ont pu le constater. (PL I 408)

This actually tallies with the research of Maurice Emmanuel, mentioned above, who specifies five positions.³⁷

Jarry's forceful efforts to make an impact on the intellectual avant garde as soon as he arrived in Paris were doubtless aided by his puppeteering prowess and his amusing performances of *Les Polonais* with his own puppets. Although the earlier of the two surviving Père Ubu puppets is a stringed marionette (Fig. 74) and the text of his 'Conférence sur les Pantins' states that the *Pantins* was a theatre for stringed marionettes, his style seems to have been based more on the techniques of glove puppetry and especially Guignol, which relied on slapstick for its effects. The fact that the later Père Ubu puppet is a glove puppet (Fig. 62) suggests that Jarry was able to manipulate both. The peculiar mechanical voice, for which he was particularly remembered is typical of the marionettist, although he did not apparently need to resort to the artificial distortion of the *pratique*, the small wooden instrument that puppeteers hold in their mouths. The satirical and boisterous, if not obscene puppet plays of the later *Pantins* repertoire, performed by Jarry, Ranson and Franc-Nohain are radically distinct from the classical texts performed by Signoret and Bouchor with rod

³⁷ "1. Tête de face ; 2. Tête penchée en avant; 3. Tête penchée de côté; 4. Tête tournée; 5. Tête renversée." Emmanuel, op. cit. p. 159.

puppets, however they are still classified in puppet bibliographies as a “literary” genre.

On account of his expertise in puppet lore Jarry’s engagement by Lugné-Poë as “secrétaire-régisseur” to the Oeuvre was superficially appropriate. The London reviews of Lugné-Poë’s 1895 productions had remarked on a harsh jerkiness verging on caricature in the acting style.³⁸ This seems to indicate signs of an existing marionette aesthetic and a trend away from the spiritual and mystical aura of his earlier productions of Ibsen. Jarry certainly tried to introduce a guignolesque element which would defuse any atmosphere of mystery and strangeness. Hence his reworking of the Peer Gynt troll scene,³⁹ his efforts to persuade Lugné-Poë to put on the little known Grabbe farce, Scherz, Satire und tiefere Bedeutung, which he adapted and translated under the title of Les Silènes, and his successful launching of Ubu roi in the face of Lugné-Poë’s misgivings. Nevertheless, this last would have been impossible without the energetic backing of two influential lovers of the macabre and fantastic, Marcel Schwob and Rachilde, who bear a large responsibility for setting loose this forerunner of the destructive artistic movements of the twentieth century.

5.6 Jarry as Nabi puppeteer, and lecturer on puppets.

As we have said, Jarry’s activity as a maker and manipulator of puppets had begun in 1888, in collaboration with his sister Charlotte and his schoolfriends, the Morin brothers. The Jarry-Morin team founded the Théâtre des Phynances and gave the first amateur performances of Ubu roi or Les Polonais in the attic of the Morin family house. The Nabis’ puppet performances likewise took place in substantial private houses: either on the top floor of Councillor Ranson’s house, known as “Le Temple,” which became Paul Ranson’s own workshop, in the children’s nursery of Councillor Coulon, or in the large attic belonging to

³⁸ See John Stokes, Resistible Theatres, London, Paul Elek Books Ltd., 1972, p. 168.

³⁹ The working proofs of Peer Gynt used for the Oeuvre production are currently held in the Bibliothèque de la Société des auteurs dramatiques and show cuts, additions and changes in Jarry’s hand and two others.

Madame Hérold, mother of the orientalist, A. Ferdinand Hérold.⁴⁰ It is possible that Jarry may have given informal performances at one or other in 1894. Letters of both Henri Rousseau and Rachilde indicate that Jarry gave numerous private showings with his own puppets, both at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre and elsewhere.⁴¹ Jarry's friend, Dr Albert Haas, recalls that his own room was adapted for these performances:

Un rideau fermé couvrait un des murs. Jarry avait fait percer la cloison entre cette pièce et sa chambre à coucher et s'était fait ainsi un théâtre de poupées, sur lequel il représentait lui-même son *Ubu-roi*, devant un public d'invités.⁴²

For all Jarry's Bohemian mannerisms, he was of bourgeois stock, performing for an élite and highly educated audience, far removed from the world of the vagrant and impoverished showman. In December 1897, when the Nabis invited Jarry to be manipulator for their relocated and renamed *Théâtre des Pantins* (the former *Théâtre des Nabis*), his own comfortable circumstances had been irrevocably shaken and the venture was conceived as a commercial one for his benefit.

The core of the Pantins team consisted of Jarry, Ranson and the poet, Franc-Nohain, bringing a harshly satirical tone to the enterprise. Claude Terrasse, who needed the puppet medium to carry his particular music, was the organizing force, donating his own workshop both for the manufacture of the puppets and the performances. Jarry was responsible for the complex business of the stage mechanics and for the manipulation, aided by Franc-Nohain⁴³

The Nabi artists in the venture, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Paul Ranson and

⁴⁰ Different sources give different locations. See Agnès Humbert, *Les Nabis et leur époque*, Pierre Cailler, Geneva, 1954, Dorothy Knowles, *La Réaction idéaliste au théâtre depuis 1890*, Droz, 1934, and G. Mauner, *The Nabis: Their History and their Art*, New York and London, Garland Publishing Inc., 1978.

⁴¹ A letter from Rachilde to Sacha Guitry, which seems to be written for a larger audience than its recipient, runs as follows:

Cher Sacha, n'ignorant rien des sentiments que vous avez pour Alfred Jarry, l'auteur d'*Ubu Roi*, j'ai pensé qu'il vous serait agréable de posséder dans vos multiples collections de marionnettes [sic]. Celle-ci, fabriquée par Jarry, fut montrée un peu partout, théâtre de l'Oeuvre et représentations privées et il fut ensuite interprété par Gémier et Jarry me fit le don de sa marionnette préférée (...)

L'Etoile-Absinthe, nos. 41-2, p. 65.

⁴² Haas, op. cit. p. 23.

⁴³ A. F. Hérold, 'Claude Terrasse,' *Mercure de France*, 1 août 1923, pp. 695-6.

K. - X. Roussel, had already worked very closely with Jarry, painting the décors for the Oeuvre productions, including Ubu roi, and designing the posters and programmes. The theatre lasted for three months. Given this tiny life-span, it is a staggering fact that Bonnard is said to have made three hundred puppets for the Pantins.⁴⁴ To make this effort worthwhile must mean that the theatre continued as an amateur venture in private houses - an important fact.

Jarry partnered the puppet expert Franc-Nohain in the production of Paul Ranson's L'Abbé Prout - Guignol pour vieux enfants. He was also the author of Petits poèmes amorphes which gave their name to 'De l'île amorphe' of Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien dedicated to Franc-Nohain. Jarry's comment: "Celui-là mime les pensées des hommes par des personnages dont il n'a conservé que la partie supérieure du corps, afin qu'il n'y ait rien en eux que de pur" (PL I 682) is a tongue in cheek description of the much less than pure puppets, manipulated by Franc-Nohain. Ranson's *Abbé Prout* is a womanizing monastic in the tradition of the Turkish stock puppet, Kharagheuz. Jarry's remark nevertheless constitutes a serious definition of the puppet's purity of identity, encapsulated in the exaggerated features of the mask. A single surviving head from this production, carved into the striking profile of the aristocratic and toothless Marquis Gontran de Percefort by the Nabi sculptor Georges Lacombe demonstrates this exaggeration. (Fig. 75.)

Like Jarry's, Franc-Nohain's interest in puppets rested on their potential for caricature. His delight in the vulgar is demonstrated in his lyrics for the songs of the Répertoire des Pantins. 'Berceuse obscène,' makes the dialogue of Ubu appear almost fastidious. Jarry's later lyrics become more colourful and linguistically daring, however, and it is certain that the partnership must have been an explosive one. Jarry's detailed review to Franc-Nohain's guignolesque play La Botte secrète which refers to Gémier's performance in his role of sewer cleaner in boots of monstrous proportions, demonstrates the closeness of their tastes. A future ambassador of puppetry and frequent lecturer, Franc-Nohain subsequently joined

⁴⁴ See Henry Certigny, 'L'École de Pont-Aven et les Nabis,' in La Vie des grands peintres impressionnistes, Paris, Éditions du Sud, 1964, p. 414.

Gaston Cony, son of the conjurer A. Cony, who had run the Buttes-Chaumont booth. As we shall see in Chapter 6, when the programme for the Pantins was still being discussed, he wrote to Claude Terrasse recommending that Jarry should be asked to perform a particularly complicated manoeuvre with pirouetting ballerinas as the *finale*. We know that the puppets used were stringed marionettes with wax or terra cotta heads. Jarry's skill was therefore as a manipulator of stringed marionettes, as shown in a sketch by the illustrator, Edmond Couturier. (Fig. 25)

Gabrielle Fort, daughter of Vallette and Rachilde, recalled that Jarry was a martinet of perfectionism in imposing the rhythm and timing of the marionette pieces. Indeed the puppeteer Lemercier de Neuville has indicated the importance of the stick not only as a prop for "slapstick" effects but for reinforcing the comic effect of a typical barrage of insults, as it beats out the rhythm of the text like a metronome.⁴⁵ Béhar and Eruli both select the following piece of dialogue from *Ubu sur la butte* for its onomatopoeic, guignolesque qualities. Eruli notes the rhythmical link with the *bâton* of Guignol, comparing it to similar streams of insults in Duranty's and Ranson's theatre where the effect of the dialogue shifts from dependence on interior verbal meaning to percussive sounds:⁴⁶

BOUGRELAS (le frappant) Tiens, lâche, gueux, sacripant, mécréant, musulman.

PERE UBU (ripostant) Tiens, polognard, soûlard, bâtard, hussard, tartare, calard, cafard, mouchard, savoyard, communalard!

MERE UBU (le battant aussi) Tiens, capon, cochon, félon, histrion, fripon, souillon, polochon. (PL I 637)

⁴⁵ "Le bâton! Voilà le grand argument de Guignol comme aussi de Polichinelle. Le bâton résout tout: il termine les différends, il paye les dettes, il renvoie les importuns, il corrige les femmes, il se venge des hommes, c'est le *Deus ex Machina* de tout ce petit monde lilliputien. (...) et plus il frappe, plus il fait rire! Lemercier de Neuville, op. cit. p. 34.

⁴⁶ "E interessante notare come questo fuoco di fila di ingiurie sia collegato al momento in cui il *bâton* di Guignol, è in piena attività; l'effetto ricercato non è quello della comunicazione verbale ma una specie di ritmo fonico che si combina con il rumore dei due pezzi di legno che si urtoan violentemente." Eruli, op. cit. p. 89.

This style of dialogue, the fragmentation of syntax by rhythm, is much used by Rabelais, whose texts Jarry plundered as much as Lautréamont's. Kristeva calls it *désémantisation* in connection with what she terms "la pulsion non sémantisée qui précède et excède le sens."⁴⁷ Jarry's interest in non-signifying language or sounds can be seen at various points in his texts.⁴⁸ We should not forget his access to the researches of Marcel Schwob into mediaeval beggar language and to those of Remy de Gourmont into mediaeval ballads. His academic interest in the phonic and rhythmic quality of language underpins his gift for writing *mirliton* verse, so valuable to Claude Terrasse as the vehicle to carry his extraordinarily avant-garde compositions for primitive and exotic instruments.⁴⁹ Jarry's own linguistic researches, which can be deduced from poems such as 'Le Mousse de la Pirrouït' and which relate to the peculiar dialect of the Seine fishermen and to fairground patter, demand separate study.

Drawing once again from German literature where he recognized a streak of grotesque humour like his own, Jarry's adaptation of the little known Scherz, Satire, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung, which he deemed to be a sister piece of Ubu roi, was due for performance at the *Pantins*, under the title of Les Silènes, but foundered at the rehearsal stage. With Claude Terrasse, Jarry then produced an abridged version of Ubu roi with songs, written exclusively for marionettes, titled Ubu sur la Butte, which appeared at the *Guignol des 4'zarts* of Montmartre in November 1901. This was supposed to launch a longer term puppet theatre, to be called the *Guignol des Gueules de Bois*, which never took shape. The strong family tradition which ensured relative longevity for the pavement puppet theatres was lacking in the

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'D'une identité l'autre,' in Polylogue, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1977, p. 168.

⁴⁸ Examples can be found in the deformed bubble words of 'Consul Romanus' in Les Jours et les Nuits and in the passage that Jarry quotes from Didier de Chousy's Ignis in his article 'De quelques romans scientifiques':

Et voici d'autres machines femelles plus grossières encore, vomissant des propos monstrueux des coassements obscènes de toutes les ordures que peut contenir la panse d'une balayeuse mécanique en état d'ivresse...

(PL II 520)

⁴⁹ See 'L'Ile sonnante' of Faustroll, dedicated to Terrasse, which lists a selection of real and fictitious instruments ending:

On y respirait encore l'octavin, le hautbois d'amour, le contrebasson et le sarrusophone, le biniou, le zampogna, le bag-pipe; la chérée du Bengale, l'hélicon, contrebasse, le serpent, la coelophone, les saxhorns et l'enclume.
(PL I 692)

literary puppet ventures, whose casts consisted of loose groups of actors, artists and writers, all with other commitments and who were only bound by friendship. Henri Signoret's tiny theatre depended on the voluntary help of forty highly talented specialists in order to mount its performances. The pavement puppeteer had to have all the necessary performance and craftsmanship skills at his disposal and would have served a lifelong apprenticeship.

Claude Terrasse's passion for antique and exotic instruments, particularly apt for the marionette theatre, secured an artistic collaboration for Jarry, whose talent for writing *mirliton* verse for marionettes never deserted him. However he was only to give one more public performance as a professional puppeteer. This was a one-man show at the *Libre Esthétique* of Brussels in March 1902 and followed his Conférence sur les Pantins, which provides one of the few records of Jarry's remarks on marionettes. The event had been organised by two of Jarry's Belgian friends, Octave Maüs, director of the *Libre Esthétique* and the writer, Eugène Demolder. Thirty years later, writing under the pseudonym of Sander Pierron, Paul De Glines, the Belgian puppet historian, who had welcomed and entertained Jarry, wrote a sensitive account of this, Jarry's only visit to Brussels.⁵⁰ He captivated a large society audience, with an entirely satirical repertoire consisting of the *Trappe* scene from *Ubu roi*, Paul Ranson's explicitly crude *L'Abbé Prout* and the only public performance of *Les Silènes*, his own adaptation of Christian Dietrich Grabbe's, *Scherz, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung*.

So much for the historical side of Jarry's puppeteering. We shall now examine how the marionette aesthetic penetrated his literary texts and venture to suggest that the emotional, mental and spiritual aspect of marionette performance has an even greater role in Jarry's literary inspiration and private philosophy than has previously been indicated.

⁵⁰ Sander Pierron, 'Alfred Jarry à Bruxelles.' *Mercur de France*, 1er août, 1923, pp. 295-6.

5.7 The marionette's daimon and the extended or 'eternal' gesture.

That Jarry was acutely aware of the importance of the so-called "souffle animé," which passes from puppeteer to puppet, whether it is the transference of the animator's psyche or the breath of metaphysical fear, as later evoked by Artaud, is apparent from this seemingly inconsequential jingle composed for the puppets of *Ubu sur la butte*:

*Hélas! le monde s'use, hélas! tout dégénère;
nous, derniers héritiers des sages et des dieux,*

et des hommes à la tête de bois,

(spoken)

*Nous, les petits pantins,
Nous sommes nains,
Nous sommes gueux
Pour hausser vers le peuple nos têtes sur la scène,
Epandant la science, il faut qu'à nos fantômes
Le souffle animé passe entre des doigts de chair.*

(PL I 636-7)

Manual dexterity and sleight of hand are so vital to the successful operation of puppets that conjurers, such as Cony, whom we have mentioned before, often doubled as puppeteers. Whether the marionette is a thing of white or black magic, there can be no doubt of its relationship to the dolls of voodoo, as Artaud's remark makes clear. Moving as of its own volition, it awakes an atavistic fear in its human counterpart that it could break free from its strings, having sucked a spark of living spirit from its animator and become golem.⁵¹ This unquenchable anxiety led to images being chained in order to prevent their moving of their own accord and to artists refraining from putting the finishing touches to their paintings for

⁵¹ Gervais details the extreme emotional effort demanded of the manipulator to transfer his spirit, (not dissimilar to the psychic transference practised by the attendant to Indian tricks of levitation):

Le métier de marionnettiste pour devenir un art exige un don total et permanent de soi. il faut allumer d'une flamme de vie ce corps minuscule. Puisez en vous largement et sans cesse. Dès qu'elle cesse d'être alimentée par votre feu intérieur la poupée s'éteint: l'être disparaît, il ne reste plus qu'un morceau de bois sculpté entouré d'étoffe (...). Le manipulateur ne peut s'abstraire des sentiments dont il veut donner le spectacle, sans qu'aussitôt ceux-ci évanouissent et meurent dans sa poupée. Il ne peut avoir la tête froide pour traduire une émotion. Il doit éprouver intensément en lui-même ce que la marionnette doit exprimer.

Gervais, op. cit. p. 52.

fear of them coming to life.⁵² Puppeteers of previous centuries have had to allay the fears of their audience's with comforting jingles such as the following, which dates from 1745:

“Que Pantin serait content
S'il avait l'art de vous plaire,
Que Pantin serait content
S'il vous plaisait en dansant.

C'est un garçon complaisant
Gaillard et divertissant
Et qui pour vous satisfaire
Se met en tout mouvement.

By contrast, Ubu's mechanical *pantins* or *palotins* are of the most macabre kind and their songs express their brutish nature. The Chanson du décervelage, which was sung all over Paris, expresses the ghoulish glee of the lip-licking crowd, that gathers to the guillotine, the electric chair or the gas chamber.

Here we see the first appearance of the Palotins, whose macabrely comic nature resides in their mechanical form of jacks-in-the-box, as specified by Bergson⁵³ :

Lentes, lentes, d'un mouvement invisible, rampaient visqueusement sur la scène sans plancher et précédaient Achras saluant d'effroi les trois caisses badigeonnées de sang de boeuf, les trois caisses de bagages de M. Ubu, juxtaposées et coalescentes comme les huîtres cramponnées à la même roche. Et soudain les trois, d'un hoquet convulsif bâillèrent, et la trinité hirsute des Palotins jaillit en un élan phallique. (PL I 184)

Jarry insists on at least two occasions that marionettes are an extension of the will of the manipulator. Ubu's *Palotins* embody Jarry's premonition of mechanisms invented by man as instruments of his evil will and which go beyond it, once set on their course, unencumbered by conscience or any system of ethics. It is a well-known fact that the possession of an obedient

⁵² Although encouraged by Marcel Schwob in the task of translating Robert Louis Stevenson, Jarry's choice of *Olalla* as his subject, which concerns a portrait that sometimes comes to life, is significant in this respect.

⁵³ “*Est comique tout arrangement d'actes et d'événements qui nous donne, insérés l'une dans l'autre, l'illusion de la vie et la sensation nette d'un agencement mécanique.*” [Bergson's italics]
Henri Bergson, Oeuvres complètes, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963, p. 419.

machine, henchman or instrument creates a distance between the human operator and the living organism that he wishes to kill or harm, allowing him a feeling of dispensation from full responsibility for actions which he would certainly shrink from committing with his bare hands.⁵⁴ Jarry describes this phenomenon very succinctly in *Visions actuelles et futures*, pointing out that any petty tyrant (“petit César”) can set up a Disembraining Machine for Sunday entertainment, providing he has obedient servants to operate it. Jarry illustrates this with a little chant, portraying the *Palotins* as rechargeable animated creatures made of inflatable rubber, (Fig. 21) but designed on the same principle as Hephaestos’ robots to carry out their Master’s will:

La locomotion de ces serviteurs caoutchoutés, génériquement Palotins, les seuls
Parfaits pour qui veut que sa Volonté s’érige loi souveraine. Ils sont
Mécaniques, et pourtant ne se remontent que par le repos comme

Des êtres animés, dans d’ophidiennes caisses en fer-blanc, dominicalement
Ouvertes. Et ils ont

Une volonté propre, parallèle plus loin prolongée

De la Volonté de leur maître.

(PL I 340)

[Jarry’s italics here indicate where the text should be chanted]

Here in his *Conférence sur les Pantins* of 1902, agreeing with the views of contemporary commentators that the actor distorts and dominates the intention of the dramatist, he further insists on the point we mentioned earlier, that the operator should have also been the creator of the marionettes in order to guarantee total control over them:

Nous ne savons pourquoi, nous nous sommes toujours ennuyés à ce qu’on appelle le Théâtre. Serait-ce que nous avons conscience que l’acteur, si génial soit-il, trahit - et d’autant plus qu’il est génial ou personnel - davantage la pensée du poète? Les marionnettes seules dont on est maître, souverain et Créateur, car il nous paraît

⁵⁴ See Giedion *op. cit.*, cited in Chapter 2, note 2.

indispensable de les avoir fabriquées soi-même,⁵⁵ traduisent, passivement et rudimentairement, ce qui est le schéma de l'exactitude, nos pensées. (PL I 422-3)

This is the same idea that Jarry expressed in 'L'Île amorphe,' the chapter of Faustroll dedicated to Franc-Nohain, that marionettes are a simple graphic representation of our thoughts. Jarry's mention of the sensation of power that the author-operator derives from his marionettes, reflects interestingly on his anxiety about maintaining control of the way that his thoughts and ideas are expressed - control that is lost through handing over one's text to wayward actors. Later, Jarry involuntarily makes an analogy between his marionettes and his revolver, both of which can translate thoughts through the twitch of a finger. André Breton felt that Jarry's revolver in fact represented for him the *trait-d'union* between reality and unreality. In his final novel, La Dragonne, where he projects his own feelings and experiences into the character, Erbrand Sacqueville, the following passage demonstrates the feeling of power that he derives from his gun, both over the material world, over the lives of others and over what he revealingly calls "outer shadows":

Et il en vint à vendre aussi la Chose qui permettait à un mouvement minuscule et souverain de son index de le faire partout et toujours maître de la vie de tous et prince des ténèbres extérieures: son revolver. (PL III 455)

These so-called "ténèbres extérieures" recall the threatening "forces extérieures" against which Sengle feels he has to protect his individuality (the concept of *invisible quintessence* that we mentioned on page 73.) Now these forces or shadows seem to have become so

⁵⁵ Jarry's insistence that the puppet should have been manufactured by the animator depends on the ancient belief in the power of a fetishistic image, as described by von Böhn as follows:

Ancestor image, idol, fetish, talisman, amulet, depend in their general conception upon the idea that the representation of a god or a demon or a man confers upon the person who makes the image and who calls by name the thing represented the power to make use of its strength or to influence it. On these grounds the law of Moses forbade, as idolatry, the making of images. With the image are associated ideas of a magic dwelling within it, a magic powerful enough to make use of the image. Thus it is that the doll, both among ancient and among modern peoples, plays an important part in magical practice. Generally the image is utilized for the purpose of doing harm to some one; seldom does one hear of images employed in order to do a good turn. The active agent undertaking a thing of this nature uses a symbolic magic which is in itself a copy or pantomimic suggestion of the result to be brought about by these means. The belief is that whatever one desires can be carried out in actuality.

von Böhn, op. cit., p. 56

pressing and the hero's resistance so frail, that a firearm is needed to disperse them.

Breton's term *trait d'union*, evoking a bridge with gaps at each end, is a useful one, and the analogy between marionette and gun as power objects also needs to be drawn. We have referred to the extra effort of concentration and acceptance of the unreal demanded of the spectator in order to forge a relationship with the marionette and to participate in its drama. Once this barrier has been crossed, it is impossible to return to regarding it as a lifeless object. The sensation persists that a life force drawn from either animator or spectator remains dormant within the wooden creature and can perhaps be reactivated of its own volition. Jarry expresses this primeval anxiety in his prose poem 'La Plainte de la Mandragore.' A rare magical plant, believed to be between the human and the plant and to spring from the semen of a hanged man, the mandrake, like the marionette needs a human hand to bring it to life and to free it from the bonds of gravity. (Fig. 27) Jarry tacitly acknowledges the analogy, bringing out the element of transference which means that, in imparting his spirit and the gift of motion to an inanimate creature, the human - here the poet or animator - changes places with it. First the mandrake intones its entreaty:

Je suis une plante et ne peux ramper, ramper comme un lierre, grimper comme un lierre sur les hauts piliers. Le fond de la terre me tient par les pieds. Nabot dont tu ris, Homme, mon grand frère je voudrais les ailes des chauves-souris (...)

then the man gives the fatal response that we have quoted before:

Et voici ma main qui cherche tes mains dont l'effort figé monte au zénith blême... mais sa main de gloire, en geste moqueur, flambe comme un phare; la rafale emporte son ricanement... le fond de la terre ME tient par les pieds. (PL I 176)

The theme of entrapment and downweightedness, here depicted, runs throughout Jarry's work, counterbalanced by the upward yearning, which takes its most conspicuous form in the poem, 'Le Sablier' and is represented by the graphic sign **Y**. The human dancer must always

fight against the weight of his body matter, whereas the marionette defies the downward pull of gravity, attaining a magical lightness and grace as Kleist so well described, supposedly reporting the words of an actual puppeteer:

These dolls have the advantage of being *weightless*. They know nothing of the inertness of matter, - about the most contradictory thing of all to dance - because the force that lifts them into the air is greater than that which chains them to the earth (...) Like elves, these dolls only need the ground as a point of *touch*, and to derive new animation through the momentary contact; we need it as a point of *support*, to rest and recover from the strain of the dance: a moment which is obviously not dance in itself, and, unless lightning swift, contributes absolutely nothing to it.⁵⁶

Jarry constantly emphasizes the characteristic heaviness of the human being as against the marionette. He depicts 'La Princesse Mandragore' weighed down by 'mules de carcan' as a metaphor of the human condition. Only trance or hallucination releases the human being from their gravity-bound state and helps them towards attaining the sacred state of marionette or god of which Kleist speaks. He depicts this liberation from gravity in his passages alluding to the escape of the astral body ('Opium' and 'Autre Jour') and in the important passage on Mnester's dance that forms the subject of our final chapter.

The yearning to escape the downward pull of matter and gravity, what Jean Starobinski calls the 'clod' state,⁵⁷ and which is linked to the motif of the autonomous or escaped marionette appears in satirical form in three of Jarry's articles, 'Les mœurs des noyés,' 'Communication d'un militaire' and 'De quelques animaux nuisibles'. All deal with an unaccountable resistance offered by apparently inanimate objects to human efforts to bring them back to solid ground from the alien elements of water and air to which they have

⁵⁶ Excerpt from Heinrich von Kleist, 'Über das Marionettentheater' in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 2er Band, Munich, Carl Hauser Verlag, 1961, p. 342, [my translation; Kleist's emphasis.]

⁵⁷ "D'immémoriale antiquité, le monde du théâtre populaire a cultivé, en même temps que les merveilles d'agilité, le comique de la balourdise. Si le clown anglais, dans le théâtre du XVe siècle, est l'héritier du diabolin Vice, s'il a parfois la vivacité infatigable, il est aussi (par son étymologie qui remonte à *clod* = motte de terre,) le rustaud, le lourdaud, l'être à la compréhension lente, le maladroit qui exécute de travers tout ce qu'on lui demande."

Starobinski, op. cit. p. 73.

escaped. The string or cord used as the means of retrieval is an obvious reference to the string used to control marionettes. The satirical tone cloaks Jarry's serious preoccupation with the fragile thread on which human relationships depend and which link soul to soul. In Les Jours et les Nuits the theme of the soul, which seems to be linked to the body by an equally frail thread, and its tendency to take leave of the body of its own accord, is more seriously treated. Ostensibly talking about kites, Jarry begins as follows:

Le volant est un oiseau remarquable par les plumes blanches, ou quelquefois de couleurs alternées, de sa queue, laquelle est de forme tronconique.

He goes on to describe the strange phenomenon whereby the apparently lifeless kite springs to life as soon as it touches the nets designed for the capture of birds:

L'animal et l'engin de sa capture sont le plus souvent, à l'époque actuelle, dans un état de torpeur curieuse; mais si on les met en contact réciproque, tous deux s'animent et cette résurrection n'est pas un phénomène plus étrange que le réveil de certaines bactéries desséchées auxquelles on fournit de l'eau. (PL I 351-2)

The related passage in Les Jours et les Nuits describes a rare state of happiness, which Jarry compares to a hashish-induced hallucination. But it is an evanescent, threatened happiness:

Et il lui souvient d'une promenade qu'il fit dans un bois avec son frère dans un état d'esprit tel que s'il avait pris du haschisch. Son corps marchait sous les arbres, matériel et bien articulé; et il ne savait quoi de fluide volait au-dessus, comme si un nuage eût été de glace, et ce devait être l'astral; et une autre chose plus tenue se déplaçait plus vers le ciel à trois cents mètres, l'âme peut-être, et un fil perceptible liait les deux cerfs-volants.

"Mon frère dit-il à Valens, ne me touche pas, car le fil s'interrompra aux arbres, comme lorsqu'on court avec le cerf-volant sous les poteaux du télégraphe; et il me semble que si cela arrivait, je mourrais." (PL I 749)

The weight of commentary attached to this text has swamped the freshness and truth of an undoubtedly real memory of Jarry's, deriving from the simple pleasure of a woodland walk with a loved companion. That it was a unique and highly charged incident, on which the

novel hinges, is clear from the fact that he returns to the memory in the crucial chapter, 'Sur la route de Dulcinée.' The happiness associated with this memory is bound up with earlier childhood memories associated with kite-flying and its frequent destruction through loss of the kite.⁵⁸ Jarry is deliberately vague as to whether the two dimly perceived floating forms are his astral body, attached to his own soul or the spiritual exhalations of the two physical forms on the ground. In any case the snapping of the kite's string through physical contact seems to be identified in Sengle's mind with the fracture of the thin communicating line between the two companion 'souls'. There is here an echo of the Orpheus theme: if Valens touches Sengle, the possibility of keeping the bond intact will vanish just as surely as Orpheus' hold on Eurydice when he turns to look at her.

We can also identify this episode with the psychic transference or *souffle animé* which passes from the puppet manipulator to the marionette by means of the fine strings. In his Lecture on Puppets Jarry relates this delicate action of persuasion to that of fishing or even typing:

On pêche à la ligne - du fil de fer (...) dont se servent les fleuristes - leurs gestes qui n'ont point les limites de la vulgaire humanité. On est devant - ou mieux au dessus de ce clavier comme à celui d'une machine à écrire⁵⁹ ... et les actions qu'on leur prête n'ont point de limites non plus. (PL I 423)

Jarry implies that the marionette is able to go beyond the small physical direction imparted by the manipulator, extending its gestures, which are the concrete expression of his thoughts, into the infinite or absolute rather as the kite soars into the upper atmosphere. Edward Gordon Craig's concept of the godlike *Über-marionette* put forward in 1911 is the natural extension

⁵⁸ Maurice Saillet's postface to the Mercure de France edition of *Les Jours et les Nuits*, 1964, pp. 217-223 clearly separates the childhood memory from the fashionable contemporary issues concerning the Double, the occult and drug-induced hallucinations and forms the base on which later commentaries have been laid.

⁵⁹ Although invented in 1808 by the Italian, Turri, as an aid to communication for a blind friend, magical connotations had accrued to the typewriter through the celebrated magician, John Nevil Maskelyne, who designed the first English machine and founded the Maskelyne Typewriter Company.

of this idea.⁶⁰ that we have already elaborated in Chapter 1 in relation to 'L'Homme à la Hache,' where Jarry implies that the graceful upswing of the native's axe continues upwards like a musical note, reaching from shore to sky in a gigantic mythical gesture.

No one was more eloquent than Bergson on the substance of the invisible impulse and the willed movement. His theories were reinforced and expanded by the young Valéry in his Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci of 1894. Valéry was preoccupied with the idea of the potential shape and the ability of the human mind to seize it. Writing about architecture he says:

L'être de pierre existe dans l'espace (...) l'édifice architectural interprète l'espace et conduit à des hypothèses sur sa nature, (...) L'espace, dès que nous voulons nous le figurer, cesse aussitôt d'être vide, se remplit d'une foule de constructions arbitraires.

Central to his thesis are the words of Leonardo da Vinci, mentioned in Chapter 1, which he translates as follows:

"L'air est rempli d'infinies lignes droites et rayonnantes, entrecroisées et tissées sans que l'une emprunte jamais le parcours d'une autre, et elles *représentent* pour chaque objet la vraie FORME de leur raison (de leur explication)"⁶¹

⁶⁰ "The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure - the Über-marionette we may call him until he has won for himself a better name (...) He is the descendant of the stone images of the old temples - he is today a rather degenerate form of god. (...) we must study to remake these images - no longer content with the puppet, we must create an über-marionette. The über-marionette will not compete with life - rather will it go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance - it will aim to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit."

Edward Gordon Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-marionette,' in On the Art of the Theatre, London, Heinemann, 1911, pp. 80-85.

The following description by Peter Schumann, founder of the American Bread and Puppet Theatre, expands on Jarry's idea of the limitations attaching to the human gesture, by comparison with the lack of limitation enjoyed by the marionette:

Les marionnettes exagèrent et purifient à la fois les mouvements du corps humain. Les mouvements de la main d'une marionnette suggèrent toutes les positions de mains que nous connaissons depuis la peinture chinoise, romane ou baroque, la simplification, l'élongation, la brutalité et la tendresse du geste, que jamais la main humaine avec ses limitations physiques ne pourra créer. La marionnette qui ne joue que de la main ou qui ne joue que de la tête, dramatise le mouvement de la main et de la tête au suprême degré. Tout se passe comme si les fonctions d'un seul corps étaient distribuées à plusieurs, élargissant ainsi chaque fonction singulière et lui donnant une vie qui a son sens propre.

Peter Schumann, 'Le Théâtre de marionnettes', Motive, February 1965, repr. in Françoise Kourilsky, Le Bread and Puppet Theatre, La Cité Éditeur, Lausanne, 1967, pp. 248-9.

⁶¹ Paul Valéry, Oeuvres I 1192 [Valéry's emphases]

Two of the youngest writers publishing in the 1890's, we can bracket Valéry and Jarry together as two very similar representatives of Bergsonian thought. Following Valéry's allegiance to Jarry's *Pantins*, this is no doubt why they were drawn together. Their ideas are symptomatic of the trend towards the spiritual and the abstract in European aesthetic thought which would lead to Kandinsky's slightly later concept of "seelische Vibration" - a vibrating core which reaches outwards from every work of art, music or word.⁶² As we shall show, the marionette is itself an abstraction.

Jarry's feller-boatman in his mythical form is able to carry his pursuit beyond the limits of his everyday fishing grounds to "la fin verte des lieues," possibly conceptualized as the same place that he later describes in his article on Régnier as "la limite de forces" and where the dynamism set in train by a movement or gesture reaches its ultimate attenuation, like the final effort of the wave on the sand. We should not, however, ignore a less grandiose interpretation of *l'homme à la hache* which relates to his puppet persona. Jarry used Javanese wayang-koelit shadow puppets as a point of reference when describing Georges Pissarro's woodcuts in an early exhibition review. These puppets are actually held in position on a wooden or horn framework which forms a kind of pedestal and have exaggeratedly long arms:

Une baguette de corne ou de bois fixée avec souplesse par une ficelle à chaque main, permet une animation particulièrement émouvante de ces longs bras, dont chaque mouvement prend sur l'écran une puissance dramatique insoupçonnée. Certaines silhouettes n'ont qu'un seul bras articulé.⁶³

The details of the pedestal and the mighty gesture of the Feller's upraised arm certainly lend themselves to an interpretation within the code of puppets, given Jarry's preference for the tangible every day, what he calls "l'observation la plus subtile de notre vie de tous les jours," (PL I 760) as against grandiloquent academism. He was also well aware of Gauguin's reliance on the Borobudur frieze of Java as a gesture resource for many of his paintings, if not

⁶² See Wassily Kandinsky, 'On Stage composition,' *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1974, pp. 190-1.

⁶³ Denis Bordat and Francis Boucrot, *Les Théâtres d'ombres*, Paris, L'Arche, 1956, pp. 17-18.

precisely L'Homme à la hache. The long coiled arm of Ubu depicted in Jarry's poster would also fit neatly to the requirements of the Javanese puppet theatre.

From his article, 'Barnum,' we know that Jarry gives an equivalent importance to all actions. It is therefore not surprising that he should have equated the manipulation of puppet strings with fishing. Thread, line or string are also equivalent to each other as a motif, whatever object they may be attached to. It acts as the magical cord joining reality to dream, the physical body to the astral body. Merely a faint magnetic tension between Eurydice and Orpheus, it takes physical form in the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur as the guideline back to the real world. It is the stuff of spiders' webs and gossamer with their entrapping and spell-binding connotations and of the silkworm's cocoon which wraps Valerius before his transfiguration as phoenix in Messaline. In Jarry's mind it enables the clumsy human hand to make a kite dance in the sky, attract and capture a swift, slippery creature hidden by shadows and reflections and give life to a limp doll. As conductor of an almost magical force, the motif of the life-giving silken thread is inseparable from the paradigm of the marionette.⁶⁴ With slightly different connotations, the significant *fil de soie* is used by Jarry as a metaphor in Le Surmâle for the thin needle of the speedometer, the imperious line, as commanding as any manipulator's wire, which provides the tension propelling the six-man team, bound at the

⁶⁴ The life-giving connotations of spun thread, perhaps connected with the Fate, Clotho, the spinner, are incongruously at their clearest in Valerius' death scene in which his thin stream of blood, likened to red silk thread denotes death, but, as we shall see in Chapter 6, combined with the metaphor of the cocoon, relate to metamorphosis and regeneration:

Alors, sur son lit de sieste, il enfonça obliquement le rasoir dans le côté de son cou et commença, soulevé sur son séant et la gorge raidie, de balancer de droite et de gauche la nudité de son crâne et la transparence de sa face qui laissait déjà voir au dedans la mort, imitant un ver qui monte pour filer. Et la soie ténue du sang de l'artère, par ce mouvement de navette, tissa sur le corps subitement sénile et les coussins blancs comme une barbe son linceul de pourpre. (PL II 101)

This macabre red thread is also associated with the precious woodland walk of Les Jours et les Nuits when the evocation of the astral bodies is linked by Jarry to the following Chinese legend :

Et il avait lu dans un livre chinois cette ethnologie d'un peuple étranger à la Chine, dont les têtes peuvent voler vers les arbres pour saisir des proies, reliées par le déroulement d'un peloton rouge, et reviennent ensuite s'adapter à leur collier sanglant. Mais il ne faut pas qu'un certain vent souffle, car le cordon rompu, la tête dévolerait outremer. (PL I 750)

In Chapter 1 we indicated Jarry's care to retain this unifying Chinese or oriental accent. Linda Klieger Stillman imputes narcissistic pathology to Jarry's inclusion of this legend about headless bodies. The present writer suspects a deliberate red herring diverting the questing academic from the far simpler explanation relating to the interchangeable heads of Chinese shadow puppets.

ankles by aluminium braces:

Le fil de soie de l'indicateur de vitesse tremblait toujours avec régularité, dessinant un fuseau vertical et bleu, contre la joue gauche de Corporal Gilbey, et je lus sur le cadran d'ivoire, ainsi qu'il était prévu pour cette heure-là quant au nombre de kilomètres à l'heure:

250

(PL II 221)

It is entirely from the speedometer that the cyclists derive their will to strive - their fuel. They therefore take on the characteristics of a machine and renounce their humanity. This is macabrely emphasized by Jarry when one of the team expires in the saddle, but is regarded as no more than a broken part of the machine, which carries on as before. The corpse then becomes truly mechanical, inspired by the motor force of the live team.

Two articles which are linked to the marionette motif and clearly written as a pair, deal with the macabre theme of floating corpses, something which impinged on Jarry's riverside summer existence. They are 'Les moeurs des noyés' and 'Communication d'un militaire.' The passive ragdoll limpness of these corpses floating down the river reminds Jarry of the uncontrolled puppet. Indeed the 'gestures' that he here attributes to them are devoid of any dynamism, "comme ayant perdu tout ressort." He enumerates these gestures as:

Des mouvements de tête, révérences, salamalecs, demi-culbutes et autres gestes courtois qu'ils affectionnent à la rencontre des hommes terriens. (PL II 357)

Like the enmeshed kite, the drowned corpse apparently springs to life at the moment of capture, as Jarry here describes:

Le noyé expérimenté, entendons avancé en âge, élude cependant la patience et la ruse du sauveteur. La loi autorise comme engin de pêche une corde passée sous les membres antérieurs de l'animal. Or le noyé adulte se défend, selon le terme technique, par *autotomie*: il coupe lui-même sur le fil le membre saisi, à l'exemple de la patte du crabe et de la queue du lézard. (PL II 361)

So here we have a portrayal of the intractable puppet. The cynical tone of these two articles betrays an underlying current of deep disillusionment with life. Both articles relate to people who have taken their own lives but in the second Jarry corrects his earlier statement that *noyés* do not travel in shoals, based on the evidence of the Boxer Rebellion and the thousands of corpses jamming Chinese rivers. The motif of the cord used by the living human to attempt to bring the corpse back by force to its natural element of dry ground and to extract it from the inimical water that had been, in many cases, voluntarily chosen by the once rational inhabitant of that corpse, is recognizably the string that jerks the marionette out of torpor. Once again the figure of the dead Eurydice comes to mind, the image of the dead, unrevivable woman that Jarry cannot quite suppress. This is no Sleeping Beauty who can be woken with a kiss, but Eurydice as depicted by Rilke, self-immersed and returned to a state of rootedness.⁶⁵ The marionette as *noyé* or *noyée* is not the same creature as the straining *marionnette-mandragore* who escapes from the entrapping earth with a diabolical and triumphant screech to wreak havoc in the mortal world, but a being that has escaped to death and which resists attempts to wrench it back by wilfully thwarting the manipulator. It is the uncooperative marionette. It not only refuses animation, it breaks.

Despite the fact that Les Jours et les Nuits is supposed to be a novel of escapism, the delicate image of the kite string linking soul and astral body expresses a young man's healthy fear of death and the destruction of happiness. In these later articles this has been replaced by a more macabre cynicism and turning away from life, where the author rejects the values of his fellow men and seems to identify with the uncooperative and spiritless marionette, more than the live 'rescuer,' whose act is motivated by a 25-franc bounty. In 'Les Moeurs des

⁶⁵ Rilke depicts a transformed Eurydice already too broken up and dispersed by her death to be revived as a whole living person:

Sie war schon aufgelöst wie langes Haar
und hingegeben wie gefallner Regen
und ausgeteilt wie hundertfacher Vorrat.

Sie war schon Wurzel.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes. Gedichte. Stuttgart, Reclam, 1966, p. 21.

noyés' the macabre details of the males and females bobbing up and down with their sexual organs and bellies exposed to view, the drowned men's spilt and wasted semen, described as "spawning," combined with the closing words, "C'est la vie" demonstrates Jarry's so-called *humour noir* at its most virulent. These images of the drowned would continue to haunt him.

The image of the floating and damaged, but adorned doll is driven to a much harsher point of sado-erotic suggestiveness in 'La Bataille de Morsang'. Indeed Jarry's *noyés* with their broken off limbs can be seen as a literary antecedent of Bellmer's macabre photographs of broken dolls. Jarry portrays a *trinité phallique* created by the lodging of a sword lily stem in the chest wound of the slain anti-heroine, Jeanne de Sabrenas, as she is dragged to the river by Erbrand Sacqueville, his alter ego. The chance adhesion of the flower thus recalls the action intentionally committed with metal. Dreamily contemplating the floating corpse, Sacqueville's personal erotic fantasy transforms the golden flower planted between the protruding outline of Jeanne's lace-clad breasts into the emblematic *fleur-de-lys*, previously deployed by Jarry as an emblem-character in *César-Antechrist*. Charlotte Jarry's notes show that Jarry asked for his article 'Les Mœurs des noyés,' in order to write the episode, a fact which evinces a near-obsessive preoccupation. In transposing it his tone has veered from the wily satirical to the grotesque-erotic.

5.8 The 'soul' of the mask

Jarry's ties his personal aesthetic to the theory of reverse mimesis. His fullest explanation of the marionette aesthetic, whereby the soul is worn on the outside as a "tic," is contained in the crucial article, 'Du mimétisme inverse chez les personnages de Henri de Régnier' that we first mentioned in Chapter 1. Using the snail's shell as an analogy, Jarry here demands that each character be attached to some exaggerated distinguishing mark :

Que chaque héros traîne après soi son décor, que nous ne voyions pas le prince de Pranzig sans sa redingote militaire, Mme Vitry sans ses joues pelées, l'aimable prince de Bercenay sans sa canne, le gros Bocquicourt sinon laissant passer quelque nudité,

M. Baragon sans qu'il soit affairé aux cordons de ses souliers, ni Mme Brignan sans qu'elle teigne ses cheveux... (PL II 416)

It is of course the technique of the caricaturist to take a single physical feature and exaggerate it out of all proportion to reality - what Jarry calls "a detail of the mask" and that he selects to represent the whole person, as he here explains:

Un écrivain est bien discret et bien sûr de lui - même s'il ne se sert, pour son dessein, que d'un détail du masque; ne nous plaignons point, puisque nous avons affaire à quelqu'un qui sait choisir le bon: de Cléopâtre, le nez suffit: on sait que le reste suit, à peu de distance. (PL II 417)

Following this principle, Jarry progressively reduced his characters to ever more fundamental types, dispensing with character names and concentrating on the body profile in his final playlets. The cast of Par la Taille is reduced to four standard puppet types: the Hunchback; the Giant; Everyman; and the Young Maiden.⁶⁶ His reaction against casting young women in the parts of angular teenage boys, although expressed in misogynistic terms, stems more from a professional distaste for the wrong body profile and the wrong gait on stage, which would be anathema to any marionettist. Jarry's objection to a "blurred line" which he attacks in 'De l'inutilité du théâtre au théâtre' as "la ligne estompée à tous les muscles par le tissu adipeux" (PL I 409) applies throughout his literary texts, which are remarkable for their sharp, clear silhouettes. As we stated in the introduction, the term *ligne estompée* that he here uses should be set firmly within the set of articles that he stood against, both in the theatre and in literature.

Jarry's call for actors to wear masks stems from the same conviction. He believed that the fluid and shifting human face exacts a weak audience response by comparison to a mask

⁶⁶ This accords very closely with the four main body positions which Gervais suggested as practice models for prospective glove puppeteers:

1. Young man with head held high, shoulders thrown back and chest sticking out.
2. Paunchy bourgeois with the palm of the hand simulating a protruding stomach and the index finger letting the head fall forward.
3. Old man with rounded back, held stiff at all times.
4. Hunchback with hanging arms and head sunk into the shoulders.

depicting a caricature or definite type, as he explains in the same passage.

L'acteur devra substituer à sa tête, au moyen d'un *masque* l'enfermant, l'effigie du PERSONNAGE, l'Avare, l'Hésitant, l'Avide entassant les crimes... (PL I 407)

Jarry moreover insists on a special voice timbre, as if moulded by the mask, which is a feature of the puppet theatre:

Il va sans dire que l'acteur ait une voix spéciale, qui est la voix du rôle, comme si la cavité de la bouche ou du masque ne pouvait émettre que ce que dirait le masque. (PL I 409)

He states a principle which the Dada group later found to be true, that the mask removes inhibitions, taking the wearer out of himself and carrying him effortlessly into total identification with the being of the mask, much as the puppeteer becomes one with his puppet - in Jarry's words, "L'acteur "se fait la tête", et devrait tout le corps du personnage." (PL I 407) His idea of the actor as effigy accords with Far Eastern precepts and also anticipates E.G. Craig's views on the so-called *Über-marionette* as invulnerable and deathless. We have previously mentioned the high value that Jarry placed on the eternal and the absolute. The eternal qualities represented by the mask are central to him, whilst the incidental minor variations of expression can be stage-managed, as he here suggests, by clever lighting:

Et si le caractère éternel du personnage est inclus au masque, il y a un moyen simple, parallèle au kaléidoscope et surtout au gyroscope, de *mettre en lumière*, un à un ou plusieurs ensemble, les moments accidentels (...) Par de lents hochements de haut en bas et bas en haut et librations latérales, l'acteur déplace les ombres sur toute la surface de son masque⁶⁷ (PL I 407-8)

These are indeed the principles of the Noh theatre, which Jarry also invokes.

⁶⁷ Jarry's following remark about exaggerating the lumpiness of an elderly and heavily made up actor's face by highlighting the protuberances with colour and the play of light until it almost turns into an assembly of cubes and salient surfaces, certainly looks forward to the experiments of the cubist and Dada painters, such as Léger, Metzinger, Picabia and Duchamp. Jarry's remark is worth quoting:

L'acteur suranné, masqué de fards peu proéminents, élève à une puissance chaque expression par les teintes et surtout les reliefs, puis à des cubes et exposants indéfinis par la LUMIERE. (PL I 407)

Our Fig. 26 demonstrates how puppeteers exaggerate the planes of the mask to express a single characteristic.

Lemercier de Neuville had written convincingly about the animating effects of light in creating the illusion of moving features upon the glove puppet's rigid features, as follows:

Vous pensez peut-être que leur face est immobile parce qu'elle est sculptée et inanimée? Il n'en est rien, car il y a l'oeil, fait d'un clou à facettes, sur lequel la lumière vient jouer et donner de l'animation; il y a la bouche entrouverte qui vue de face ou de profil semble parfois grimacer; et enfin le tremblement de la main levée qui soutient le personnage et donne la vie à tout son être.⁶⁸

His remarks on the play of light coincides with Jarry's views on the interplay of light and the planes of the mask. It is also quite noticeable that Jarry transposes the puppet manipulator's technique of using a trembling movement to indicate delicacy or frailty to his literary texts. He uses it for Varia in L'Amour absolu, for Claudius in Messaline and for Mr. Elson in Le Surmâle.

In Les Jours et les Nuits Jarry as Sengle bemoans the fluid quality of the human face and expresses his dissatisfaction about his own inability to fix the features of those he loves in his memory as follows:

Sengle était dépourvu de toute mémoire des figures et ne pouvait reconstruire, même en s'imaginant les calquer dans l'air, les traits de sa mère morte deux jours après la mort. (PL I 767)

As we have seen in Chapter 2, Jarry's exasperation about his memory's incapacity to retain a faithful image of the human face extends also to the failure of the photograph to transmit a sense of presence - to evoke the immediacy of a familiar living and breathing face which has been wrenched out of the frame of daily routine companionship.

Et il ne se souvenait pas du tout de la figure de Valens. Malgré trois ou quatre photographies, l'une du moment du départ. Les yeux fuyaient et la bouche muette était aussi monstrueuse que l'empaillage d'un oiseau. (PL I 767-8)

⁶⁸ Louis Lemercier de Neuville, Histoire anecdotique des marionnettes modernes, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1892 p. 97.

The emotion which can be sparked by the subtle patterns and resonance of a well-loved voice, and whose loss Jarry here expresses in the untitled poem which begins “*Je ne sais pas si mon frère m’oublie*” simply remains locked up in front of a series of photographs where the shifting features of the human face have been fixed in uncharacteristic expressions and which moreover offer no eye contact. This, Jarry’s most poignant poem, to which we referred in Chapter 2 seems prompted by an apparently genuine despair over an unrecoverable familiar presence:

*Je ne sais pas si mon frère m’oublie
Mais je me sens tout seul, immensément
Avec loin la chère tête apâlie
Dans les essais d’un souvenir qui ment.*

*J’ai son portrait devant moi sur la table
Je ne sais pas s’il était laid ou beau.
Le Double est vide et vain comme un tombeau.
J’ai perdu sa voix, sa voix adorable,*

*Juste et qui semble faite fausse exprès.
Peut-être il l’ignore, trésor posthume.
Hors de la lettre elle s’évoque, très
Soudain cassée et caressante plume.*

[The poem is italicized in Jarry’s text]

(PL I 768)

This convincing lyrical evocation of a lost familiar voice confounds those commentators who claim that Valens is simply a narcissitic representation of Jarry himself, two and a half years younger. Jarry’s text actually leads the reader into this erroneous psychoanalytical solution, as he immediately seeks to cover his tracks. Uncontrived and genuine, unique admission to experiencing a sensation “beyond words,” (“hors de la lettre elle s’évoque”) the poem must stand by itself as the author’s true voice.

In the climactic chapter of Les Jours et les Nuits, ‘Sur la route de Dulcinée,’ Jarry brings the debate of mask against face out of the context of the marionette or indeed normal theatre, into the larger philosophical realm. The scene that he develops is nevertheless provided with

a detailed soundtrack of what we might call associative *sound-memories* to induce hallucination and, as with Mnester's dance, conceived in terms of a performance. Jarry implicitly states his preference for the rigid, blank mask against the deceptive human face, as the receptacle or surface from which the imagination can most truly conjure the idea of the absent loved one. In Chapter 1 we mentioned the undoctored swirling wood grain which Gauguin's knife point merely stirred into the shapes that they suggested to him. Here, as evoked by Jarry, the bumpy white surface presents an ideal base plastic matter into which the artist's imagination can knead images, like the soft lumpy shapes of Cumulus and the white sheetscapes of hospital beds, constantly distorted into fantastic shapes through the filter of a high fever:

La figure blanche était tout à fait celle d'une chambre d'hôpital, bossuée de lits candides, les narines semblaient le soulèvement de genoux joints, et le front était tiré sur l'âme comme une couverture blanche. (PL I 834)

Jarry is here invoking the theory of Leonardo on the potential pictures that the imagination can make out of the stains on old walls, that we mentioned in Chapter 4. And, joining Valéry, he points to the power of the human imagination, to its strange ability to construct something out of nothing and to the unpredictable places where potential images can be found.

Jarry was an alert monitor of his audience, aware of the extra effort of concentration and imagination which has to go out from the spectators to meet the doll or the mask. The extra ingredient which is vital to building their illusion is the orchestration.⁶⁹ The sound which

⁶⁹ Making a comparison with Kandinsky, Didier Plassard confirms the important correlation between music and puppetry, sound and shape as follows:

Le rapport de la marionnette et de la musique ressemble fort, par conséquent, à celui que posait Kandinsky entre formes et couleurs. Il est possible d'établir, pour ces deux langages, une série d'analogies entre figures, timbres et rythmes, de même qu'entre le cercle et le bleu, le triangle et le jaune, le carré et le rouge. Les oeuvres qui prennent appui sur ces analogies en retirent une légitimité et une efficacité incomparables; mais celles qui s'en écartent créent un champ de tensions qui, parfois, se révèle plus fécond.

Didier Plassard, 'D'abord le tapage,' *Puck*, no. 6, 4e trimestre, 1993, p. 38.

See also Patrick Besnier, 'Tournant spirituel et tournant esthétique. (Kandinsky - Jarry - Schoenberg.) in Gwenhael Ponnau, *Fins de Siècle. Terme - évolution - révolution?*, Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1989, pp. 207-213.

guides Sengle into his trance is the slightly pulsating hiss of the paraffin lamp,⁷⁰ identified in his unconscious mind with the rhythmical grating of grasshoppers' wings on a hot day, indeed the sound-backcloth to the precious day of intimate companionship stowed in his memory. Sengle is transported into trance by the combination of sounds and colours associated with this day ("La lampe brûla sur la table rouge et respira son cri de grillon. Les murs étaient tendus de vert jaune...") and summons the spirit or *psyche* of Valens which his imagination projects onto the blank surface of the glowing plaster.

Once again the words "souffle" and 'âme' bear a high value as representing life and individual identity:

Valens se mit à apparaître et vivre. Il souleva un peu vers les coins extérieurs ses sourcils, garda les yeux baissés et *pleura un peu d'âme*, comme l'ombre d'une fumée, de ses cils par ses lèvres et son menton nus, vers Sengle. Et sa bouche pensa.
[my italics] (PL I 833)

Valens' soul or intelligence is poured from the mask's mouth like a precious elixir which assumes the shape of a butterfly, as if emerging wet from the chrysalis. Like a child, Sengle immediately takes the fragile thing into his protecting cupped hands. The question in the air is whether Sengle, the isolated individual, will be able to achieve at least token union with his absent friend's soul by meeting the mask's kiss, whose force or emanation is represented as a powerful vibrating glow of affection. Jarry indicates that the open lips of the glowing mask possess stronger communicative power than human ones:

Et l'on prouve physiquement que les lèvres moulées en plâtre sont plus éloquentes que les lèvres rouges: celles-ci boivent la lumière et sont réellement noires; la bouche du masque renvoyait vers Sengle le baiser de tous les soleils aspirés ensembles et de toutes les lampes épuisées sur la table des lectures. (PL I 833)

⁷⁰ The correlation of the senses and the influence of different types of music on the human psyche is clearly a subject of interest to Jarry. By design or coincidence, the sound here evoked matches that of the Japanese *shamisen*, which traditionally accompanies the Joruri puppet plays, described by Paul Claudel as "Cet instrument qui donne la vibration de nerfs pincés" and whose role, with the other primitive instruments used was crucial to the illusion of the performance:

[II] traduit non seulement l'émotion de la scène mais le désir d'exister, l'effort pour revivre de l'être imaginaire. Paul Claudel, 'Préface,' Tsunao Miyajima, *Contribution à une étude du théâtre japonais de poupées*, Kyoto, Institut franco-japonais de Kansai à Kyoto, 1931, p. 1-3.

As the scene draws to a close, Jarry evokes the associative sound effects of grating wingcases twice more, while successive and incomplete memory flashes become more rapid and uncontrolled. The visual and aural effects are carefully linked to the treasured experiences recounted in earlier chapters, while the shapes visible in the room merge through Sengle's delirium with their counterparts stored in his memory.⁷¹ We quoted the following passage in Chapter 1 in relation to the hypnotic effect of the ocellus outline. Now we can follow the progression of the first of two important associative shape cascades flowing from the imagined visual imprint of Valens' eyes to the suggested butterfly ocelli and finally down to the original *mare* image associated with his childhood:

Quand Valens était présent tout entier dans la chambre, son âme était un grand papillon brun-bleu, les ailes plus élevées vers les coins extérieurs, qui palpitaient du vol couplé de ses sourcils et de ses cils, découvrant la miraculeuse ocellure de ses yeux qui étaient deux mares noires.

Sengle était amoureux des mares et des bêtes qui volent sur les mares; on ne sait jamais, pensait-il *sur la route* de Saint-Anne, si l'on retrouvera des mares ou les mêmes mares. (PL I 834)

If we follow the argument proposed in Chapter 1, we can see that the archaic ornamental profile said to represent the sun, is the archetypal source image which sparks off this associative train. The second shape cascade is linked to the ancient pattern of the spiral or arabesque, said to be linked to growth and fertility and which was also discussed in Chapter 1 in the context of labyrinthine imagery. Sengle's associative train now runs from the shape of the lock of hair imprinted in the plaster of the mask's forehead, to the delicate curling tongue of the butterfly, then back to the plume-shaped trees silhouetted on the red horizon described in the chapter, 'Itinéraire,' - a triple burst of similar profiles whose cumulative force combines to suggest the irresistible gesture of the beckoning finger as follows:

Une boucle était restée sertie dans le plâtre d'un côté du front; sous la caresse de Sengle, le papillon merveilleux déroula vers lui sa spiritrompe qui était une plume

⁷¹ This recalls César-Antechrist's dictum, "les formes, seules réelles idées, meurent, naissent ou changent, et tout cela est la même chose." (PL I 292)

sombre frisée, comme les vieux arbres de la première désertion rêvée; et, vivant, il la recroquevilla comme on plie l'index pour faire signe qu'on vient. (PL I 834-5)

And now at the climactic emotional moment when Sengle is drawn forward to offer his fatal kiss, the meeting "libation of his soul", the insistent cicada music ("crissement d'élytres") quickens its beat and then flattens out:

Les élytres de la lampe stridulaient plus vite, et le bruit devint plus continu, comme un dernier trille.

This is a device straight from the marionette theatre and acts like a drum roll. We have heard it before, accompanying Achras's demise, described as a "bruissement clair" from the long-fingered harpist of Guignol and will hear it again, first when Mnester's barbaric chant drops to a low rustle, then again heralding the moment of Ellen Elson's collapse in Le Surmâle, as "une espèce de trille macabre, un interminable *krr...*" Sengle presses his lips to the incandescent mask, the table tilts and he falls to the floor amidst a mess of infectious skin-parings. The dream is broken.

This scene bears detailed examination since it represents Jarry's most serious examination of the concept of the mask as a stimulus to hallucination and an ancient magical device, which forms the very fundament of the attraction of marionettes from their most primitive origins until the present day. Jarry's views are remarkably close to those of Kandinsky, as we indicated above and it is worth quoting here his outstandingly similar theory stated in 'On the question of Form' ('Über die Form-frage') where he refers to the Outer Shell and the Inner Sound of the thing:

The emergent great realism is an effort to banish external artistic elements from painting and to embody the content of the work in a simple ("inartistic") representation of the simple solid object. Thus interpreted and fixed in the painting, the outer shell of the object and simultaneous cancelling of conventional and obtrusive beauty best reveal the inner sound of the thing. With the "artistic" reduced to a minimum, the soul of the object can be heard at its strongest through its shell because tasteful outer

beauty can no longer be a distraction.⁷²

As to the critical view of *Les Jours et les Nuits*, which generally perceives the story of the Sengle-Valens relationship as overt Narcissism and a personal statement by Jarry that he was in love with no-one but himself, this would be recklessly taking a secretive writer at face value. This complex psychoanalytical interpretation, at which Jarry mischievously connives, is refuted by the very simple and genuine poem, and by the workaday puppeteering equivalent to the Chinese legend of the flyaway heads. The quiet happiness expressed in 'Adelphisme et nostalgie' and in 'Consul Romanus' comes from companionship, not solitude. His poem 'Madrigal,' on the same theme, carries the same ring of sincerity, so difficult to discern in the rest of his work and bears the simple rhythms of Baudelaire's 'Invitation au voyage.' Here are the first four verses, which deserve quoting as a rare example of his untainted lyrical voice:

"Ma fille - ma, car vous êtes à tous
 Donc aucun d'eux ne fut valable maître,
 Dormez enfin, et fermons la fenêtre:
 La vie est close et nous sommes chez nous."

C'est un peu haut, le monde s'y termine
 Et l'absolu ne se peut plus nier;
 Il est si grand de venir le dernier,
 Puisque ce jour a lassé Messaline.

Vous voici seule et d'oreilles et d'yeux.
 Tomber souvent désapprend de descendre.
 Le bruit terrestre est loin, comme la cendre
 Gît inconnue à l'encens bleu des cieux.

Tel le clapotis des carpes nourries
 A Fontainebleau
 A des voix meurtries
 De baisers dans l'eau.

(PL II 545)

This poem is a beautiful evocation of a protected moment of companionship and rest, depicted by Jarry as a magic closed off capsule. The muffled noises of the outside world are

⁷² The *Blaue Reiter Almanac*, op. cit. pp. 161-2

compared to the plopping of well-fed carp at Fontainebleau, which leads Jarry to the image of kisses in the water - a rare evocation of intimacy. The idea of intimacy within a watery and sacred almost womb-like space recalls the strange shell-like *piscine* where Sengle and Valens swim together. Roland Barthes, in his chapter, 'Nautilus et Bateau ivre,' refers to this type of situation as "la jouissance de l'enfermement" and a rejection of the outside world, perceived only dimly through a sealed glass pane. It precisely describes Jarry's intention in this poem and in Chapter 6 we shall see another deliberate use of this "closing-off" technique in the scene which takes place in Claudius' underwater glass triclinium, scene of escape and *demi-réveil*.

We would therefore argue that Jarry placed a high value on companionship and that although he kept his relationships private, he was not the solitary and repressed individual that he is sometimes painted. He was perfectly up to date with the psychological theories of the day,⁷³ most of which derive from the familiar stories of ancient Greek literature. His novels hang too conveniently on the hooks of Narcissism, Adelphism, incest, nymphomania and female hysteria, not to raise the suspicion that these hooks have been deliberately provided to divert the reader from perceiving that the key experiences which affected him were actually very ordinary - a walk; a swim; a beach holiday - and Jarry had no intention of appearing ordinary.

5.9 Moving statues and the mechanical toy or *neurospastos*

Le Surmâle was published in 1901 as if in anticipation of Edward Gordon Craig's call for the *Über-marionette*, cited above, and within the philosophical framework of Nietzsche's vision of a higher general form of human being. Jarry's concept of a 'mechanical' man, capable of repeating any action indefinitely, derives from the *neurospastos*, moving statue of ancient Greek theatre and ancestor of the marionette. As the Supermale, André Marcueil is

⁷³ See Béhar, Les Cultures de Jarry, pp. 201-17 for exact references.

the epitome of Julian Offray de La Mettrie's idea of a human body with self-winding properties, set out in his L'Homme-machine of 1747.

The moving statue or mechanical toy is an extension of the concept of the escaped and autonomous marionette - a paradigm of the human condition in relation to God. Ahead of the age of the industrial machine, the mechanical toy had its heyday at the end of the nineteenth century and would never again achieve such intricacy and sophistication. Within this context the characters in Jarry's novels are perfectly understandable. Commentators have remarked on his lack of characterisation. Sengle, Roboam, Emmanuel, Valerius, Mnester, Marcueil and Erbrand Sacqueville have all been identified as aspects of their author. They are indeed conscious caricatures of himself, as the perfect athlete, endowed with awesome sexual potency. Writing now contemporaneously with Freud, Jarry chose to depict humans as conglomerations of molecules, powered by their sexual drives. The most distinct example of man and woman as sexual automata is played out by André Marcueil and Ellen Elson in the four penultimate chapters of Le Surmâle. They perform the standard scene of the puppet repertoire, 'Lovers' Meeting,' but over and over again, eighty and more times, like a needle stuck in the groove of the record.⁷⁴ Looking forward to the erotic rod puppets created by the Austrian artist and sculptor, Richard Teschner, (Fig. 28) they crash together like charging elks or Sumo wrestlers. The noise of their impact, described as follows, suggests that this couple is manufactured from harder materials than flesh and blood:

Et ils tombèrent l'un vers l'autre, leurs dents sonnèrent et le creux de leurs poitrines - ils étaient si absolument de la même taille - fit ventouse et retentit. (PL II 248)

Their similar height also suggests a standard hand-sized glove puppet.

Jarry's descriptions of Messalina's various encounters in the lupanar evoke the agility and

⁷⁴ Angela Carter has depicted a fictional puppet performance where the strings indeed become tangled and the marionettes are forced to repeat their kiss as long as the music continues. She also describes the noisy impact of the puppets as they engage.

See Angela Carter, The Magic Toyshop, London, Heinemann, 1967, p. 130.

exercises of a gymnast, rather than the coquettish and affected body language of seduction as represented by Varia. The sentence, “ Et il vint des hommes, et des hommes et des hommes” implies a ceaseless mechanical action. (PL II 79) At the end of Messalina’s working night, although the harsh sound of departing wings is supposed to mark the departure of the god Priapus, we sense the castelet curtain coming down, since Jarry repeats the same formula, “un strident bruit d’ailes déployés,” as at the end of ‘L’Autoclète’ in Guignol, his earliest published piece:

Le strident bruit d’éventail de la grande aile rouge du rideau qui se déploie. (PL I 185)

We have already mentioned Jarry’s careful insistence on a “mouvement de navette” evoking the typical side-to-side neck movement of the Indian or Sinhalese dancer, as Valerius the Asiatic takes his own life, but which betrays his alternative identity as a Chinese shadow puppet. These have interchangeable heads, which, moreover, endorses his phoenix-like regenerative capacity. They are also made out of transparent skin, a conspicuous detail in Jarry’s account of Valerius’ death. In the words of Bordat and Boucrot’s manual on shadow puppets: “Elles s’enfoncent dans une fente en forme de col aplati, le cou étant fait de deux feuilles de parchemin qui se superposent.”⁷⁵ The removal of the head would require the vigorous side to side movement that Jarry describes.

If not to the intimate circle of the Nabi puppet group, Jarry speaks directly to the chance specialist who may happen upon his texts and gain amusement from a subtext of down to earth details sprinkled amongst the erudite classical allusions. This subtext from his personal reality belongs to his happy category of *vérité bouffe* and demonstrates his characteristic double use of metaphor to refer to the practical and particular as well as to the universal.

Meanwhile the toy identity of Mnester, spinning and spinning on the nape of his neck is indicated by the description of his chant as “le vrombissement croissant d’une toupie d’airain.”

⁷⁵ Bordat and Boucrot, op. cit. p. 10.

Chapuis and Gelis moreover cite the mercury-filled eighteenth-century clockwork toy, known as the *culbuteur chinois*, described by most authors of *Physique amusante*, which emulated the backward or forward flips of the *saut périlleux*.⁷⁶ Jarry's lifetime spanned the so-called Golden Age of the mechanical toy which ended with the First World War. The mechanical double of the waltzing couple described in his article 'Balistique de la danse' was an actual creation of the father and son partnership, Gustave and Henry Vichy, who worked in Paris. Equally ingenious were the creations of the mechanical toymaker Alexandre Théroutte.⁷⁷ Jarry would therefore have been justified in looking forward to a steady development in the mechanical theatre, of which he might have taken advantage.⁷⁸ His exact stage directions concerning sound effects and movements for both *Messaline* and *Le Surmâle* tend to support this view, as does his vision that spectators would one day derive their excitement from whirling round the acrobat, reducing the need for him to risk his own life. The acrobat, Diavolo's Looping the Loop stunt formed the basis for the similar scene in *Le Surmâle* about which Jarry wrote in 1903 :

Nous estimons que d'ici peu de mois, des montagnes russes nouvelles adopteront ce système où ce seront des spectateurs, dans des fauteuils wagnonnets, qui tourbillonneront autour d'un "acrobate" immobile. (PL II 674)

Jarry's *Revue blanche* column of 1902, written under the heading 'Gestes,' has a heavily ironical tone, based entirely on a mechanistic view of man, which heralds the cynical Beckettian *va-et-vient* perception of humans as an ant-like mass, rushing purposelessly backwards and forwards. His articles on kites and the drowned fall into this category. In

⁷⁶ "Il faut renverser en arrière le personnage qui s'appuie de ses mains sur lesquelles il se tient verticalement. Des fils de soie dissimulés, agissent sur les pieds, qui sont plus éloignés du centre de gravité que le mercure (...) Le mouvement de bascule continue et la figurine descend de gradin en gradin jusque sur la table où elle s'immobilise allongée."

Alfred Chapuis and Ed. Gelis, *Le Monde des automates*, vol. II, Neuchâtel, Editions du Griffon, 1928, p. 23.

⁷⁷ See Christian Bailly, *Automata: The Golden Age, 1848-1914*, London, Sothebys Publications, 1987.

⁷⁸ The Mechanical Theatre realized by the Italian Futurists, Fortunato Depero, Ivo Paneagi and Vinicio Paladini was eventually succeeded by the 'Théâtre mécanique' of Harry Kramer. See Hulten, op. cit. p. 470 and Günter Metken, 'Entre La Marionnette et la machine. Le théâtre mécanique de Harry Kramer,' *Puck*, no. 1, 1979, pp. 54-56.

'Balistique de la danse' and 'Battre les femmes' Jarry likewise lays his subject bare of any humanitarian, emotional or spiritual values, in caricatured imitation of the social attitudes and laws that he observes in operation around him. The full force of these becomes apparent when set against his sympathetic articles supporting marginalized clowns, acrobats and artists, such as Juno Salmo and Auguste Ravier and even Pierre Bonnard. Loïe Fuller, who happens to incarnate a stock mechanical toy known as the Serpentine Dancer,⁷⁹ whose effects were enhanced by chromatropes (magic lanterns) projecting a galaxy of colours on to her undulating white dress as climax to many travelling shows, is notably absent.

5.10 Jarry's *gestes rayonnants* and Valéry's *lignes de force*.

We have to go back to earlier texts to find a more sensitive and serious treatment of the moving statue motif. These are 'L'Homme à la Hache,' 'Le Sablier,' and 'Consul Romanus' written between 1894 and 1897. Regardless of chronology, we may take Jarry/Sengle's glowing memory picture of his friend Valens as the core ember from which the 'Statue poems,' 'L'Homme à la Hache' and 'Le Chant de Mnester' radiate. Here is the relevant passage:

Valens nagea, puis il fut debout au milieu de l'eau pas profonde, glabre et d'or comme une statuette, avec les cheveux pareils à un trou sur la fumée chaude, et qu'essayait d'imiter le minéral. Si l'on pouvait raboter le diamant noir, il s'était coiffé des copeaux. (PL I 779)

Jarry makes the analogy with moving limbed statues of gods quite explicit by referring to what he terms "silver skeletons", brought out at the beginning of certain festivals. He imposes this metaphor of his own on Gauguin's native woodcutter. The additional analogy of the pursuing Roman emperor in his chariot is typical of his technique of liberating the image from its fixed form. The god is allowed to step from the marble pedestal to his swift boat. Flux follows stasis. The gesture of raising the axe is seen as a hieroglyph imprinted on the sky.

⁷⁹Böhmer, op. cit p. 44.

Indeed Gauguin had 'collected' it as a precious archaic outline from the west frieze of the Parthenon.⁸⁰ Jarry intends to encapsulate the perfect notion of virility in the upswing of the axe, and, if we follow the idea that he expresses about the "rayonnement musical" emanating from Régnier's characters, he envisages the 'ripple profile' of the gesture travelling onwards to the "limits of force," as he says here:

Comme les cercles d'ondes qui s'écartent d'une pierre jetée, non seulement le milieu immédiat, mais de plus amples circoncentricités. (PL II 416)

In Chapter 1 we mentioned Jarry's tendency to describe air as if it were a resistant material and the closeness of his ideas to Valéry's mentioned before, who talks of "l'émission d'une image" which he perceives in psychic terms and here of the ancient power to perform "actions à distance:"

Une action à distance est une chose inimaginable. C'est par une abstraction que nous la déterminons.

Valéry later appended this significant marginal commentary:

*Comme je l'ai dit plus haut, les phénomènes de l'imagerie mentale sont fort peu étudiés. Je maintiens mon sentiment de leur importance. Je prétends que certaines lois propres à ces phénomènes sont essentielles et d'une généralité extraordinaire; que les variations des images, les restrictions imposées à ces variations, les productions spontanées d'images-réponses, ou complémentaires, permettent de rejoindre des mondes aussi distincts que ceux du rêve, de l'état mystique, de la déduction par analogie.*⁸¹

⁸⁰ Bearing in mind that Gauguin also cherished photographs of the Borobudur frieze, André Levinson, the dance expert, argued that the 12th-century reliefs of Tjandi-Panataran in Java imitate the *Wayang-golek* silhouettes, which he identifies as the model and source of the sacramental plays performed by living dancers. The puppets must therefore have been used to record and immortalize the archaic gestures of sacred dance as he here suggests:

The idol of stone and the living statue emanate from the same spirit and reproduce the same consecrated rites. They obey the same general laws of rhythm and symmetrical balance, which are the function of all plastic harmonies.

André Levinson, 'Javanese Dancing: The Spirit and the Form.' *Theatre Arts Monthly*, December, 1930 reprinted in Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola, *André Levinson on Dance*, Hanover & London, Wesleyan University Press, 1991.

⁸¹ Valéry, *Oeuvres* 1193-4 [Valéry's emboldening]

Both men had been influenced by the theories of the scientist, Michael Faraday, whom Valéry credits with having seen systems of lines projecting from and uniting all the bodies in space and which he calls *lignes de force*, tying in with Jarry's concept of *limites de force*, or *couronne* where all these hypothetical lines meet.

It is difficult to assemble a precise code of gestures from Jarry's texts, which might correspond to those he deployed in the marionette theatre. The only sign system that he sets out displays his own gift of imaginative interpretation of gesture, rather than a set range that he deploys himself. This is his interpretation of the different fencing positions, to which he gives the form of a recitation with organ accompaniment in Le Vieux de la montagne:

Prime, le geste de la pudeur;
seconde, le geste du rameur;
tierce, le dragon qui grimpe l'arbre;
quarte, le tondeur qui coupe la barbe ;
quinte, le bûcheron qui abat l'arbre
sixte, le soldat qui tire avec son arbalète;
septime, le faucheur qui ampute les jambes;
octave, la Mort qui rompt les cordes de la harpe. (PL I 900)

Despite the few indications given by Lemercier de Neuville, professional puppeteers tend to claim that no such general code exists and that the most effective gestures have to be discovered by constant experiment and rehearsal.

The poem 'Le Sablier' provides the most powerful gestural impact of all Jarry's poetry, with the refrain:

Hausse tes bras noirs calcinés
 Pour trop compter l'heure aux damnés.
 (...)
 Hausse tes bras infatigués
 comme des troncs d'arbres élagués. (PL I 245)

As we have said before, the upraised arms signify the ancient gesture of supplication from man

to god. We also see it in Rodin's 'Ephèbe adorant.' The unnamed victim of 'Le Sablier' is, however, hung in the martyred position of crucifixion, as Christ, Odin or Marsyas. The mandrake is to Jarry what the Mantis is to Dalí and Caillois. Both are "praying" or entreating, but also carry a sinister charge. We can perceive an attention to the positions of hands and arms throughout Jarry's texts: the hands clasped on the knees denoting restful contentment and absorption in 'Consul Romanus,' the burrowing white *bras-serpents* of Varia as Vamp in *L'Amour absolu*. But hand gestures or *chironomia*, beloved of Blake, are given the same attention as gait, tread and the movement of the whole body. Jarry does not exclude any part of the body from the task of expressing ideas. The entire instrument must participate. As we shall see in Chapter 6, Mnester, the mime, gives his whole body to the erotic pantomimic undulation of the *Sikinnis* dance, in which individual steps and gestures have no role.

Mnester stands apart from all Jarry's stock characters as a shifting, mobile sign. His aspect changes from snake, to spinning top, to hermetic egg. Where does the boundary between the fixed profile of the marionette and the fluctuating identity of the acrobat come? What is the difference between the marionette as a graphic symbol and the acrobat? ⁸² The answer to this question lies in the identity of the one as an abstract if not sacred hieroglyph and in the changeability of the other - it is the difference between one and zero. The marionette is a simple reusable vessel, whose infinite capacity for repair gives it an eternal aspect and with a **signifying**, unchanging mask. The acrobat is a mobile and marvellous ever-changing hieroglyph, but his still body signifies nothing. The acrobat represents movement and change itself and Messalina cannot obtain or reconstitute the secret of Mnester's genius by imprisonment, interrogation or by casting his likeness in a single pose. We have returned to

⁸² The dance theoretician Susan Manning sees the body mask functioning as the puppet and the performer as the puppeteer. Speaking of Sophie Täuber Arp's "abstract dances" and Mary Wigman's Witch Dances, she argues that the body mask has the effect of dematerializing and desexualizing the body, so that the dance plays on the tension between the gendered performer and the genderless *Gestalt*.

Susan A. Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon. Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 71-2.

the puzzle of the trapped ornamental sign, which is the subject of Chapter 1 and upon which Jarry exerted the force of his liberating imagination. The bronze memento merely represents a single glyph - the magic language of the moving dancer's body vanishes more quickly than the trail of a shooting star and at the end of the dance his body represents nothing.

5.11 Conclusion

The concept of physical expressivity according to Mark Franko's definition is "an external corporal trace of a secret event hidden from view, the scene of emotion's hidden impact on the soul."⁸³ The marionette or puppet expresses precisely this impact in distinct and exaggerated schematic form, like an *intaglio*. Indeed the forms of the Wayang puppets are **punched** out of the leather.⁸⁴ In Jarry's mind the emotion or thought powers the physical gesture, which in turn punches the viscous air, and sends ever-expanding ripples to some outer region of the universe. As we have seen, he also talks of the *enveloppe chatoyante* or halo which a powerful or exuberant personality projects, bonding itself to and magnifying its particular silhouette. The puppet silhouette is a duplication of this.

Jarry's thinking points to contemporary ideas about the astral body, conceived as "Thoughtforms" and expressed as abstract paintings by the theosophists, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater,⁸⁵ which, for example, depict "selfish ambition" as a tentacular form and "watchful and angry jealousy" in a form of a sharp snake's tail, disconcertingly poised in the aggressive striking stance of the sighted head. (Fig. 30) Let us remember Jarry's own perception of his astral body floating with Kleistian weightlessness above the idyll of the

⁸³ Mark Franko, *Dance as Text. Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 145.

⁸⁴ Claudel too emphasises the sense of a violent impact involved in the creation of a mask:

Partout dans les *Nô*, le masque a la même fonction qui est de placer le personnage à l'abri du temps actuel, de le consolider pour toujours dans la passion dont il est la forme, dans l'âge dont il est le symbole, dans l'événement historique ou fabuleux dont il fut l'artisan. Entre lui et nous, entre le *Shité* et le *Waki*, il y a ce masque dur et inaltérable, le sceau définitif de ce qui n'est plus capable de changer. L'expression japonaise n'était pas "sculpter" mais "frapper" un masque.

Claudel op. cit. p. 90.

⁸⁵ C. W. Leadbeater and A. Besant, *Thought-Forms*, in *Lucifer*, September, 1896, repr. London, 1905.

summers' day walk:

Et il ne savait quoi de fluide volait au-dessus, comme si un nuage eût été de glace, et
ce devait être l'astral. (PL I 749)

We have previously mentioned Kandinsky's painting, The Woman in Moscow, in relation to the "etheric aura" of colour which encloses the woman and which matches Jarry's idea of the "coruscating envelope." Jarry's above description rather accurately describes the indeterminate shape floating above the woman's head. (Fig. 31) Is this the spirit escaped from its *ganguie* or limiting sheath? It is certainly what Jarry would describe as a "nebulous" shape, the very antithesis of the marionette or the shadow puppet. Although he is never explicit on this point, we can see, by assembling his various texts that there is an underlying belief in a kind of divine repertoire of shapes or finite alphabet, much as Caillois describes, which unmistakably expresses certain types of spirit or thought, almost as a caricature. The outlines of archaic ornament express these fundamental concepts, as much as the stark silhouettes of the marionette theatre. The various outlines act as vases or foci for particular distinct spiritual forces, such as evil and can be 'read.' It is the puppeteer's task to project the force within the marionette towards the audience. This requires the activating spark of his own energy and spirit and is easier to perform if he has manufactured the marionette himself. With his own marionettes, the *opérante* can convey his ideas in pure schematic form, whereas the unpredictable personality of the living actor adheres to the character he tries to interpret and will always complicate and blur the original idea of the dramatist, causing the *ligne estompée* or "nebulous" effect that irritated Jarry

The occult character of the marionette as a spirit receptacle is nevertheless secondary to its malleability as a satirical weapon, which made it the focus of Jarry's passion. As ever more mechanical means of killing and torture became available, the figure of Ubu gave shape to the shapeless shadow of the potential twentieth-century dictator. The thundering tread of Ubu

depicted as dragon in the poem 'Le Bain du roi,' ("Son lard tremble à sa marche et la terre a son souffle") evokes the "cadence des monnayeurs" and "masse des monnayeurs" which is a repeated motif in *Haldernablou*.⁸⁶ The only way to dematerialize the shadow was through laughter. For Jarry the English clown and the marionette were the last heirs to the ancient burlesque tradition, without which society cannot cleanse itself. To bestow the cleansing gift of laughter is the final and most important function of the marionette. As their creator and animator, Jarry participated in this sacred function. Indeed the abstract marionette is a higher being than the clown and the acrobat who, by virtue of their mortality, are society's traditional sacrificial victims. The shadow of mortal peril always falls across the acrobat and it is their closeness to death, as much as their skill that constitutes the thrill of their act.

Jarry rated both the acrobat and the marionette as superior to the flesh and blood actor. His admiration for the acrobat rests on their moral superiority, not only by virtue of the risk of the profession (and we shall see that he regards their role as the same as that of the Roman gladiator) but their disregard of personal fame. Representing a selfless asceticism, he remarks that their appallingly dangerous acts are carried out not only in total anonymity, but regardless of whether the spectators' attention is on them or not. The acrobatic act consists of beautiful and terrible patterns. The marionette, on the other hand, is a vehicle of communication and superior to the actor by virtue of the fact that, if made by the animator himself, it will transmit his thoughts in their purest concrete form. In both cases Jarry implicitly censures the vogue of stardom which puts the actor's personality above the beauty of the act or the purity of the text. Given the constant doubts that he expresses about the unbridgeable gap between writer and reader, definitely the most important implication contained in the short fragment from his *Conference on Puppets* is that, as a vehicle of communication, the marionette is more potent than picture, performing actor or the written word.

⁸⁶ Starobinski sees the acrobatic feat as allegorical equivalent of the poetic act, whose selfless virtue shines out in the materialist age which Jarry's phrase evokes and which Starobinski describes as "un siècle en proie aux puissances d'argent, où on n'entend plus que le râle de la roulette et de la banque." Starobinski, *op. cit.* p. 33.

CHAPTER 6 THE WRITER AS ECSTATIC DANCER IN *MESSALINE*: UNITING THE SACRED AND THE OBSCENE

Ponder, consider, roll yourself up in a ball
and whirl about any way you can. And if you fall
into perplexity, jump quickly off on another line of thought.
Don't let sleep, honey of the soul,
take its place on your eyes.

Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 700-5.

6.1 Introduction

We end this thesis on Alfred Jarry's work with a chapter on dance, since it draws together many of the themes of the preceding chapters and provides a clear, well-bounded context for Jarry's aesthetic views as a mature writer. Dancing, as a form of physical expression, and therefore a language of the body, more direct than writing, was of deepest concern to him in his personal tussle with the matter of writer-reader communication. As a more fluent medium, which uses the living body as the vehicle of communication, the language of dance is a natural extension of the schematic, segmented sign language of marionettes where the human body is only represented by the medium of communication. Jarry's innovation is to express the dance both as a manifestation of the obscene and also a potent form of spiritual expression. As we shall see, the dancer constitutes a neutral sign who draws down the 'thunderbolt' of divine poetic inspiration. This can be interpreted from two points of view: the vulgar and the esoteric. Of all the themes covered in this thesis, dance is the one where Jarry expresses himself most seriously. He presents an image of dance at its most primitive, as a force of disruption, with no hand gestures, no steps and no wafting garments or veils: it is the pure movement of the naked human body in its entirety expressed as art, following the ancient Greek principle of gymnastics, as expressed in its root, *γυμνος* = naked and which we can call gymnic dance. Although the dance motif surfaces at several points in his poetry, it is not until the novel, *Messaline* that Jarry develops his thinking on dance as an extension of and

indeed a purer form of poetry. In her book, The Art of Dance in French Literature, Deirdre Priddin arrives at an important definition of dancing which declares the impossibility of attaining to truth by means of thought alone and supports Jarry's arguments in favour of using physical speed and danger to stimulate thought processes:

Dancing then is a symbol of all the arts in that action comes to the aid of thought, which alone is incapable of entering into contact with reality and so of reaching truth (...)

She cites Socrates's argument favouring action as the most direct route to the godhead:

The God reached through words is but word born of word and returns to word (...) But on the contrary it is in acts and in the combination of acts that we should find the most immediate sense of the divine presence and best use of that part of our strength which is unnecessary for living and which seems reserved for the pursuit of an indefinable object which infinitely surpasses us.¹

This reaching out for the indefinable is first signified by Jarry's "upraised arms" emblem, which stamps the front cover of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial. Later the chapter, "Il dansait quelquefois la nuit" shows the dancer-writer dancing both for himself and as an act of communication with the spirit world, while the avid, non-understanding reader-audience seek their titillation either in the sexual suggestiveness of the dance or in the personal risk which the dancer faces through performing dangerous physical feats. The question of understanding the artist is also posed by the figure of an avid spectator through Jarry's fictitious portrayal of the empress, Messalina, who seeks to understand, to "open" the artist by possessing him. In the novel, Messaline, the dancer is imprisoned, tortured, drugged and finally executed but keeps his personal integrity intact. Mnester remains a hermetic, variable sign, with no single interpretation.

A debate had been in train since the eighteenth century as to the true function of dance. The debate rested on whether the dance should be an expression of emotion or whether it

¹ Deirdre Priddin, The Art of the Dance in French Literature, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1952, p. 139.

should be limited to body motion, pure and simple. Louis de Cahusac, the eighteenth-century dance theorist, had written on ancient and modern dance, setting out the superiority of the ancient dance and particularly the Roman pantomime over the strict forms and rhythms of the French dance.² Consciously or unconsciously, Jarry's argument in the novel Messaline upholds the same view. The central figure of Mnester, the Roman mime resurrected and reconstructed by Jarry as the foil to Messalina, has not previously been analysed with reference to this debate, nor in the context of Mallarmé's writings on the dance which grapple with its double aspect.

Mallarmé's unfinished and posthumously published text of Le Livre contains many diagrams of ballets, juxtaposed with arcane poems, which expressed his intention of transposing poetry into dance. His idea of the dance as a religious rite ("rite ...énoncé de l'idée") eventually took precedence over his earlier, but better known pronouncements about dance as body writing, mainly written in relation to the performances of Elena Cornalba in 1886 and Loie Fuller in 1893. Between the 1880s and the period of 1893-8 which corresponds to that of Jarry's few but lengthy and intense conversations with Mallarmé,³ his ideas had been far from static.

Chapter VII of Messaline, 'Il dansait quelquefois la nuit' represents Jarry's fullest examination of the question of the performer <> audience relationship, which must be seen in terms of the writer and his readership. The implicit tragedy in this scene is the artist's necessity to waste his talent and energy on an uncomprehending audience. We have seen how Jarry constantly fought against the practical requirement of appealing to a readership, upon whom he was dependent for a living. Again and again he demonstrates his scorn for the resistance to the difficult or unfamiliar shown by the general public, to which, as we have seen, he refers as

² Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola ed., André Levinson on Dance, Hanover and London, Wesleyan University Press, 1991, p. 78.

³ Several writers (Albert Haas and Annette Vaillant) attest to Jarry's occasional attendance at Mallarmé's mardis and sustained conversation with him. Jarry's 'De l'île de Ptyx' immortalises his own memory of these. Their artistic understanding is demonstrated by Mallarmé's letters to Jarry containing sensitive appraisals of Ubu roi and the complimentary copies of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial and L'Ymagier that Jarry sent him.

la grande héméralope, and their prurient tastes. Although only twenty-six when he wrote *Messaline*, Jarry had already spent three full years living hand to mouth and could see his future only too clearly. Through the ascetic and uncompromising figure of the dancer Mnester, he demonstrates a foreknowledge of his own failure to be understood within his lifetime. Jarry places conspicuous physical cues to link Mnester to himself. The evidence suggests that he was responding to Mallarmé's call for writers to sanctify themselves and their work through transfiguration in a sacrificial dance.⁴ There is also a strong accent of Indian religious culture in this chapter, combining the sacred, the ecstatic and the obscene. As early as 1894 in his review of Gourmont's novels, Jarry had alluded to the tradition of the temple prostitute - the religious requirement that each woman must offer herself to the first comer at the temple gate. The idea that Jarry here presents of the 'pure prostitute' ("la plus prostituée est la plus belle") (PL I 1101) is one that he develops in the poem 'Madrigal' :

La boue à peine a baisé la chaussure
De votre pied infinitésimal,
Et c'est d'avoir mordu dans tout le mal
Qui vous a fait une bouche si pure.

(PL II 545)

By virtue of her minute foot, the figure in this poem is linked to the statue of the Breton Madonna at the end of *L'Amour absolu*, who, victorious over evil, places her *petit talon* symbolically on the head of the sea serpent, Leviathan. Although the historical figure of Messalina is evoked in the poem, this role of 'pure prostitute' is not applicable to Jarry's portrayal of a predatory, insatiable and stinking Messalina. The religious role is transposed to the mime, Mnester, by virtue of the austere discipline of his profession and the shamanistic nature of his dance. On the strength of 'Il dansait quelquefois la nuit' alone Jarry deserves to be allocated a place between Mallarmé and Valéry in the chronology of French writing on dance, not only for the imaginative power of his writing but for the intellectual argument that he presents through his complex metaphorical exposition of the dance as a form of communication and as a sacred rite.

⁴Stéphane Mallarmé, 'L'Action restreinte,' *La Revue blanche*, 1 fév. 1895, OC 369-73.

Writer and dancer are depicted as one. Mnester "writes" like a moving finger in the sand of the Roman arena - in the impermanent and shifting sand of oblivion which, as we showed in Chapter 2, is one of the most pervasive metaphors of Jarry's early work. Although we shall be arguing that Jarry does not usually depict the dance in terms of lightness and evanescence, as Mallarmé and Valéry do, there are powerful connotations generated by the combination of the words *sable* and *danse* which evokes whirling desert sandstorms, mirages and dervishes, all pertinent to this chapter.

As we saw in Chapters 1 and 4, the Empress Messalina, who watches Mnester's dance, represents the corrupt city of Rome itself. Because of his adamant refusal to make love with her, Jarry's Messalina contrives, as consort of the potentate, to have him imprisoned and beaten in a near parallel to the story of Herod's wife and John the Baptist. The patterning of his skin after flogging, in Messalina's imagination, described by Jarry as a trellis of blood-red crescents, evokes stylized mediaeval portrayals of Christ after his flagellation.⁵ The irony, indeed the tragedy of Jarry's act of writing Messaline, is that it was seen by contemporaries such as Gide as a pornographic novel, written for money, and thus a compromise of the writer's principles. In fact it was an uncompromising satire aimed at the very people who might have bought it and, in its moral structure and mood, with a distinct flavour of Mallarmé's Hérodiade and his unfinished Les Noces d'Hérodiade.

Unlike contemporary commentators on dance, Jarry sought models in other cultures and drew on both the oriental concept of ecstatic dance and that of the circus acrobat, turning away from western models of the female dancer-performer. His name is not at all associated with the discussions on dance which were current in French literary and artistic circles at the turn of the century. He made few comments about the famous solo dancers of the day, yet his work reveals a lifelong interest in the phenomenon of dance, both in its ability to induce trance or ecstasy through rapid physical motion and in its links to antique statuary and art

⁵ Examples are reproduced in L'Ymagier no. 1

through its use of an ancient trans-cultural code of gesture and pose. His reference to six main frontal positions of the head and six in profile to indicate the full gamut of emotions, as cited in the last chapter, proves his familiarity with this code. Like Valéry, he had followed Mallarmé's arguments closely and his portrayal of Mnester refracts these to some extent. Contextualising Jarry's thinking against the ideas of Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Valéry, as well as archaic writers, this chapter will draw together the threads of the previous chapters to show how Jarry, as a mature writer, had developed a very idiosyncratic perception of the writer as dancer.

6.2 Mnester's *cubistic* dance

Mnester or Μνηστήρ, was the name of a famous Roman mime, mentioned in Suetonius' Twelve Caesars and there described as the lover of Caius Caligula. Why did Jarry select this minor historical figure to act as foil and opponent to the voracious Empress-Prostitute Messalina, who, as one of the most notorious *femmes fatales* of history, was a popular subject for *fin de siècle* writers? In so doing he gives a spectacularly original cast to the Messalina theme. Jarry provides a fictionalized second episode to Suetonius' account of Caligula, which portrays Mnester's continued career into the reign of Claudius, who finally has him executed. In arranging a dance scene around a male acrobat of ambiguous sexuality, Jarry flies in the face of contemporary female-based accounts of the dance, drawing his inspiration both from antiquity and from Indian models and uncannily anticipating the advent of the twentieth-century male dancer-athlete as typified by both Nijinsky and Nureyev. The chapter may also constitute a memorial to Oscar Wilde, of whom Jarry was an eloquent defender, in supporting "the love which dares not speak its name" and includes the insertion of an obscene sub-text offsetting the motif of the sacred dancer.⁶

⁶ Mnester's Chant betrays signs of linguistic tampering, in the line: *Et à bon droit tu élevas la Tour ardente de douze étages en ta mémoire, / A Boulogne*, which link it to *Les Jours et les Nuits*, where Lord Alfred Douglas appears as Bondroit (Goodlaw). The end of the chapter shows linguistic peculiarities common to 'Du pays de dentelles', dedicated to Beardsley, (who, coincidentally or not, caricatured Wilde as a Roman emperor.)

This thesis is not concerned so much with gendering as with defining the character of Jarry's imagination, which, as we know, always seeks an alternative to the norm. The androgynous figure of Mnester proposes an alternative to the voluptuous, hourglass norm, represented by the female dancer. As a representation of homosexuality, this strand must be regarded in proportion to the several others in the chapter. Previous commentators have not remarked on the odd detail, invented by Jarry, of Mnester's affair with Poppaea, the Veiled, a beauty whose fame is legendary as much for being hidden as actually proven. This complicates Mnester's sexual identity.⁷ But Mnester is transfigured through his dance from mortal to priest. He is at once shaman and shaman's rod, the conductor of a male divine presence.

Viewed in retrospect, Jarry's particular rebellion as a writer had the effect of beginning to draw the marginal and the taboo into mainstream art. To transpose a scandalous and semi-obscene puppet play from the intimacy of the private performance to the public stage was his main achievement. In *Messaline* he proposes the figure of the marginal male acrobat or 'obscene' Roman mime as an ideal dancer, anticipating twentieth century trends by a hair's breadth.

Chapter 3 has already classified Mnester in visual terms as a "flexible grapheme," rather than as a character whose psychological development is important to the novel's plot. As a sign or cipher, Jarry takes pains to identify him with the god Priapus, focus of Messaline's quest and her desire. As such, he must be linked to the bounding and conspicuously phallic *Bâton-à-Physique* of César-Antechrist, which Jarry is careful to do by the selective use of his personal word, *cubiste*, which acts as signifier for the *Bâton*, Mnester and for the mobile, disruptive aspect of Ubu himself. As outlined in Chapter 1, Jarry probably concocted the word *cubiste* from Homer's reference to *kubistitire* (κυβιστητηρε) and Plato's *kubistontes* (κυβιστωντες), both used to refer to acrobatic tumblers or "circulators" able to imitate the

⁷ Quoting several historical sources, Jarry moreover indicates that Valerius the Asiatic and Mnester may be the same person. His information is deliberately confusing. (PL II 97) In the text of *Messaline* both characters are connoted as phoenix and therefore hermaphrodite.

movement of a wheel. Fascinated as he was by the phenomenon of camouflage in nature, Jarry's attraction to the word was clearly on account of its dual identity, philologically camouflaged through possessing the common suffix '-ist' as a part of its root. To the casual reader, the word 'cube' presents itself as the probable root. Since the *cubiste* as acrobat actually connotes a circular movement, it is a word whose outer form and actual meaning are contradictory. The reader, like a gullible fish, swallows the apparently digestible bait and will probably never discover the author's subtle doctoring. Jarry, the author/ fisherman, certainly took a more sadistic view of his role towards the near-sighted reader than Nietzsche, who, in Also sprach Zarathustra, spoke of the writer's role as fishing men **out** of the sea of dogmatic opinion! Lexicologists register Jarry as the first to have used the word, *cubiste*.⁸

It will be helpful to the rest of the discussion if we divide Mnester's dance into its five distinct stages before going any further. As we said above, one of its most remarkable features is the total absence of any reference to either steps (*le pas*) or hand gestures (*le geste*), the elements which normally formed the basis of dance commentaries. The dancer uses his whole body as the instrument of his art. By placing Mnester's dance in a somewhat barbaric context, Jarry defies the criteria whereby a Northern European stage performance to an audience would normally be judged. The obscene and the ecstatic aspects are noticeable through the strongly stated theme of drinking. In the following stages of the dance we can clearly recognize the characteristics of a primitive dance of possession:

1. "Mnester demeura immobile jusqu'à se confondre avec les dorures, où il s'adossait, du socle rose de l'obélisque de Caius, et si longtemps que le rythme ternaire des flûtes et le barrissement mouillé des éolipyles de l'hydraule, qui préludaient à sa danse, à l'imitation des battements de mains, s'atténuaient et attendirent." (PL II 108)

⁸ It appeared in Jarry's article, 'Visions actuelles et futures' L'Art littéraire, nos. 5-6, mai-juin, 1894 as *demi-cubiste* deriving from Plato's description of the original human being as two-sexed, two-faced and with eight limbs that they used in order to progress very fast in cartwheel fashion, like *kubistontes* or 'circulating acrobats.' The term *cubiste* is shortly afterwards validated as a classification for an acrobat walking on his hands in the Bibliothèque Nationale's catalogue of Greek and Roman bronzes of 1895, but not endorsed by Daremberg & Saglio and is at variance with Longpérier's 1868 usage of *cybistète* in his catalogue of Louvre bronzes. Emmanuel uses the term *kubistète* in his thesis of 1895 which appeared concurrently with César-Antechrist, where the earlier passage containing Jarry's *demi-cubiste* of 1894 is repeated.

Cf. Ernest Babelon & J.-Adrien Blanchot, Catalogue des bronzes antiques de la bibliothèque nationale, ill. par Saint-Elme Gautier, Paris, ed. Ernst Leroux, 1895, p. 426.

[Emptying his mind and completely still like a yogi or fakir, the dancer waits for inspiration, as an empty receptacle, despite the impatience of the audience. This immobility is not only characteristic of the rigid first stage of the Indian Kathak dance, but evokes the latent imago in the camouflaged chrysalis, waiting to hatch, suggesting the idea of Mnester's dance as a process of metamorphosis.]

2. "La tunique d'écailles d'or frémit au soleil comme le vent hérissé l'échine d'un fleuve. Toutes les parties de son corps souple ont l'air de jongler les unes avec les autres, et chacune, où qu'elle aille, est suivie amoureusement d'un morceau de soleil. Et pour la première fois, depuis que des pantomimes avaient commencé, sous Auguste (...) ce fut la voix même du mime - on eût dit un bruissement plus sourd des parures de sa danse - qui chanta." (PL II 109)

[Undulating in a gold sequined costume like a scaled reptile, the dancer begins his chant on a very low note, performing the Sikinnis peculiar both to pantomime and the belly dance. His mirror costume of crescent moons, indicating that he represents the moon, is "lovingly" followed by the sun and reflects its light in tiny fragments, constantly breaking up and reassembling the image of the dancer in a different shape. He begins a peculiar low chant, like the rustling of the scales themselves.]

3. "Le mime, après un saut et demi périlleux, est retombé sur les mains, en posture de cubiste, les écailles d'or renversées, écartent leurs feuilles; les lunules polies ne réfléchissent plus que l'ombre; la lumière et la vue baisent Mnester tout nu par les entremailles, et le subligar se rabat comme on hausse une visière.

Le mime saute sur un seul bras par bonds énormes sans interrompre ni saccader sa sourde plainte; et le voici qui tourne très vite et de plus en plus vite sur sa main, ouverte à terre, qui brille toute blanche dans l'ombre ronde de son corps vertical, comme une étoile tombée." (PL II 111-2)

[Still maintaining his monotonous and growling chant the dancer performs a saut périlleux of one and a half turns, and begins a series of huge Dionysian leaps on one arm.. Compared to the opening of a vizor to reveal a knight's face his reversed subligar or codpiece and reversed scales leave his sex and his bare flesh exposed to the audience's view. Now clearly connoted as Phallus or Bâton, he begins to spin on one hand, likened to a fallen star. For Jarry spinning precedes entry to another world.]

4. "Mnester ne chante plus, mais parle pour soi, et dans une attitude de méditation il a croisé ses bras et penché sa tête sur sa poitrine, et c'est sur sa nuque maintenant qu'il gyre, comme les orbites inertes des astres sous ses pieds joints, lentement, comme depuis éternellement (...) Un disque noir mordait à même le soleil, jusqu'à n'en plus laisser qu'un croissant rouge, comme la pénombre des lèvres de Mnester (...) buveuses de la chair sidérale."

[The dancer is possessed and rotates through supernatural forces on the nape of his neck in a state of transcendental meditation, murmuring only to himself. This improbable vertical posture, balanced on a bent neck, represents the letter J, the author's own initial. The planets themselves seem to respond to the power of the terrestrial dance and the moon begins to devour the sun in imitation of the taboo act of love between Mnester and Caius Caligula, whose spirit the dancer has summoned.]

5. “ Dans les restes de la lumière impériale, les yeux de Messaline, seuls, plus noirs que deux charbons éteints, étaient fixés, et sur rien autre chose, sur l’ombre indestructible du fond du cirque - où s’achevait le dernier geste, et le plus silencieux, de la danse de Mnester.(...)”

Quelque chose avait roulé à bas de l’estrade du théâtre, et occultait encore la lumière par terre: une boule aussi parfaitement ronde que le disque d’une planète chue, le corps inextricablement *pelotonné* de Mnester à la fin de sa danse.

[The emphases are Jarrry’s]

(PL II 113-4)

[*The spent dancer assumes the spherical form of the moon and rolls to a halt, curled up in a hermetic circle. Only Messalina is not blinded, not having been distracted by the eclipse, and observes this final movement, interpreting it as the Baiser de Narcisse of her earlier erotic fantasy about Priapus in the garden*].

Jarry indicates a careful progression through the stillness of the meditative phase of the dance, the strange voice used for the chant, the levitation, the summoning of the spirit and the final physical exhaustion of the dancer which clearly mark it as a mediumistic or shamanistic ritual. His precise and emphasized wording referring to the dancer’s body in terms of a ball of wool, so tightly entangled that it cannot be unwound, may refer back to Bergson’s definition of the individual life as *l’enroulement d’une pelote*, cited in Chapter 2, the continuous strand that constitutes his particular life and self and to which Jarry gives visual substance in the dense spiral of his woodcut “âme badine” as “flying snail.” This argument is supported by the following chapter, where Messalina tries in vain to “unravel” the secretive dancer, by having him flogged. But Mnester maintains his curled up, closed posture - not snail but threatened millipede or woodlouse. The first of these entomological metaphors derives from Lieds funèbres, where, as we saw in Chapter 3, the Breton funeral processions, referring to human lives in terms of lines of black text, Jarry represents as black millipedes;⁹ the second points clearly to the explicit chapter, ‘Mélusine était souillarde de cuisine, Pertinax eschaleur de noix’ of L’Amour absolu, which not only draws *Mélusine* into a linguistic alliance with *Messaline* but where an allusion to the defensive mechanism of the woodlouse, “Ainsi le méticuleux et inexorable cloporte s’arrondit,” forms part of a complex erotic metaphorical sequence linking Madame Joseb’s closed eyes and her sex: *étoiles*

⁹ If, as recounted in Les Jours et les Nuits, Jarry the child enjoyed blocking up the holes of crickets with his penknife, (PL I 761) it is likely that the uncurling of millipedes may also have engaged his energies.

tombées>châtaignes>hérissons>cils>masque>sexe:

Ces choses rondes avec tant de pointes...

Ce ne sont que les étoiles qui tombent(...)

Pour s'adapter au milieu terrestre, elles se pelotonnent sous les châtaigniers.

Hérissons végétaux, puisqu'ils ont la couleur des fruits jeunes. (...)

Mais les piquants de ces petits hérissons pourrissent assez vite pour qu'on y
reconnaisse le masque de cils de Varia! (PL I 952)

As regards the significance of Mnester as a male dancer, this probable parody of psycho-sexual symbolism may be calculated to mislead. The entomological references relating to a defence mechanism and which derive from Jarry's personal expertise make more sense in that they highlight an intertextual relationship between Mnester and Sengle (*Singulum*) and thus to the author himself. As we said in Chapter 4, the specialist term *pelotonnement* that Jarry uses of Mnester's position, has been identified by several commentators as a linguistic signpost which deliberately draws 'Du pays de dentelles' and Beardsley himself into a metatextual relationship with 'Il dansait quelquefois la nuit.' The dancer's physical posture connotes his gesture of silence, what Messaline describes as the clenching of his fist over his heart.¹⁰ ("Le dieu ferme pour moi sur l'arcane de son coeur son poing") (PL II 116) Far from disowning his early poetry, Jarry regarded his life's work as a continuous text. Here the liberal sprinkling of textual clues relating to glass and the beat of tom-toms we would suggest to be his method of referring the reader-diver back to an even earlier text, to the closed heart of his hermetic poem, 'Le Sablier' and perhaps, in wider terms, to the spat upon, abused heart of the poet-artist as celebrated by Rimbaud's 'Le Coeur supplicié,' which is assimilated to it.

¹⁰ The motif of a pierced heart, encircled by a mythical serpent, can also be related to an actual object and one of Jarry's talismanic childhood memories. This is the strange pierced-heart weather vane, encircled by a Chinese dragon chasing its tail, recorded in the same passage as note 6, which he used to pass on his cycle rides.

6.3 The dancer, seen as sacrificial victim of the spectator-voyeur

In contrast to Jarry's rendering, nineteenth-century writers tended to look on the dance exclusively in terms of a performance for spectators - usually a female dancer or dancers performing before males. Driving this concept to an exaggerated point, the story of Salome's deliberately seductive dance before Herod in order to procure fulfilment of her mother's wish of John the Baptist's execution - the vengeful desire of the woman scorned - was a much repeated theme of Symbolist and decadent art. This celebrates the theme of the dance as spectacle and, in this case, the dance of a young girl for the gratification of an ageing but powerful male monarch. Herod's wife uses not her own, but her daughter's feminine charms as an irresistible bargaining tool in a purely sexual negotiation. Moreau, Beardsley and Picasso were moved to depict this theme in their very different ways. With regard to Jarry, Picasso's rendering of Herod is particularly interesting, since there is a faint but definite *ubidouille* traced on his belly (Fig. 65) which perhaps relates to the sexually awakened Ubu of *Ubu colonial*, while his high-kicking Salome recalls Bonnard's grotesque illustrations of dancing negresses for Jarry's explicitly obscene 'Tatane'. As a collector of Jarry's manuscripts, Picasso certainly knew this. (Fig. 77) The spectacle of dance as a kind of titillation for the common crowd or for the individual potentate is contrasted by Jarry with dance in its archaic function, whereby the dancer acts as sanctified intermediary between the mortal community and its god or gods and where the dance itself constitutes the transitional stage between the mundane, 'useful' acts performed in the day to day business of human living and the sacred state of trance.

Dance designed as a spectacle is classified ^{as} one of the visual arts. Its more primitive antecedent may predate speech and is linked to instinctive mating rituals, initiation ceremonies and religious rites of a strictly private, if not secret nature. Erotic oriental dancing as recorded by Flaubert, Nerval and Gautier falls into the second category, especially harem dancing, conducted as it is, behind closed doors. Where the action of dancing gives more

pleasure to the participants than the spectators, there is a kinship with sport and the exhilaration to be derived from violent exertion and from moving at speed. As a passionate cyclist, canoeist and fencer, Jarry clearly appreciated this kinship. As we shall see, he preferred to draw from "low" cultural sources whose ancient lineage as entertainment for the common folk had never been subject to academic censorship or fashions and had retained the purity of their origins. For the later "undulating" stage of Mnester's dance sequence, Jarry has used the *danse du ventre* as his model. Despite being performed by a male dancer, the belly dance perpetuates the archaic *sikinnis*, which was banned from public performances given by Roman mimes on account of its obscene character. Mnester, however, does not dance for the gratification of the audience; his dance is in the nature of a private mediumistic ritual. The obscene aspect of his dance actually takes place at a cosmic level, unnoticed by the audience.

Dance as an expression of the spiritual was as important a feature of Symbolism as of Expressionism. But Mallarmé's view that "la danseuse n'est pas une femme qui danse (...) mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme: glaive, coupe, fleur" etc. reduced the dancer to a series of signs representing a series of single objects. In other words he originally saw the dance as a simple signifying system. It is true that in 'Il dansait quelquefois la nuit' Jarry represents the dancer as *lamproie*, *toupie*, *boule*, which are simply a more grotesque series of signifieds than Mallarmé's. However Jarry's vision from his earliest published work of the "dancing sign" ('Végétal') and of the live and slippery arabesque, ('Manao tupapau') represents dancing as an elusive, pagan and indeed mad form of expression which could not be pinned to a single interpretation, but which is a more primitive and perhaps 'truer' alternative form of human articulation to speaking or writing and which, if the dancer is gifted enough to enter a state of trance, can unite the human being with his spiritual origins - his gods. In this he comes much nearer to the Expressionist idea of dance than to the Symbolist. In much of his critical writing on the ballet, as we shall see, Mallarmé thinks in terms of a dancer-spectator dialogue. To Jarry as writer, identifying with the fictionalized artist-acrobat whose dance he creates, the spectators, the uneducated *foule*, are

of no importance. Following Seurat's Le Chahut and Toulouse-Lautrec's Jane Avril, which both juxtapose phallic double bass stems and high-kicking female dancers, Jarry depicts the spectator's interest in dance as unashamedly voyeuristic.¹¹

Jarry perceives the writer-dancer in gladiatorial terms. The seed kernel from which the concept for the figure of Mnester sprang, a seed which demonstrates how extraordinarily early his views were formed, is Byron's epic poem, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,' based on which the young Jarry wrote a poem of his own, 'Le gladiateur mourant.' The brief epigraph, "A ruin - yet what ruin!" taken from Canto IV of this long poem indicates the context but hardly summarizes the subject or theme of the Canto, which is the indomitability of the human spirit indicated in the first line, "But I have lived and have not lived in vain." Jarry's juvenile but passionate and free adaptation relates to the actual death of the gladiator in front of the Roman audience narrated in verses 140-1. But it is Byron's next verse which provides the springboard for developing his idea of *la foule*:

BYRON

But here, where murder breathed her bloody steam;
 (...)
 Here where the Roman million's blame or praise
 Was death or life, the playthings of a crowd,
 My voice sounds much - and fall the stars' faint rays
 On the arena void - seats crush'd - walls bow'd -
 And galleries, where my steps seem echoes strangely loud.

JARRY

Étendu dans le cirque est le gladiateur.
 Il est percé du fer d'un sauvage vainqueur
 Qui vient d'être applaudi par la plèbe romaine.
 Le blessé se soulève, et l'on voit, dans l'arène,
 Comme un ruisseau rougi, son sang couler à flots
 De ses flancs transpercés de deux longs javelots.
 Il pense que la fin d'une vie intrépide
 Est donnée en spectacle aux yeux d'un peuple avide...
 Il jette sur la foule un regard de mépris,
 Puis il ferme les yeux.

(PL I 73)

¹¹ "Le public, désormais, pour une cotisation minime, aux Folies-Bergère et au Moulin Rouge, voit d'en bas, comme toujours, ce qui se passe dans les cercles." 'Les Cercles' in Le Canard sauvage, avr. 1903, (PL II 422)

In the conclusion to Jarry's adaptation, the German gladiator uses his imagination to shut out the crowd, to conjure up the landscape of his homeland and also to create his private image of an Italy in ruins, conquered by Germans. Although with a militaristic and romantic colouring that he would later suppress, this is Jarry's earliest demonstration of the artist's ability, and indeed his need, to replace the outer reality of the present with the imagined reality, preserved by memory, that propels the plot of Les Jours et les Nuits.

In his anonymous auto-review of Messaline Jarry talks of gladiators who do not actually exist in the text. He titillates his potential readers with the lascivious, lubricious and obscene. In his mind the readership are no different to the circus audience "qui béait d'une grande curiosité", the eager and stupid spectators, like those of the average Montmartre cabaret audience who impatiently wait for the dancer or acrobat to excite their jaded senses. But in order to understand the obscene connotations of this chapter, the reader needs to have knowledge of sacred Indian dance rituals and of the Bhagavad-Gita text.

According to the rules of an Indian *Kathak* dance, which seems to be one of the models for Mnester's dance, the entire first stage is static and devoted to prayer. The body is rigidly composed as if petrified. Jarry's Roman audience completely fail to understand that the dance has already begun, a reaction of which a French audience could easily be guilty and which Jarry may even have experienced during the Oeuvre's performance of A.-F. Hérold's adaptation of L'Anneau de Sakountala in 1895. Mnester's still pose is interpreted as a delay and as an obstinate refusal on the part of the dancer to perform. Jarry lends the crowd's audible impatience, which turns from whistles and jeers to a roar, the material form of a feral beast, as if Mnester were indeed a gladiator going to the slaughter:

Or, comme le peuple attend mal quand il ne comprend pas, un ronflement mugit de nouveau dans l'entonnoir du cirque, de murmures, de cris et d'injures.

L'obélisque rose, avec la figure d'or de son socle, perçait implacablement tout ça.

Déferlant contre ce phare qui portait au pied sa lampe, les sifflets et les paroles se cadencèrent et prirent une forme, qui bondit en assauts successifs de bête par le cirque.
(PL II 108)

This bounding form moreover recalls the hysterical Empress of the previous chapter, described as leaping “comme une bête” from step to step of the circus in her search for Priapus and whose predatory advances Mnester will not survive. Both crowd and the empress are thus portrayed as bestial and with a shared predatory lust. Messaline’s highly developed jaws is one of the few physical characteristics of the prostitute-empress on which Jarry insists. As we pointed out in Chapter 2, this is as much a physical feature of a spider as a carnivorous animal. (Jarry’s written description in no way resembles his pert little caricature of Messaline, distinguished by her golden modesty wig. (Fig. 14) One of three heads sketched, it was perhaps intended as a model for Bonnard in his capacity as maker of puppet heads for the *Pantins* Theatre and one of the three hundred that he is supposed to have made.

Where Jarry’s portrayal of the dancer-spectator relationship differs from those of his contemporaries, such as Seurat’s ‘Le Chahut’ or Toulouse-Lautrec’s poster of Jane Avril is that his theme is the predatory and erotic female-upon-male gaze rather than that of the male-upon-female.¹² Although this viewpoint ties in with the nineteenth-century obsession with the *femme fatale* - Sphinx, Hérodiade, Judith or Jocasta, it also announces the imminent equalizing of sexual roles. Given Jarry’s intense admiration of Rachilde, his puppeteering collaboration with Berthe Danville and the priority given to Mary Cassat in an early art review, one should hesitate, as always, before putting him in any category to which he has led the reader himself: misogynist, narcissist or any other. In *Léda*, as early as 1900, he gently mocks the feminist movement, inventing the title *Le Gynécée* for a putative ancient Greek feminist magazine. In all probability his earlier exaggerated misogyny was a pose. However,

¹² See Mary Ann Caws, ‘Dancing with Mallarmé and Seurat (and Loië Fuller, Hérodiade and La Goulue)’ in Collier and Lethbridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-302.

beneath the gaze of Messalina, Mnester's dance provides an innovatory counter-view to the prevalent image of the dancing-girl as prey to male desire.

6.4 The paradigmatic figure of the acrobat-gymnast

So the actual practical experiences which influenced Jarry were not from the stage, but popular art forms from the Paris streets and parks; from the Bal du Moulin Rouge and from nightclubs, where increasing numbers of belly-dancers from the near east drew a horrified and not to say racist reaction from the purist dance specialist, Jules Lemaître. Jarry's position on the dance is in direct opposition to Lemaître's.¹³ The novels of Jean Lorrain provide an insight into Jarry's sources. They may not have great virtue as literature, but they provide a vivid record of Paris low life, from which Jarry drew his material in equal proportion to esoteric texts. His portrait of a Montmartre acrobat proves that Jarry did not have to look far for his model of Mnester:

Moulé dans un maillot de soie pâle, un acrobate, nudité brillantée et moirée par places de lumière électrique et de sueur, se renversait dans un cambrement de tout son être; puis, se redressant tout à coup dans un effilement imposait à tous l'hallucinant spectacle d'un homme devenu rythme, d'une souplesse animée d'un mouvement d'éventail.¹⁴

The swaying acrobat, metaphorically assimilated to the rhythmical movement of a fan, is described in terms of a stimulus to crowd hallucination. His upright, upended form, swinging backwards and forwards focuses the rapt attention of the crowd. Lorrain goes on to confess how he too succumbs to the instinct of the crowd, and describes the involuntary longing that he feels, together with the rest of the audience for the the acrobat to fall, gripped by "thoughts of lust and death." It is precisely the conflict between the ancient, 'high' art of the acrobat, as Jarry perceives it, and the bestial instinct of the crowd, which provides the

¹³ "La danse d'Orient nous envahit, et c'est pourquoi je ne crains pas de jeter le cri d'alarme (...) en brave Occidental et en honnête Aryan que je suis."

Quoted in Priddin, op. cit. p. 84.

¹⁴ Jean Lorrain, *Monsieur de Phocas*, Paris, Ollendorff, 1901, p. 34.

argument and the dramatic tension of "Il dansait quelquefois la nuit..."

As an avid frequenter of fairs and circuses from an early age, Jarry saw an unchanged folkloric tradition linking the performances of the anonymous acrobats which he observed at fairs and circuses with ancient acrobatic and dance routines. He attributed his early aesthetic training to the clowning routines of Pierantoni and Saltamontes; Chocolat and Footit.¹⁵ In 'La Mécanique d' "Ixion" Jarry refers to the strange "circulators" who had perfected the ancient skill in which the acrobat twines his feet round his neck and rolls like a wheel and which had survived unchanged from antiquity as the most demanding exercise, through which a Greek gymnast kept his body at the peak of suppleness, "Ainsi "circulent" les hommes-serpents dans les foires, la nuque au talons". (PL II 405) Jarry also gives his first-hand impression of an actual performance by the acrobat Juno Salmo where, with arched back, he forces his body into the shape of a wheel, knotting his feet around his neck:

'Jambes croisées derrière sa tête, noeud compliqué de membres ou de tentacules,' (...) (PL II 335)

This brief reference to the acrobatic routine known as "faire la roue", which he observed at various fairgrounds reveals that Jarry's source for Mnester's strange posture were the contortionists of every-day Paris and closely corresponds to his description of the Roman mime artist, "deux pieds plus court que des sabots de chèvre croisés derrière cette même nuque." He moreover evokes the undulating movement typical of the so-called *hommes-serpents*, or "boneless" acrobats "ondulant de la même reptation qu'une lamproie," (PL II 105-6) The joints of "boneless" acrobats, also known as "dislocated men," being subject to the constant strain of acrobatic exercises from an early age, developed an elastic tissue allowing them movements impossible to the joints of normal people.¹⁶ The acrobat-

¹⁵ "Il (Barnum) nous souvient du temps où, rhétoricien en bas âge, alors que nos condisciples s'entraînaient, au Théâtre Français, à discerner les beautés conventionnelles de Racine et autres défunts, nous bifurquions discrètement à gauche, par la rue Saint-Honoré, afin de nous documenter plus amplement, au commerce de nos excellents maîtres Pierantoni et Saltamontès, dans l'art de faire voyager des chapeaux pointus à travers les airs et de donner, quand il sied, du pied au derrière des gens." 'Juno Salmo au Nouveau Cirque,' (PL II 334)

¹⁶ See Hugues LeRoux, *Acrobats and Mountebanks*, tr. A. P. Morton, London, Chapman & Hall, 1890, p. 247.

dancer Valentin Le Desossé was immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec. There was also a clown known as Caoutchouc. Jarry's description of Mnester's act is the detailed account of a keen spectator of popular dance acts and acrobatics;¹⁷ he moreover paints a vision of an *elastic acrobat* par excellence in the form of Ixion, stretched over the entire circumference of his eternal wheel of torture. ("Qu'Ixion de par la gymnastique de sa supplice doit être grand!") (PL II 407) Maurice Emmanuel, whose study of Greek dance forms depicted on vases, contains a section on *kubistètes* confirms the longstanding folkloric tradition which has perpetuated the same gymnastic stunts until the present day:

Kubistan, c'est se jeter sur les mains, la tête en bas, pour exécuter dans cette posture incommode des exercices variés. Il suffit d'avoir sous les yeux les représentations antiques de cette danse acrobatesque pour y reconnaître des *tours* chers à nos bateleurs.¹⁸

Mnester is nevertheless a hybrid - an *homme collé*. He is a composite of dancer, shaman and contortionist who manifests aspects of quite different cultural contexts. Jarry is exact in describing the stimuli necessary to induce a state of trance typical of tribal rituals in primitive societies, which is where his interest in the dance seems to lie. Mnester's performance does not conform entirely to Roman, nor Greek patterns; to African, Turkish or Indian, but forms a clever synthesis of all of them. As a literary forerunner of Nijinsky and possibly representative of a wider dissatisfaction within the French avant-garde with both the Loïe Fuller model and that of the prima ballerina, Mnester represents the stark separation of real dance movements from the romantic movement of clothing around the dancer - Baudelaire's *vêtements ondoyants* and Mallarmé's suggestive *gazes*. Jarry's view of the dance as art is a very modern one, which proposes pure body movements, uncomplicated by the effects of loose outer clothing. He also shows us a dancer attaining to a state of trance, which is integral to the ancient tradition of ecstatic dance and similar to that which the acrobat must achieve in

¹⁷ See Saint-Pol-Roux, 'La Charmeuse de serpents,' in *Les Féeries intérieures*, 1885-1906, recorded as *Foire de Montmartre 1890* and dedicated to Jarry which is the nearest we have to an eye witness account of Jarry's enthusiasm for popular acrobatic fairground performances.

¹⁸ Emmanuel, op. cit. p. 276.

order to accomplish feats of extreme physical daring, His implication is that both writer and reader must commit themselves to a parallel act of imaginative daring. The writer must supply the impulse and the reader must make the imaginative leap.

A brief 1894 review of Le Cycle by the Swiss writer and painter, Albert Trachsel, to whose work, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, Jarry remained attentive, reveals his early attraction to images of dancing and their evocative power. He is taken with Trachsel's habit of leaving blank spaces for the reader to examine his own emotional reactions, instead of trying to create emotions for him. This review, and the extract cited by Jarry are worth quoting in full and once again show a close affinity between Jarry's imaginative world and Rimbaud's:

Un jeune homme qui le vit sur ma table le prit pour un traité de vélocipédie. Mais c'est un beau livre, décors et musique, **points marquant les silences où nous inscrirons nos émotions.** L'écrivain est beaucoup plus fort qui comprend l'impossibilité d'écrire, que celui qui peut tout exprimer, sentant rudimentairement. Le livre a déjà ses disciples, et l'on reverra ses Danseuses

(Je danse le Pas des glaives,
Je danse le Pas du sang!
Au-dessus, au-dessus de ma tête sifflent
flamboient! sifflent, sifflent, flamboient les épées! ...
... Voyez, voyez! Je frappe, l'ennemi,
je frappe, et me lance, et me lance en avant! ...)

et ses lacs entre les forêts de fleurs bleues, sous les cygnes violets, et ses fleurs serpentant parmi les arbres précieux ... Citons sa *Marche suisse*, sa *Reine des émeraudes*, qui, avec des étoiles, jonglait, jonglait, jonglait, ... jonglait...

.....

[my emboldening] (PL I 1009)

Jarry ends the review by imitating Trachsel's technique of providing the reader with imaginative space indicated by a full line of dots. He moreover uses this technique in his own fiction, as here, at the end of Messaline, when the news of Messalina's death is broken to Claudius:

Et d'un geste maniaque, il rue sur le plateau d'argent sonore qui couvre tout le guéridon le sens dessus dessous de sa coupe vide, et écoute choir le silence.

.....
(PL II 104)

The dots expressing space for thought and silence have the same importance as a general pause in an orchestral piece. Jarry insists that the reader should have a pause for reflection - time for imagining.

Trachsel's Queen of Emeralds, who particularly catches Jarry's imagination and whom he cites as "juggling, juggling, juggling with the stars," not only looks forward to his own image of the golden-scaled body of Mnester, whose sun-glistening, fragmented parts are described as juggling with each other and who sings of some cosmic player playing jacks with Caligula's bones BENEATH his skyward-pointing feet, [Jarry's emphasis] but recalls a very short 'illumination' of Rimbaud's, which can likewise be said to link the rhythm of the text with imaginary choreographic and cosmic movements:¹⁹

J'ai tendu des cordes de clocher à clocher; des guirlandes de fenêtre à fenêtre; des chaînes d'or d'étoile à étoile, et je danse.

Rimbaud's 'je,' perhaps an aspect of the author, can move freely through space, unimpeded by distance, by means of his bounding imagination. This picture of the writer as aerial and cosmic traveller is shared by Jarry, who jumps up to a star to see into the past, believing that scenes from the past, like each human gesture, do not simply disappear or end, but, as we saw in Chapter 4, continue travelling through space like ripples:

Mais de l'étoile Algol - où j'étais monté d'un bond, pour contempler cette scène reculée dont l'image se perd comme les cercles qui s'éloignent d'une pierre qu'on jette à travers l'infini liquide (...)
(PL I 211-2)

¹⁹ Cf. Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 79 & 227. Reynolds places this 'illumination' at the centre of her excellent chapter on the "verbal hallucinations" of Rimbaud and cites it as a prime example of what she calls "textual choreography" as a crucial element in the imaginative interaction between writer and reader.

In Jarry's mind the directional thrust of a thrown object or of a gesture has the substance of a solid so that several objects following each other from the juggler's hand and the *jongleuse* herself would therefore be linked by a steel cord of energy like Faraday's *ligne de force* :

La Jongleuse, si son corps est assez d'acier, doit suivre sa dernière boule.

This theory bears the hallmark of Bergson and we shall see exactly the same distinction between the physical body of the dancer and the abstract line of the dance being drawn by Valéry in his later discussion, *L'Ame et la danse*, which centres around a fictitious Greek dancer, Athikté:

Elle est une femme qui danse et qui cesserait divinement d'être femme, si le bond qu'elle a fait, elle y pouvait obéir jusqu'aux nues.²⁰

Both writers yearn for an inhuman dancer-acrobat who could follow the line of her throw or bound to its ultimate conclusion.

Typically, Jarry places his most profound remarks in his reviews on the writers whom he most admires - here Rachilde, in his key article, 'Ce que c'est que les ténèbres,' Literature, he says, should strive towards achieving the effect of a trampoline. He places the reader in the position of the gymnast, who must himself make the effort of the jump but who relies on the springiness of the trampoline membrane, or skin of the text, to provide him with extra impulse for his imagination:

L'impression du saut est assurément plus grande chez celui qui ne saute pas, l'élan saute au-dedans de lui. Et c'est à cet effet que doit tendre la littérature. (PL II 434)

Jarry does not envisage the reader-gymnast returning to the trampoline in the normal way, but speaks of leaping from the edge of the trampoline into another world. For Jarry, as writer, the

²⁰ Valéry, *L'Ame et la danse*, *Oeuvres* II 151.

objects in this other world are the real ones (“les choses d’autre monde sont les réelles”). Crossing momentarily into the English language, he terms the other world as the writer’s *home*. In the same passage he speaks of *l’inachevé des rêves*. The leap of the reader’s imagination from the edge of the trampoline-text is supposed to extend the faint arabesque onwards. The text, like the dream, which, by its nature is never finished, is not an end, but only provides the impulse towards an unknown imaginative destination.

6.5 Rhythm and song as primitive inducements to trance states

Jarry’s implicit argument is that dance cannot be considered in isolation from its earliest wellsprings, connected with ancient fertility rituals. As we have seen, he disregarded all Western forms of dance as performance, with its emphasis on elegance and light-footedness, flowing gestures and pretty steps. He was determined to bring primitive dance forms to the fore. Wherever mention of the dance surfaces in his texts, the emphasis is on heavy-footedness and thumping rhythms, redolent of the ancient Dionysian revels. In his poetry the pounding of the organ and the stamping of elephants are linked to the dance. Images of shuddering and whipping are evoked. In selecting as an *élu* the bells of Rabelais’ fourth book, to whose mad, jingling rhythm Panurge says the devils always dance,²¹ Jarry stresses his interest in the demoniacal aspect of the dance. He tries to revive dance’s early links to magic and focuses on its important primitive role in the process of growth and disintegration. He drew his information from classical Greek texts and may have been following recent research into primitive societies by Frazer and by Albert Reville, who gave a series of lectures on the religions of Mexico and Peru in 1895. As we have been arguing, he was more daring than most his contemporaries in celebrating the muscled male form as an aesthetic model, deriving from ancient Indian traditions and from his observations of fairground *bateleurs*. As far as the Paris public were concerned, the acrobat belonged to a subculture of circus and nightclub, preserve of the outlandish and the freakish, where social norms did not prevail. To

²¹ Rabelais, Book IV, Ch. XI.

present a male figure as a dancer and an object of beauty in the 1890s would have been considered scandalous.

Dance theory at the end of the nineteenth century as formulated by the critic, Jules Lemaître, and the poets, Gautier, Mallarmé and Rodenbach had been mainly based on the performances of professional female artists, either classical ballerinas, such as Elena Cornalba, or solo artists like Loïe Fuller. Gautier did not avoid writing about male dancers, but could not admit of any element of grace or delicacy in the male form. Only in writing of Marius Petipa, who was performing in Russia, did he relax this view. It is tempting to speculate that Jarry was aware of the innovations of Diaghilev at the time of writing Messaline, however these were not reported in France. Despite the initial scandalization, it was Nijinsky's arrival in Paris with the *Ballets russes* in 1909 that persuaded the French public to embrace the idea of the male dancer-athlete and the concept of masculine dynamism as integral to the dance. Once again, as we said in Chapter 3 with regard to the ideals of L'Ymagier, it was in Russian art forms, which benefited from the still thriving folk cultures of their enormous hinterland, where Jarry's aesthetic ideas, representative as they were of a particular impulse among young avant-garde writers and artists, first broke surface.

The fictional figure of Mnester in Messaline certainly bears an uncanny resemblance to Nijinsky in his performance of Fokine's L'Oiseau de Feu, in which even Stravinsky's score seems to emulate the harsh, primitive musical patterns described by Jarry. The two following descriptions, one by the dance theorist, André Levinson, of an actual Paris performance of L'Oiseau de Feu in 1910 and the other Jarry's fictional account of the musical accompaniment to Mnester's dance, written in 1900 both conform to the pattern of frenzy and sudden hiatus that occurs in shamanistic rituals ²²:

²² "Alors soudain le chaman frappe les mains, à n'importe quel instant du chant et tout le monde se tait. Silence profond (et c'est très impressionnant (...) ce silence profond après le rythme rapide et tant soit peu hypnotisant de la chanson.) Alors le chaman s'adresse à son *damagomi*." Mircea Eliade, Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase, Payot, Paris, 1968, p. 245.

JARRY

La musique s'était étouffée avec
le soleil, sauf un des joueurs de
flûte, qui, devenu subitement fou,
soufflait à perdre haleine la même
note suraiguë presque sans discon-
tinuer et la trompette prodigieuse de
l'orgue à vapeur qui pataugeait
à pieds d'éléphant aveugle
dans son automatique, joyeux et
insupportable rythme ternaire.

(PL II 113)

STRAVINSKY

But suddenly the deafening uproar
of the orchestra ceased and accompanied
solely by the shrill, dry beats of the
xylophone, the dance continued in a
strained, gasping, tragic silence. Then
a piercing trumpet note broke the spell
and the throng of mad men whirled
and stamped with increasing violence (...) ²³

Stravinsky's shrill xylophone notes correspond to the demonic and piercing *si* of the flutes which Jarry uses to summon the spirit who will take possession of Mnester. They contrast with the bassoons, described by Levinson as "crashing like perforated skulls," whose barbaric pounding bass corresponds to the deep grating of Mnester's voice.²⁴ In particular the timbre of Mnester's voice as his chant progresses conforms to the superhuman bellow or roar,²⁵ characteristic of the climax of a shamanistic ritual, compared here by Jarry to the grinding of fabulous gears:

Le bruit de sa voix sourde est comme un roulement d'engrenages précieux et terribles.

(PL II 111)

In particular this rhythmical grinding sound evokes the sound of the archaic bullroarer, (*taurobole*) instrument of trance and seduction, whose jagged outline Jarry so often depicts (Fig. 7) and to which, we believe, Mnester's Chant makes a coded allusion:

²³ André Levinson, 'Stravinsky and the Dance', *Theatre Arts Monthly*, November 1924, reprinted in Acocella and Garafola, op. cit. p. 37.

²⁴ W.O.E. Osterley quotes J.G. Frazer as mentioning a *special voice* used in Gold Coast rituals:
It is while dancing to the drums that the priest or priestess lets fall the oracular words in a *croaking or guttural voice* which the hearers take to be the voice of the god.

W.O.E. Osterley, *The Sacred Dance. A Study in Comparative Folklore*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1923, p. 129.

²⁵ The Polish theatre director, Jerzy Grórowski, after studying primitive methods of voice production, classified this as the use of the laryngeal resonator which recalls the roaring of wild animals, and which, (no doubt deriving from shamanistic rituals,) is used in Oriental and African theatre.
Jerzy Grórowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, London, Methuen, 1968.

*"Tel encore, tu te berças en soie pourpre sur ce pont qui fit de la mer la terre,
A Baules."* (PL II 110)

In his next novel, *Le Surmâle*, Jarry would deploy this huge supernatural voice again, described as "limpide et éclatante", for the final oracular verse of the phonograph's ballad, foretelling Ellen's death.

Jarry's handling of the dance theme anticipates the Surrealists' interest in shamanism and the release of the unconscious. We should not forget, however, that many of his ideas derived from his largely undocumented involvement with late nineteenth century occult circles and from a knowledge of Indian religious practices, derived partly through his friendship with A.-F. Hérold, translator of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita.

In Jarry's use of the triple effect of music, rhythm and repetitive movement to bring about the state of ecstasy we can discern his expertise in the procedures of the 'ecstatic' dances of Antiquity and of the Orient. In his literary experiments Jarry united his knowledge of the ancient states of ecstasy with the results of contemporary research into hysteria and catalepsy, particularly by Charcot.²⁶ In the chapter of *Les Jours et les Nuits*, titled 'Sur la route de Dulcinée,' Jarry refers back to the earlier 'Adelphisme et nostalgie,' which describes his treasured memory²⁷ of a final cycle ride with his friend before their separation. In connection with the theme of hallucination and fantasy to which his title points, Jarry particularly recalls the heady, rhythmical grating of grasshoppers' wings, typical of hot summer afternoons, now compared to its cosmic counterpart, the music of the spheres:

Le crissement d'élytres vivait toujours, et ce fut la reviviscence de la dernière promenade des deux frères, les atomes bruissants, comme les petits grillons jaunes qui habitent les galeries polyédriques du soufre; et cela était tout à fait pareil à la musique céleste des sphères. (PL I 834)

²⁶ As we shall see below, Brunella Eruli examines this very fully in her chapter, 'L'Amour absolu: isteria e catalessi' in *Jarry. I Mostri dell'Immagine*, op. cit., pp. 151-2

²⁷ This is one of three or four treasured or talismanic memories like the previously mentioned cycle ride past the weather vane, which Jarry uses as points of reference in several texts and, carries with it an enclosing "encrustation" of associations from previous texts. Jarry provides textual clues to enable the reader to "dive" back and retrieve the information that he needs to fully understand each later reference as it comes along.

In the previous chapter we also referred to this passage as an indicator of Jarry's belief in the power of a heavy, insistent, pulsing rhythm as a mechanism to release the imagination and to induce trance. This belief is of paramount importance to his concept of the dance as a liberating mechanism for the mind and a means for the human to attain to a state of trance. Here in the same review of Gourmont's novels, mentioned earlier, we see a tom-tom player and dancers combining to aid the soul's release:

L'écuyer de la princesse avait une barbe blanche jusqu'aux genoux et un long tambour de buis sur sa barbe. Et il commença, et au lieu de la prose de son tambour germèrent les violons des anges et des fauves et les pleurs du sang et des fleurs rabattus par ses poings rythmiques:

O pourpiers de mon frère! pourpiers d'or, fleurs d'Ambour!

Ut ré mi b mi b ré ré do..., hiéroglyphes évocatoires des orgues et des clercs par les déserts d'Égypte, rappel de la chapelle sans Dieu d'Élade, danseuses dans les ruines de Thèbes dont la danse meurt et ploie en plainchant, soupir dernier de tambour..., mort du corps..., l'âme ascense:

Mon coeur, mon coeur s'élève, ah si haut qu'il s'envole.

(PL I 1011-2)

This passage selected by Jarry insists on the poetic images which can be conjured by a rhythmical beat alone, without words or music.

Positioned at the watershed between Symbolism and Surrealism, Jarry's lines of investigation and his attempts to explore extra-rational states reflected the interests of Charcot, Janet and indeed Freud's early work. It would be interesting to know how closely he was following research into the rituals of primitive communities.

Jarry's commentators have largely overlooked the various references to the dance which occur at various points in his work, focusing most strongly on the figure of Mnester, which undeniably represents Jarry's most complex, articulate and interesting attempt to represent ecstatic dance as a condensed and dynamic form of expression, transcending verbal language. But before returning to Mnester's dance again, it would be useful to look at a couple of

earlier points in Jarry's work where the dance motif surfaces.

It is significant that two of Jarry's juvenile poems, written on the same sheet of paper but drawn from different cultural sources, firmly associate the theme of dance with death. These are 'Hextentanzplatz,' based on 'Walpurgisnacht' from Goethe's Faust, and 'La Danse macabre,' drawn from Homer's Odyssey. Jarry's early reading thus led him to link the concept of the *danse macabre* - the *Totentanz* of German literature - to the orgiastic Dionysian frenzies of ancient Greece. These elements are still evident in the poetry of Les Minutes de Sable Mémorial, published in 1894. By comparison with other writers on the dance, what is most tangible, whenever Jarry broaches the subject, is the underlying sense of the pagan and evil. If Jarry did not rationally believe in God, his Catholic upbringing never allowed him to shake off a belief in an ever-imminent Hell, lurking in wait like a massive living creature just beneath one's feet, as he states in the conflictingly titled 'Prologue de Conclusion,' "Sous son armure de pavés, l'enfer guette rêvant." (PL I 241) For Jarry the true dance is linked to dark magical forces, to lust and to death. Dancer or skater are not perceived as lightly moving semi-aerial forms but as if pulled from below by a sinister magnetism which impels them as if they were rod puppets operated by the Devil himself. This idea is implicit in the strange line, "O les lourds patins sur la glace vert enfer" from the choral chant of Haldernablou. (PL I 226) Ice, which elsewhere in Jarry's texts is depicted as white or blue, here takes on an evil green, the same devilish emerald glow which suffuses the poem, 'Manao Tupapau,' the distinguishing colour of the Spirit of the Dead and the "enfer vert" evoked in its companion piece, 'Ia Orana Maria.' Jarry's Hell is a cold one.

Much the same sensation is conveyed by Jarry's poem, 'La Régularité de la chasse,' discussed in Chapter 2, whose supposed theme of chaste love, symbolized by the chalice of the title, lurches rapidly into a *bal de l'abîme*. Paul Valéry, whose later ideas on dance were close to Jarry's, knew this poem by heart and is reported as being able to recite it as late as the 1930s. The lines on which Valéry apparently dwelt once again evoke the *danse macabre*:

C'est le bal de l'abîme où l'amour est sans fin
et la danse vous noie en sa houleuse alcôve.²⁸ (PL I 119)

We have argued that 'La Régularité de la chasse' can be said to parody several poetic affectations, by virtue of its exaggerated alliteration and concrete form, however the idea of drowning in the dance, followed by an evocation of Death, not as the terrifying jutting-boned skeleton of tradition, but rather the Dark Angel of Evening, gentle, sensual and intimate in his embrace, strikes a real chord in the imagination. The soothing sequence of 'l's reinforces the lulling effect:

Puis l'engourdissement délicieux des soirs
Vient poser sur mon cou son bras fort; et m'effleurent
Les lents vols sur les murs lourds des longs voiles noirs... (PL I 200)

Here a heady combination of tactile imagery contrasts the finger-like stroking of passing women's veils with the weight of the leaning arm. Was Jarry overtaken by genuine poetic inspiration despite himself?

Valéry's comments referred to a heavy ternary rhythm, typical of early folksongs and ballads, such as those published in *L'Ymagier*. Jarry insists on it again in his description of the orchestration of Mnester's dance, quoted earlier. By including the use of the peculiar Roman *scabella*, heavy stamping, pneumatic sandals, that emit their own musical note, Jarry deliberately emphasizes that the type of dance in question is the antithesis both of light-footed Western ballet and the floating fairy veils of Loïe Fuller, vaunted by Mallarmé for their suggestive potential.

6.6 The dance of the *Palotins* related to archaic and disruptive forms of dance

Jarry's interest in ritual dance forms surfaced as early as 1893 in his accomplished prose piece 'L'Autoclète.' Certainly the *danse macabre* is proper to the black humour of

²⁸ Conversation recorded by H. Laurenti, 'Valéry et Jarry ou les "malédiction d'Univers,"' *L'Etoile-Absinthe*, no. 25-28, 1985, pp. 54-55.

Guignol.²⁹ Here he outlines the techniques whereby the puppeteer and the musical accompanist build up an atmosphere which literally *enthrals* the spectators. 'L' Autoclète' unrolls in the fashion of a tribal rite. The music is slow and measured as it leads up to the climax of human sacrifice. The dance of the *Palotins* is a typical ritual 'encircling dance' traditionally performed around a sacred object or sacrificial victim.³⁰ Achras is portrayed as the tortured dying victim on the stake and the *Palotins'* dance increases in tempo to a frenzied ecstatic gallop, until his death by impalement inevitably ensues. (PL I 185) Never mind that this is slapstick. Jarry's erudite attention to detail regarding the types of sound and movement and the changes of tempo which would be most effective in inducing horror, suspense and tension is extremely professional. His insistence on the precise sounds and rhythms of the harp and flute accompaniment is his personal semiotic signature. As if he were a modern sound technician, and at the risk of interrupting the thread of narrative, Jarry manages to interleave descriptions of tempo, pitch, resonance and volume - a technique to which he would return for both the description of Mnester's dance and also the playing of the record *La Triste Noce* in *Le Surmâle*. By introducing oriental imagery such as bamboo and snake charming Jarry heightens the barbaric atmosphere which the wildly changing pitch and pace already indicate. The following extracts describing the four stages of the harpist's accompaniment evoke more primitive instruments, including the barrel organ of the Paris streets:

1. Ainsi qu'une araignée qui fauche, l'être vague chargé de rythmer le branle des pantins badins griffa **paressseusement** de ses doigts longs les fils pendus aux fémurs de sa harpe: et grelotta soudain un galop clair de grêle rebondissant de tuile en tuile.
[Although the accompanist is supposed to be anonymous and not impinge on the spectators' consciousness, Jarry sketches a macabre image which has more in

²⁹ In her article on the *danse macabre* Jane Taylor, whose definition of Black Humour we cited in Chapter 4, relates it to André Breton's definition of *humour noir*, whose function she sees as "figuring the void", setting up systems in order to destroy them. She makes the point that the Dance of Death is a figure for circularity - for pointless movement. Jarry's *danse macabre* of 'L' Autoclète' is modelled on the rigorous patterns of the Scottish Sword Dance absurdly wedded to a gruesome scene of guignolesque torture. Taylor, op. cit. pp. 139-169.

³⁰ Cf. Osterley, op. cit., pp. 88-106:

The ritual encircling dance (...) is perhaps the commonest kind of sacred dance. (...) The object around which it takes place was in most cases (...) a sacred one: an idol, an altar, a sacrificial victim, a holy tree, or a well.

common with Redon's *Araignée souriante* than a human being.]

2. Le gnome harpiste sembla traîner ses ongles lourds sur un gong de tôle; et des hauteurs sifflantes du *si* retomba au-dessous de l'*ut* caverneux le frémissement des cordes.

[*The heaviness of the trance state is here evoked*]

3. *Ut ré do la, ré sol sol fa*, soupire doucement la harpe cliquetante; et les cordes d'acier se font douces, comme pour attirer les serpents hors des antres, les sons sourds et ouatés des flûtes de bambou. *Ut ré do si, si la la sol*;

[*The volume of the music drops to the level of simple clicks and sighs, then changes to the snake charmer's sweet, muffled drone which must tempt and tame the victim*]

4. *Sol fa sol la sol, fa mi ré ut, si do ré mi, mi, ré mi, fa ré ré ré, (...)*

Impassible toujours et monotone, grave comme un singe qui cherche poux en tête, le harpiste fait tomber de ses cordes chevelues les notes qui crépitent. Et tout à coup à leur bruissement clair se mêle le strident bruit d'éventail de la grande aile rouge du rideau qui se déploie

[*Detached from the violence of Achras' gruesome impalement and taking the role of a Greek chorus, the harpist closes the scene and prepares the spectators for the return to reality, indicated by the sharp snap of the curtain coming down, compared to the shutting of a fan.*] (PL I 180-185)

Jarry's detailed attention to the unharmonious instrumentation of 'L'Autoclète' demonstrates his early interest in primitive music and dance and reveals this piece to be a clear antecedent of Mnester's dance. Levinson mentions the effect created by deep rhythmic bass music contrasting with high sustained treble notes in evoking powerful visual images³¹ which is crucial to the attainment of the ecstatic state in the primitive religious rites of Ancient Greece, Africa and India. Although we cannot actually hear Jarry's music, his precise and peculiar descriptions of the instrumentation add sharply to the evocative power of the piece. Hardly music at all, the references to shivering, crackling and rustling sounds carry a harsh and intensely modern accent.

Whether from his own researches into archaic Greek dance forms or from recently

³¹ "Each musical episode - the grinding commonplace tunes of the squeaky accordion, (...) the harsh thin notes of the sorcerer's flute, those breathless entr'actes, marked by the brutal beat of the drum - invokes a throng of visual images, clear-cut, brilliant and full of illusion."

Acocella and Garafola op. cit., p. 37.

published work on shamanism such as J. G. Frazer's,³² Jarry was well aware of the narcotic effect of heavy repeated rhythms and of acceleration to induce exhilaration and finally ecstasy.³³ We have seen how he deploys heavy insistent rhythms in his poetry to drive home the power of the words. Here, in 'L' Autoclète' and again in Mnester's Dance, he expertly interleaves aural and visual effects to achieve the maximum impact on the reader's imagination.³⁴

Mnester's dance is shown to have opened the way to disruptive forces, not only in terms of the unexpected darkness but also the sudden madness of the musician and the apparent animation of the inert, represented by the two most audible instruments, flute and organ, going berserk and playing by themselves, (Jarry uses the metaphor of an elephant on the rampage). The crowd too are seized by panic and, through their fear - forerunners of the Living Theatre - become an integral part of the performance.³⁵ The dance is portrayed by Jarry as having unsettled the balance of the cosmos. Claudius, representing rationality and science, must now try to regain control of the crowd through imposing a scientific explanation. Claudius, in whose honour the dance is supposed to be and Caligula, whom Mnester actually invokes, are therefore shown as opposing forces: Claudius represents the rational and the dull; Caligula represents artistic genius and caprice in the mould of Maldoror. His whim, as recounted by Suetonius and Dion Cassius, had been to perform a night dance in front of three consuls, woken for the occasion and forced to watch him from a scaffold on which they might hang if their terror-stricken applause is not appreciative enough;³⁶ performer and spectator are

³² From 1888 Frazer had been developing ideas about how magical thinking worked and how it fitted into modern psychology. His first article, 'Totemism,' describes a mimed death and revival in initiation ceremonies. It preceded Freud's *Totem and Taboo*.

³³ Cf. Levinson's 'The Negro Dance: Under European Eyes.' Acocella and Garafola op. cit. p. 72.

³⁴ Reynolds refers to the role of Dynamism in T. Lipps's concept of "Einfühlung." She argues that it is largely through rhythm that connections are forged between the concrete space of the textual/pictorial medium and the "sensory unreality" of imagined space. Rhythmic patterns can replace coded objects and act as a "bridge" between the medium and the imagining activity.

Reynolds, op. cit. p. 26.

³⁵ The première of *Ubu roi* had already shown Jarry the potential of an audience performance controlled by the actors.

³⁶ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, tr. Robert Graves, London, Penguin, 1957, pp. 175-6

therefore tightly bound in an act of mental torture, where the performer is in control. Jarry's selection of this macabre act of cruelty, depicted as "living art", as the point of reference contextualizing his chapter on Mnester's dance is innovative in the extreme. The shadow of Ubu nonetheless hovers behind that of Caligula, pointing prophetically to the horrifying dangers of the Tyrant-Dictator as artist.

6.7 Achieving ecstasy and grace: Jarry and Valéry

In Chapter 4 we mentioned the affinities between Valéry and Jarry's aesthetic theories, which had their roots in Bergson's. Valéry used Faraday's term *lignes de force*. Jarry, while accepting a linear extension of each gesture also visualized a radiating expansion of the whole form, that he termed *rayonnement musical* or *halo grossissant*. In Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien Jarry demonstrates his sympathy with Valéry's imaginative interest in physical laws by dedicating a chapter to him titled, 'De la marée terrestre et de l'évêque marin mensonger.' The concept of an "earth-tide" that Jarry credits to Valéry is a delightful one that he describes as follows:

Je sais maintenant qu'outre le flux de ses humeurs et la diastole et systole qui meuvent son sang circulaire, la terre bande des muscles intercostaux et respire vers le rythme de la lune; mais la régularité de cette respiration est douce, et peu d'hommes en sont informés. (PL I 696-7)

The idea of the breathing earth-body is similar to that of the trembling or *libration* of the moon that is mimed by Mnester at the end of his dance. Jarry and Valéry seem to have shared an interest in curious physical phenomena and a belief in a strong bond between cosmic rhythms and man. Of the two writers Jarry was early in bringing the theme of ecstatic dance to the fore, at a time when the classical ballet and the cult of the female dancer was a much more usual subject of discussion.

Valéry was content to be regarded as a disciple of Bergson; Jarry too quoted Bergson's

ideas freely and constantly demonstrates his influence. In the two previous chapters we saw how the interest of both writers was gripped by the Bergsonian discussions of *espace* and *durée*, leading them to broaden their investigation to take in the theories of Leonardo and of Faraday and Kelvin, whom Bergson cites. Although Jarry never uses the term *lignes de force*, his idea of a *palais d'espace* or *rayonnement musical*, radiating from a forceful shape or personality, demonstrates a convergence in their views. Jarry and Valéry's friendship which dates from the beginning of 1898 is proven, not only by the tribute in Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien, but mentioned by Valéry in a letter to Gide.³⁷

Valéry refrained from expressing his views on dance in print until after the 1920s, by which time the *Ballets russes*, Expressionist dance, Dada and the Surrealist movement had each brought considerable changes to dance performance and theory. Jarry's portrayal of dance as a disturbing, primitive force is nevertheless extraordinarily close to Valéry's, based as it is on the Greek sources and the pagan Dionysian initiation mysteries and heralds the trends in actual dance performance of the following twenty years. Valéry moreover endorses Xenophon's Banquet, one of Jarry's sources for the graceful, trance-protected *sauts périlleux* of the archaic *kubistitir*/acrobat. Valéry supports Xenophon's view that dancing has a transfiguring effect on the human face and form and that it bestows the elusive and much discussed quality of graceful movement, which has no other end than that of giving pleasure and that, with Bergson, he saw as belonging to an ideal world.³⁸

Valéry's two main pieces on dance were L'Ame et la danse, written in 1923 and Degas Danse Dessin, written in 1934. In L'Ame et la danse he demonstrates prolonged pirouetting as a way to entering another world through the dance of the fictitious Greek dancer, Athikté, depicted in his reconstruction of entertainment at a Greek banquet, such as depicted by Plato

³⁷ Valéry's letter to Gide dated 7 November 1899 states briefly: J'ai l'estime de M. Ubu.

³⁸ "Grace transports us from this world where words are riveted to action and action to selfishness, into another completely ideal world, where word and movement are freed from their utility and have no other object but to please."

Priddin translates Bergson's words but does not give the precise reference.
Priddin, op. cit. p. 159.

and Xenophon. It carries the same message as Jarry's portrayal of Mnester's barely possible acrobatic whirling and of Messaline's frantic circling of the Roman arena prior to her vertiginous descent and trance-encounter with Mnester/Priapus. Described through the fictitious dialogue between Socrates, Eryximachus and Phèdre the act of the dancer's spinning is perceived to cause an eventual separation between the physical and the spiritual, indicative of a parallel potential disturbance of the natural order in the surrounding world, as in the case of Mnester's dance. At the moment that this happens, the dancer's physical body tumbles to the floor, bereft of the consciousness which normally supports it. Here is the commentary of the spectators:

SOCRATE: Elle tourne sur elle-même, - voici que les choses éternellement liées commencent à se séparer. Elle tourne, elle tourne...

ÉRYXIMAQUE: C'est véritablement pénétrer dans un autre monde...

SOCRATE: C'est la suprême tentative... Elle tourne, et tout ce qui est visible, se détache de son âme; toute la vase de son âme se sépare enfin du plus pur; les hommes et les choses vont former autour d'elle une lie informe et circulaire (...) un corps par sa simple force, et par son acte, est assez puissant pour altérer plus profondément la nature des choses que jamais l'esprit dans ses spéculations et dans ses songes n'y parvint.³⁹

Valéry is here asserting the superior force of a physical act over mental effort, of physical speed over dream when it comes to achieving a real alteration in the natural order: the separation of the spirit from the body, as if these two were physical entities like curds and whey. As we said earlier, this is also Jarry's argument, whether achieved by the downward momentum of a runaway bicycle or a kind of self-perpetuating whirling which gathers momentum by itself. Jarry does seem to link this to a definite spiritual effort on the part of the dancer, which allows the body to spin in a state of semi-levitation that could not be consciously achieved. Jarry portrays the spent dancer having to be carried from the stadium. It is interesting how close Valéry comes to Jarry's theories on the heightened mental receptivity provided by speed, leading to the release of the creative impulse.

³⁹ Valéry, *L'Âme et la danse*, 1923, in *Oeuvres* II 174

The absence of conscious effort is also linked to the mysterious quality of grace. Kleist's well-known discussion on the property of graceful movement, Über das Marionettentheater, cites the case of a young man, who tried in vain to repeat a graceful and spontaneous sequence of movements, that had involved taking a thorn out of his foot. Kleist decided that true grace was unattainable through conscious human effort.⁴⁰ He also cites a case of a skilled fencer who decides to try his skill against a dancing bear, but whose tactical attacking thrusts are unfailingly parried by the animal with an instinctive spontaneous and graceful movement. In seeking a paradigm for the perfect dancer Valéry too turns away from human models. His most compelling and colourful argument was to equate the art of dance with the graceful locomotion of jellyfish. Having failed to find a vehicle for the Mallarmean idea of abstract movement, which the all too heavy human strives in vain to convey, Valéry found that these fairy floating life-forms whose very flesh takes the form of frilled petticoats, fulfilled his concept of the perfect dancer as follows:

Point de sol, point de solides pour ces danseuses absolues; (...) Point d'articulations de liaisons invariables, de segments qu'on puisse compter (...) cette grande Méduse, qui par saccades ondulatoires de son flot de jupes festonnées, qu'elle tresse et retresse avec une étrange et impudique insistance, se transforme en songe d'Éros; et tout à coup, rejetant tous ses falbalas vibratiles, ses robes de lèvres découpées, se renverse et s'expose, furieusement ouverte.⁴¹

Linking flesh and lacy fabric, Valéry deliberately allies the metaphor of frilled skirts to the female sexual parts that might be seen under it. Dancer, skirt and sexual parts are fused into a single unit. Thus as brazenly suggestive in their movements as any cabaret dancer, yet gravity-

⁴⁰ "So findet sich auch, wenn die Erkenntnis gleichsam durch ein Unendliches gegangen ist, die Grazie wieder ein; so, dass sie, zu gleicher Zeit, in demjenigen menschlichen Körperbau am reinsten erscheint, der entweder gar keins oder ein unendliches Bewusstsein hat, d.h. in dem Gliedermann, oder in dem Gott." Grace seems to be connected with the Infinite. The structure of the human body therefore appears at its purest when there is either no consciousness present at all or else infinite consciousness, i. e. in marionette or god. (My summary)

Heinrich von Kleist, 'Über das Marionettentheater' in Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, 2er Band, München, Carl Hauser Verlag, 1961, p. 342

⁴¹ Valéry, 'Degas, Danse, Dessin,' (first published in La nouvelle revue française, no. 244, 1 jan., 1934) Oeuvres II 1163-1240.

defying and boneless like Jarry's ideal acrobat, the jellyfish gives visual form to Valéry's idea of erotic dance. It leads directly from the idea of the teasing, swishing skirt to the inviting sex of a frenzied striptease dancer. In simplistic terms, the greatest difference between Valéry's and Jarry's portrayals of the dancer is that Valéry's jellyfish represent the female principle and Jarry's spinning spindle-acrobat represents the male: the vibration, the undulating movements and the sudden nudity are common to both portrayals and relate to the elemental aspects of the dance. Jarry's dancer is more visually confusing in that his form is fragmented, even scattered into tiny glinting pieces, so that it materializes or dematerializes according to the light. Neither writer is concerned with steps and gestures and any artificial sign system that these may contain.

If we discount the erotic connotations and the female gendering of the jellyfish, and focus on the elements of lightness, colour and grace, the above passage has strange affinities with an early prose piece by Jarry, called 'La Vue,' which describes a mystical smiling foetus in a jar, buoyed up by formalin and coloured air bubbles which lend it a peculiar grace and the appearance of life, until a clumsy jolt bursts the uplifting bubbles and returns it to the state of an inanimate rubber doll:

Il s'est épanoui dans son vase comme un bouquet qu'on arrose. Et des bulles d'air, irritées et irisées, sous la clarté crue de la lampe, restent accrochées aux plis non encore défaits de sa face. Ses paupières s'écartent, ses lèvres s'ouvrent en un vague sourire. Il a emporté de l'air aux oreilles comme un insecte d'eau qui plonge. Ses yeux et sa bouche me regardent de ce regard mystique dont vous inquiète tel masque en pâte de verre. Mais mes doigts maladroits agitent le vase, les bulles s'envolent, et je reste béant devant la figure bête de poupard de caoutchouc qui s'étale. (PL I 209)

Both jellyfish and foetus achieve a beauty and grace through movement performed entirely without intelligence or self-consciousness and so reinforce the point made by Kleist.

Published in 1894, the above passage contains Jarry's first references to the diving water beetle and the life-giving bubbles of air, which, within the framework of the Breton *mare*, as we said in Chapter 2, he later invested with the status of "treasured memory" and to which

he had recourse for some of the main metaphorical imagery for his aesthetic philosophy. The links between the floating foetus and the river-borne *noyés*, which figured in the previous chapter are not difficult to perceive. There seems to be a deep concern with fragility here. Jarry's reference to glass, a marvellous material between the fluid and the solid, transparent, malleable, but easily broken, underlines the contrast between grace and clumsiness; what is dead and what is alive. Foetus, marionette and the mythical mandrake all hover on the edge of the animate, where a slip of the human imagination can easily give them the semblance of life. The marginal area between life and death were very much a *fin-de-siècle* preoccupation, as were the origins of life. We can see this preoccupation expressed in the sperm motifs of Munch and Beardsley, which can almost be interpreted as a form of grotesque ornamental arabesque. In 'La Vue' Jarry is concerned with the frail essence of life itself as expressed by one of the elements of dance: its seemingly magical and gravity-defying lightness. Mnester is connected to the forces of death but also of regeneration. He too can be interpreted in terms of a grotesque arabesque that glows, goes out but then reemerges as an "indestructible" and ineradicable shadow or black cinder. Mnester, the dancer as sign, the acrobat as shaman, escapes the pull of gravity as he directs his feet and his mind towards the heavens and almost levitates as a spinning *trait-d'union* between the ground and the sky, an extraordinary, but not impossible manifestation of ecstatic dance.

6.8 Rotation, vertigo and the spiral movement

Jarry's keen attention to the power of a rotatory movement, both as a suggestive image and in the rhythm of his text is very noticeable. As early as 1894 in one of the chorus poems of *Haldernablou* he refers to an upward spiralling movement as *des vrilles de vigne* and indeed African dance rhythms have been described by a contemporary expert as being analogous to the spiral germination of plants.⁴² The spiral of Ubu's *gidouille* could represent Jarry's personal seal as an artist, the sign of both mystery and creativity - the

⁴² See Jean Laude's introduction to Michel Huet, *The Dance, Art and Ritual of Africa*, Collins, London, 1978.

omphalos of Delphi. As we have seen, there is ample evidence to show that both the spiral and the fast-moving wheel are crucial to Jarry's experiments in style and meaning. In this section we shall turn aside from the dancer-performer to examine the whirling movement and rhythm of primitive dance and the way that Jarry applies it to the text.

We know that Jarry equated the eye, star and wheel as powerful visual emblems with a magnetic force conducting towards the central dot or hub.⁴³ In Chapter 1 we cited his early reference to a wheel-like structure when setting out his personal aesthetic code in 'Linteau', "Suggérer au lieu de dire, faire dans la route des phrases un carrefour de tous les mots." This dynamic linguistic concept of a crossroads, where words brush against each other in meeting at a nucleic vortex, but then glance off in different directions, having both gained and given resonances of meaning during the moment of contact, is Jarry's ideal of maximum suggestivity - an idea to which Apollinaire attempted to give literal form in his poem 'Lettre-Océan' and one which Julia Kristeva, quoting Bakhtin, has lucidly described as a paradigm of the writing process. It is worth citing her full quotation from Bakhtin to make a point about the varying and shifting surfaces of the text, what she terms the Menippean ambivalence - a stormy marine image which is entirely pertinent to the Jarry textual universe:

Le langage du roman ne peut pas être situé sur une surface ou sur une ligne. Il est un système de surfaces qui se croisent. L'auteur comme créateur du tout romanesque n'est trouvable sur aucune des surfaces linguistiques: il se situe dans ce centre régulateur que représentent le croisement des surfaces. Et toutes les surfaces se trouvent à une distance différente de ce centre de l'auteur.⁴⁴

Kristeva's comment on this text insists on a multiple centre, rather than a single static wheel-hub, and on the elusive, darting and diving nature of the authorial position within the text,

⁴³ The star-shaped layout of the avenues in Lucullus' gardens in *Messaline* draws Messalina inexorably towards the centre, visually and bodily, in the manner of a whirlpool. She is buoyed up by flower petals, but hidden depths are suggested:

Et, selon les branches d'une étoile en allées régulières guidant les yeux de Messaline vers le centre, mais où son pied était supporté sans enfoncer par d'élastiques pétioles, des tulipes insondables et des amarantes infinies.

(PL II 104)

⁴⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Slovo vromane,' in *Voprosy literatury* 8, 1965, cited in Julia Kristeva, *Συμειωτική*, p. 168, n. 13.

which yet controls it - she views the author as an unpredictable Poseidon-like figure impelling its currents, emerging and submerging at unexpected points on the shifting surface:

En fait l'auteur n'est qu'un enchaînement de centres: lui attribuer un seul centre, c'est le contraindre à une position monologique, théologique.⁴⁵

With this image in mind we should pay special attention to Jarry's cryptic metaphorical/phonetic references to a Burdigala (Bordeaux) oyster diver and to a *sorcier musicien* from Taprobane⁴⁶ in the same breath, whose drumming protects him from the shark guarding what he mysteriously calls the "parc circulaire". We suggest that the motif of the dancer and that of the diver may be deliberately linked through Jarry's talismanic word "cubiste". "Kubistitir" is not used of all acrobats, but only those who perform the *sauts de carpe* or "tumbling" routine, since the Greek verb *κυβτω* relates to the head-down movement of diving or stooping. The important reference to the acrobatic tumblers on Achilles' shield must be combined with an earlier reference in *The Iliad* where Patroklos, in slaying Hektor's charioteer, sardonically compares his headfirst tumble to the ground to that of a diver or acrobat.⁴⁷ Here is the confusing and important coded passage which follows the path of the half-intoxicated emperor's wandering attention, before he replies to Messalina's wheedling and charged statement, "Claudi, le pantomime Mnester refuse de m'obéir en une chose":

Claude ne répondit pas d'abord, l'oreille au grincement des fenêtres de cristal: des fiasques de vin si centenaire qu'une carapace de coraux les laissait croire éventrées, rampaient sur les pattes de crabes ou les douzaines d'ailettes ventrales, remuant un

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Although we have argued that Jarry's choice of the words Taprobane and Burdigala is for their phonic qualities, Taprobane is the ancient name for Ceylon, where the Veddas originated, and Jarry's reference to a "sorcier musicien" could also be to the Veddas and their hymns, the earliest known song cycles, here defined by Mallarmé:

Le Véda, le recueil des hymnes, ou les Védas, si l'on parle des hymnes pris en eux-mêmes, nous offre *le plus ancien monument de notre race*: un ensemble des chants religieux en honneur chez les premiers Aryas, émigrant vers l'Indus. Mallarmé, OC 1171.

⁴⁷ "He fell like a diver from the well-made chariot, and the life left his bones. Then, horseman Patroklos, you spoke in mockery of him: Oh this is a really agile man, a ready acrobat! I should think he would be good too if he was out on the fish-filled sea - this man could feed a large number with the oysters he could find, diving off a ship, even in rough weather, to judge by his easy tumble to the plain from his chariot. Oh yes, the Trojans have their acrobats too!" *The Iliad*, 735-50.

vertigineux dégoût, de limules dont le dos enduit de cire scellait leurs goulots. Puis le verre répercuta le grondement d'un tambour de Taprobane, et un plongeur, vêtu d'une pierre entre ses cuisses, descendit cueillir des huîtres de Burdigala, le sorcier musicien le protégeant, durant le même temps qu'il retenait son souffle, de la vigilance du requin gardien du parc circulaire.

- Quelle chose? dit Claude.

(PL II 116-7)

This passage is an example of one of the most noticeable features in Jarry's texts : the drift in and out of reverie, perhaps better described as a sudden giving way or *enfouissement* (to use Jarry's own term) of the elastic surface reality of plot and context, like the elastic blue petals he describes as supporting the feet of Messalina in Lucullus' hippodrome. The above description of various crustaceans, including the significant *limule*, charged with a fraternal likeness to Ubu, (PL I 467) is a strange digression from the main plot and may hark back to the rock-pool or *mare* motif that the writer associates with memory and the happiness of earlier years. Jarry's dream sequences link to each other, rather than to the texts where we find them, and interrefract. The above excerpt can be linked to key passages, from which we have quoted in earlier chapters: principally 'Consul Romanus,' but also 'Le Tain des mares,' 'Le Récit de Roboam,' and 'Le Priape du jardin royal.' If we recall what Barthes calls "la jouissance de l'enfermement" that we related to the poem 'Madrigal' in the last chapter, Claudius' underwater cool-house or triclinium is the site of dream - another form of the protected magical space that Jarry describes in terms of the half-live, half artificial "piscine aux parasitaires antennes," described in 'Consul Romanus' and transfigured from a memory of his adolescence. The sea creatures which distract Claudius' attention from the harsh decisions of the real world are there too:

Et ce furent les thermes souterrains, d'eau douce si proche de la mer qu'elle était piquante au fond de crabes et d'insectes des mares. Et ils se baignèrent. (PL I 778)

The writer's *jouissance*, concentrated into this single nostalgic memory is without doubt and Jarry is now with Claudius in his reverie. If the written text is to be regarded in terms of a

watery mass with a vertical downward dimension as well as a horizontal surface, then the reader, as well as Kristeva's Poseidon-like author, must turn diver, prepared to plunge down through the author's several earlier texts to seize the pearl-bearing oysters. The mysterious *sorcier musicien* whose drum roll introduces the pearl diver sounds very much like the *gnome harpiste* of 'Guignol.' Does Jarry see the author somehow protecting the adventurous seeker of truth, as he plumbs his texts? Might there also be Rimbaudian resonances in Jarry's reference to the magical tap on the tom-tom, which signals entry into the world of fantasy and of a universal language?

Un coup de son doigt sur le tambour décharge tous les sons et commence la nouvelle harmonie.⁴⁸

So to the sound of a reverberating drum, like the prelude to a dangerous circus act, the reader-diver, as seeker after truth, is supposed to commit himself to a fearless downward plunge, if the effort of writer and receiver are to be matched and if they are to achieve communion. To this plunge and the rhythmic aural stimulus we must join the rotating movement of wheel or whirlpool, which Jarry unequivocally links to the creative imagination and the attainment of trance.

Jarry clearly identified the Dance as a means of passage (alternative to those of sleep or drugs, which he examines separately in *Les Jours et les Nuits*) to a different state of mind - an extra-rational state. The bird-like side to side head and neck movements peculiar to Indian dance, where the torso remains static, are recreated by Jarry for the death dance of Valerius the Asiatic prior to his immolation, connoted as phoenix as follows:

Alors, sur son lit de sieste, il enfonça obliquement le rasoir dans le côté de son cou et commença, soulevé sur son séant et la gorge raidie, de balancer de droite et de gauche la nudité de son crâne et la transparence de sa face. (PL II 101)

⁴⁸ Arthur Rimbaud, 'A une raison,' in *Poésies, Une Saison en enfer, Illuminations*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 166.

Although we argued for a puppet persona of Valerius, in the previous chapter, this side-to-side head-jerking also suggests the vertigo-inducing movements of the Greek maenads which would have enabled him to enter a state of trance to alleviate his death agony. Both interpretations are valid and to pursue Jarry's more serious argument about the nature of poetic inspiration, we should momentarily set aside the distracting vision of his characters as marionettes or mechanical toys.

Mnester's whirling dance falls into place as a further attempt by Jarry to transcend language and normal rational processes and to put forward dynamic motion as a means of attaining a sort of super-consciousness. This is linked to his theories on the stimulus to the creative process provided by travelling at speed, quoted above, which he proffers as an alternative method of assimilating forms and colours to that of the traditional ambulant poet ("capturer dans un drainage rapide les formes et les couleurs, dans le moins de temps possible, le long des routes et des pistes") mentioned in Chapter 1 section 13. One is reminded of Ezra Pound's later theory of Imagism that: "The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is (...) a VORTEX, from which and through which ideas are constantly rushing."⁴⁹ The writer's hurtling perception and, indeed the physical line of his trajectory through the landscape is like a fast geological bore to which selected impressions stick. Later remarks of Jarry's on travelling by train through a pivoting landscape, "le tout bondissant dans un immense mouvement circulaire" (PL III 496) provide an interesting counterpoint to contemporary painting and especially Braque's experiments in Estaque.

Jarry's perceptions can also be related to a slightly earlier literary context in the form of Poe's Maelstrom, a monstrous whirling and devouring phenomenon, which absorbs everything within reach - a macrocosmic equivalent of Jarry's belief, that the truly original mind possesses the pulverising ability of the ostrich's digestion and that it performs a destructive and deforming action like the alchemical transmutation of metals. ('Toomai des éléphants,'

⁴⁹ Ezra Pound, 'Vorticism,' in Gaudier-Brzeska, 1917, p. 92, quoted in Audrey Rodgers, *The Universal Drum*, London, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979, p. 20.

PL II 393) The spiral symbol in fact exists in alchemy as the symbol for trituration, whose action is defined as “to reduce to fine particles or powder by rubbing, bruising, pounding, crushing or grinding.”⁵⁰ We need look no further than the “creative” spiral on Ubu’s *gidouille* to perceive the digestive-cerebral process that Jarry intended to convey and which surely derives its inspiration from Rabelais.⁵¹

There is, nevertheless, at least one other theme running through the particular details of Mnester’s dance and chant and to which his spinning top movement is pertinent. This is the aesthetic theme of sculptural or artistic beauty, first announced through the evocation of the charioteer of Delphi in combination with the reference to Achilles’ shield and restated in the words of Mnester’s Chant. We have just invoked The Tales of Edgar Poe, which stands first in the list of *Livres pairs*, but there is equal reason to cite the second book in the list, Cyrano de Bergerac’s Histoire et Empires du Soleil. Introducing the pertinent theme of metamorphosis, the item that Jarry selects for inclusion in his collection of imaginative ‘gems,’ “Du petit nombre des élus”, is Bergerac’s extraordinary composite tree, which disassembles itself into a multitude of little people and their nightingale-king. (“De Bergerac, l’arbre précieux auquel se métamorphosent, au pays du soleil, le rossignol-roi et ses sujets.”) The tiny people begin a vorticist dance and, like microdots, recompose themselves into a giant as follows:

Cette volubilité s’étrécissant toujours à mesure qu’elle s’approchait du centre, chaque vortice occupait enfin si peu d’espace qu’il échappait à ma vue. Je crois pourtant que les parties s’approchèrent encore; car cette masse humaine, auparavant démesurée, se réduisit peu à peu à former un jeune homme, de taille médiocre, dont tous les membres étaient proportionnés avec une symétrie où la perfection, dans sa plus forte idée, n’a jamais pu voler.⁵²

Bergerac’s imaginative vision of atomic entities which can be composed or decomposed according to the illusionist principles of Arcimboldo would certainly have appealed to Jarry’s

⁵⁰ René Alléau, Aspects de l’Alchimie traditionnelle, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1953.

⁵¹ Bakhtin refers to this process as “degradation” and relates it to the process of regeneration. He counts laughter as one of the most important instruments of the degrading-conceiving process. Bakhtin op. cit. pp. 21-2.

⁵² Remy de Gourmont ed., Cyrano de Bergerac, Paris, Mercure de France, 1908, p. 241.

own beliefs. A main feature of Bergerac's description of this metamorphosis dance is that the dancers gradually become invisible with the increasing speed of the dance. Mnester likewise becomes invisible to the spectators, first through his spinning and second through the darkness of the eclipse, which connotes the 'chrysalis' stage masking his transformation from the mortal to the cosmic. His dance is therefore portrayed as a means of passage to a spiritual union, whose erotic and obscene connotations do not devalue it within the sacred Asiatic frame of reference that they are portrayed. From the visual angle it is easy to see why Jarry's ideas of speed leading to dematerialization of the image appealed to Marinetti and the Futurists. Jarry's insistence on accelerated movement, leading to invisibility and trance is a crucial ingredient of his aesthetic code and points the way to the artistic values of the coming century.

The structure of the chapter describing Mnester's dance also bears scrutiny from a linguistic angle. Brunella Eruli has drawn a perceptive analogy between the vertiginous movements that Jarry describes at the surface of the text and the pattern of the text itself.⁵³ It is a technique which Jarry practises at several critical points in his work, points which should be related to each other. For example the dance scene of Messaline cannot be analysed without reference to the structure of L'Amour absolu. We have shown that this novel approaches the theme of trance and hypnosis leading up to an incestuous Oedipal love scene in three chapters which strictly parallel the three chapters that lead up to Mnester's ecstatic dance and trance. The first of these chapters, 'Odin,' depicts Varia's progress towards her *rendez-vous* with Emmanuel as the 'magical journey' described in Chapters 1 and 5, during the course of which she has to run the gauntlet of a series of creatures and plants which have sharp, threatening silhouettes. The steeply descending slope of the hill looks forward to Messalina's vertiginous descent of the circus arena in Messaline's parallel

⁵³ "Egli, infatti, cerca un tipo di scrittura che segua da vicino il ritmo vertiginoso con cui le allucinazioni, o i movimenti del pensiero, si associano e si dissolvono per dare origine a nuove immagini.

Nell'Amour absolu lo scrittore registra le associazioni mentre queste emergono attraverso, e all'interno, della scrittura e dei suoni: "Elle enregistre le Vrai qu'il improvise."

Eruli, Jarry. I mostri dell'immagine, op. cit., 1982, p. 142.

chapter, 'Le Priape du jardin royal.' Varia's pace accelerates from walking to running and she arrives at her destination in a state of near-hysteria or panic. Like Varia, Messaline is no more than a cipher representing Woman - the Yoni to Mnester's Lingam/Priapus. She is forced, like Varia, to pass through a "décor of fear", here rank upon rank of myrrhines, the fabulous drinking vessels, made from an opaline material described in Pliny's Natural History. They form a gallery of watching eyes following her progress down the stepped banks described by Jarry in this passage, already quoted in Chapter 1, but which bears repeating here:

En équilibre sur un pied d'or, ils siégeaient et lorgnaient, compagnie d'oiseaux cyclopes sur une patte.

Et inlassablement, vers le spectacle silencieux où joue le rôle du chœur la nuit noire, leur feu ouvre des yeux de convoitise ou des bouches avides de boire. (PL II 104)

The imagery that Jarry uses to describe the myrrhines, feminine symbols intended to adorn the gorgeous and mythical backcloth for Messaline's descent into a dream state through vertigo is amongst the richest and most fantastic in all his writing. The deliberate juxtaposition of a cup-like form like a mushroom with the full moon above is a symbolic combination, denoting sexual yearning, used by future painters such as Magritte (Pipes amoureuses de la lune) and Paul Nash (November Moon). The hippodrome itself represents a huge cup, as Jarry is at pains to point out.

Jarry's lyrical description with its repeated rhythmical refrain depicting the myrrhines as greedy gulping eyes runs as follows:

Les étoiles de feu des murrhins (...) pareils à des champignons au parasol révulsé par un souffle des abîmes ou par trop vouloir s'épanouir - ouvrent des yeux de convoitise ou des bouches avides de boire. (PL II 105)

As we shall see, the theme of drinking, whether it is the poet, who "drinks" inspiration, or the shrivelled seed husks of the expectant text itself, runs strongly through this novel, in which writer, text and readers are respectively portrayed within the metaphors of dancer,

ornamental beakers and spectators. The final bleak gesture of the novel is that of Claudius, seeking oblivion in a clear third manifestation of the author in this novel, banging his empty goblet upside down on the tray and then stretching it out to be filled; his final words:

A BOIRE!

In Messaline Jarry's analogy between the engraved patterns on Greek drinking cups and the shape of the action he wishes to describe may be of prime significance to his belief in life imitating art. He describes Messaline's headlong descent in these terms:

Et comme on nielle des danses de femmes et déesses en bordure des coupes et cratères, Messaline courait, à la recherche d'une descente sans vertige, le long de la lisière des gradins supérieurs de l'escalier gigantesque (...) ⁵⁴ (PL II 103)

As mentioned above, Jarry further emphasizes the lack of distinction that he makes between art and life by referring to Achilles' shield as described by Homer. Homer's dramatic description of the pictures engraved on the shield entered the history of aesthetic discussion when singled out by Lessing as the only piece of writing in which a poet had succeeded in describing a series of static pictures dynamically, as if they were successive events with moving figures in them.⁵⁵ Jarry's comparison between the furrows of the ploughman as engraved by Hephaistos and the circular pattern of Messalina's giddy race is a tacit reference to Lessing's text and an attempt to flag his own experiments with language and aesthetics. Equating Homer's ploughman with his favoured image of a charioteer, (*l'aurige laboureur*),⁵⁶ Jarry implies an analogy between the lines of the printed text and the furrows of the ploughed field, between the ploughman/charioteer and himself, the writer, even down to the detail of the beaker of inspirational alcohol. The shield, the arena and the written page are portrayed as

⁵⁴ Louis Séchan explains that jumping and running belongs to the preparatory phase of Greek orgiastic dancing before vertigo can be attained.

Louis Séchan, *La Danse grecque antique*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1930, p. 161.

⁵⁵ G. E. Lessing *Laokoön, oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, ed. A. Hamann, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1878, ch. 17-18.

⁵⁶ From the Latin *auriga* "charioteer" the bronze statue of the Greek charioteer excavated at Delphi brought this word into vogue at the end of the nineteenth century.

equivalents. The movement of the charioteer is in the nature of a vertiginous race. The ploughman not only turns, but turns **over** the soil to reveal the precious *ancien sable de cristal* in his important act of regeneration. Turning and drinking here complement each other in the hazardous and vertiginous activity of imagining and creating a written text:

Et selon l'enseignement d'Homère, en images sur le bouclier d'Achille, après chaque virage aux traces parallèles (...) l'*aurige* laboureur vidait une grande coupe, au fond de la grande coupe du cirque. (PL II 103)

In our discussion of Jarry's *l'homme à la hache* we looked forward to the charioteer mentioned in Mnester's Chant, who seems to be endowed with godlike qualities and confusingly interchangeable with the King of the Fragrant Isle (described as "*comme la course en char d'un César*" and "*roux comme sur un piédestal.*") Once again we must evoke the so-called painted statue, where the Caesar/poet drinks the thunderbolt of Dionysiac inspiration (*synkeraunotheis*),⁵⁷ emulated by the reflecting scales of Mnester's costume which, as we shall see again below, 'drink' the sun:

*Au milieu de ton cirque, Cai, je danse.
Je danse au soleil.
Dans une splendeur pareille
O ma belle idole peinte, tu parus sur un char rempli de tonnerre,
Et ta bouche buvait l'éclair
De la barbe d'or du cocher roux.*

Following the same procedure as in the earlier part of the novel, Jarry combines crucial elements from two very different cultures, but which both relate to poetic inspiration: the one is the Dionysian thunderbolt of the ancient Greek mysteries and the second is the epiphany of the Hindu god, Krishna, whose transformation into the driver of Arjuna's war chariot forms the central moment of the Bhagavad-Gita and whose message helps to explain the strange

⁵⁷ This verb "to be lightning struck" comes from a fragmentary poem of Archilochus which relates that Semele, wishing to see Zeus, the father of her child, Dionysus, was visited by him in the fatal form of lightning. Archilochus seems to suggest that, in the act of improvising his dithyramb, the poet experiences through wine the equivalent of Semele's lightning-induced death. This argument was certainly designed to appeal to Jarry and suits his choice of a winejar outline for Ubu. See Lonsdale, op. cit. p. 91.

martial theme of the poem. Krishna has to persuade Arjuna to kill his own people. His words "Thou art my instrument" imply that the mortal warrior must submit blindly to the sacred force, without attempting to judge the morality of his actions.⁵⁸ Although Jarry's novels carry strong moral arguments (and it is notable that his longest amendment to the working proofs of Peer Gynt concerns the conversation between Peer and the Devil), in the question of poetic or artistic inspiration he leans towards an elimination of the distinction between good and evil. We have already seen him inclining to this view when comparing Lautréamont's sadistic hero, Maldoror with Filiger's saintly portraits in 1894:

Des deux éternels qui ne peuvent être l'un sans l'autre, Filiger n'a point choisi le pire. - Mais que l'amour du pur et du pieux ne rejette point comme un haillon cette autre pureté, le mal, à la vie matérielle. Maldoror incarne un Dieu beau aussi sous le cuir sonore carton du rhinocéros. Et peut-être plus saint... (PL I 1027)

The sacred nature of evil as incorporated by, say the destructive Hindu gods Kali, Shiva or Vishnu opposes the gentle religion of Bhuddism. To the Hindu concept Jarry allies the angelic identity of Satan/Lucifer and his own ineradicable belief in the Catholic Hell, the other side of Heaven and prime site of exquisite torture. The thematic content of L'Ymagier is as much, if not more biased towards the punishments of Hell as to sacred images.⁵⁹ Jarry's personal vision of Hell had been enlivened both by the brilliant verbal expression of Dante, to whose *chute des bolges* he refers, and by Doré's amazing illustrations to The Divine Comedy. Doré's portrayal of Satan cast out of Heaven, pitching headlong downwards, provides a vivid visual source for the "diving" *cubiste*, mentioned above.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Octavio Paz's The Poetic Revelation p. 114-5 for his relation of this text to the nature of poetic inspiration. Jarry's likely familiarity with this text through A.-F. Hérold has been previously indicated, but the unity of cultures had long been a preoccupation of Mallarmé's too. He mentions Arjuna as the subject of Vedic hymns in his 'Mythes hindoues ou védiques,' OC 1172, quoted above.

⁵⁹ Following the gruesome section 'Le Miroir du pêcheur' Remy de Gourmont sets out a project, never completed, which was to continue this theme:

Dans un prochain article, il sera curieux de comparer les visions populaires de l'Enfer avec celle de Dante, par des images et des textes apposés.

L'Ymagier no. 1, p. 106.

⁶⁰ "L'ange Lucifer, vieux et semblable au temps et au vieillard de la mer lapidé par Sindbad, plonge de ses cornes dorées vers l'éther latéral." L'ANGE LUCIFER S'ENFUIT, 'Clinamen' (PL I 716)

6.9 Achilles' shield: the ploughman-charioteer and the *kubistitire*

The passage of the *Iliad* which describes Achilles' shield depicts each successive scene engraved in terms of a lively continuous narrative. The figures are mobile, emotional and noisy, breaking all the rules binding the static icon. Homer puts the finishing knot to his account with two acrobats (*kubistitire*) whirling and tumbling at the umbilical centre of the shield. A connection between the motif of the whirling acrobats and the magical properties of the shield seems very probable. Homer was certainly at pains to indicate a blurring of the boundaries between life and art under the aegis of a whirling dance, such as Bergerac also describes. In Section 1 we showed how Jarry tailored the Greek word to coin the prophetic word *cubiste*. A precise reference to the archaic origins of Mnester's acrobatic dance sequence, we cannot know how many initiates were privy to this piece of Jarryesque jargon which lay like a dormant seed awaiting its moment to flower into a dancing shadow meaning, softening or even obliterating the image of the cube in "Cubist" in the minds of a very few, but perhaps an important few, who included Paul Fort and Apollinaire.⁶¹

The verb *kubistan* actually refers to the acrobatic stunt of tumbling (*sauts de carpe*) and includes performing the *saut périlleux* or full turn in the air.⁶² Jarry's insertion of a chapter on the mating habits of fish, 'Le pêcheur des mugils' in *Messaline* is entirely relevant to his theme. Plato uses the word to describe the fast circular progress of the mythical eight-limbed hermaphrodite before Jupiter spliced them in half to produce the single-sexed human being. Throughout Jarry's written texts one finds the motif of rotation announcing a state of

⁶¹ This extract of a letter from Jarry to Apollinaire shows that Apollinaire acquired first editions of *César-Antechrist* and of "L'Acte prologal" through the efforts of Jarry himself:

Voici bien six mois que j'ai mis de côté un *César-Antechrist*, quoique ce bouquin n'ait pas grande importance; mais il a été long de retrouver le premier acte. Maintenant, j'ai tout complet. (PL III 578)

⁶² Jarry's narrative "le mime, après un saut et demi périlleux, est retombé sur les mains en posture de cubiste." is echoed by Séchan's description of the so-called *kubistète*:

L'art de kubistète consistait essentiellement à se jeter sur les mains (kubistan) puis, à revenir à normale soit en rabattant ses jambes, soit en achevant un tour complet. Il pouvait faire ainsi une série de tours rapides, et parfois même peut-être, l'appui des mains étant supprimé il accomplissait de véritables "sauts périlleux."

Louis Séchan, op. cit. pp. 225-6. See also Père Ubu's boast in *Ubu cocu*, that he too can perform 'le saut périglyeux' despite the size of his 'gidouille.' (PL I 504)

hallucination, trance or even the passage to death. His selection of the term *posture de cubiste* to describe the second stage of Mnester's dance intentionally combines the idea of the archaic hermaphrodite and the acrobat/conjurer.

The figure of Mnester, rotating on one hand, cannot be viewed in a solely Greco-Roman context, although Lucian's perception of the rhythmical movements of the planets as a cosmic dance is certainly relevant here.⁶³ Jarry moves towards the idea of dervish dances, whose whirling circles are also intended to imitate the movements of the spheres. His assimilation of Mnester's hand to the image of a fallen star underlines this. We shall be comparing Mnester's Chant to Marcueil's Lullaby, in that both performers sing **to themselves**, in a state of reverie which places the text of their songs outside the main text. Mnester's Chant, progressing from the barely audible "rôle de fauve" to a thundering roar is completely outside Roman mime traditions and would seem to be modelled on the invocations of African or South American shamans, as we have said. Jarry may have been aware of an antique dance known as the Spinning Top (*strombilos*)⁶⁴ but Mnester's improbable feat of performing this upside down and of gaining enough momentum to spin on the nape of his neck goes even beyond the African possession dances towards the now vanished feats of levitation practised by Indian travelling conjurers, such as the Indian Rope Trick, or by Tibetan lamas. The second phase of Mnester's dance shows similarities with the movements of Turkish and Arabic belly dancers mentioned earlier ("Et toujours Mnester ondule et se disloque") (PL II 111) emphasizing his equivocal sexual identity. Mnester's so-called *libration* likewise evokes the delicate muscular trembling peculiar to this form of dance. Jarry marks definite transitions between these sinuous movements which are also performed by the contortionist or "carpet acrobat," the *saut de carpe* proper to Greek acrobats and the final levitational, almost

⁶³ There are many echoes of Mnester's dance in this chapter, especially the references to the combination of flutes, the tapping of feet and, exceptionally, to the melodious voice of the actor - also to the tumblers of Achilles' shield.

Lucian, 'The Dance,' in *The Complete Works*, tr. A. M. Harman, Vol. V, 'London & Cambridge, Massachusetts, Heinemann & Harvard University Press, 1936.

⁶⁴ Hesychius of Alexandria's record of this dance is mentioned in Lonsdale, *op. cit.*, n. 45 to ch. 1, p. 283-4. Cf. Ar. pax. 864, Athen. 630a.

supernatural gyration, more appropriate to a fakir, lama or shaman. Here is Jarry's description:

Mnester ne chante plus, mais parle pour soi, et dans une attitude de méditation il a croisé ses bras et penché sa tête sur sa poitrine, et c'est sur sa nuque maintenant qu'il gyre, comme les orbites inertes des astres sous ses pieds joints, lentement, comme depuis éternellement. (PL II 112)

We discussed in Chapter 3 the concept of the flexible graphic sign and the idea of Mnester as a changeable cipher. This improbable vertical posture, balanced on a bent neck, could be viewed as representing the letter **J**, the author's own initial. We might be tempted to take this further and argue that his four successive postures, the upright 'l', the serpentine 's', the upside-down 'j' and the final 'o', form an anagram of 'jsol' otherwise 'isol', pointing towards the writer-dancer's essential isolation.

The classical sources of both Jarry and T. S. Eliot are clearly visible in their insistence on a stationary *choregos* who marks the "still point" of the dance. At the climax of his dance Mnester is spinning so fast that he appears static, evoking the figure of Dionysos, calmly overseeing the frenzied movement of the Thyiads who celebrate him in their nocturnal revels, but is not necessarily caught up in it.⁶⁵ Jarry's ennoblement of the acrobat to a priest-like figure, indifferent both to mortal danger and to the opinion of the vulgar crowd, is clear from two passages, the first in 'Barnum' that we quoted in Chapters 3 and 4:

Quelle supériorité sur les acteurs ont ces grands artistes acrobates qui trouvent naturel de se livrer à leur travail périlleux, pêle-mêle avec vingt autres numéros, sans même savoir si c'est eux qu'on regardera! (PL II 333)

and the second in *Looping the loop* where he looks forward to a roller coaster auditorium, in which the spectators, strapped into *fauteuils wagonnets* hurtle around an immobile "acrobate." For Jarry the acrobat/*choregos*, with his ascetic disdain of physical risk and personal fame and whom he puts in the category of "ces grands artistes acrobates", was equivalent to a great

⁶⁵ Lonsdale, op. cit. p. 81.

artist who deserved to meditate in stillness. Equating the crowd with the ancient Dionysiac revellers in their desire for excitement and sensation, he felt that the spectators should be the ones subjected to violent movement and danger.

6.10 Dance as metaphor: Mallarmé's and Jarry's separate visions

In Chapter 3 and in Section 1 of this chapter we argued for a sharp distinction between Mallarmé's thinking on the written text and Jarry's. Jarry's concept of 'dancing letters,' is certainly distinct from Mallarmé's view of the orderly black on white text and his predilection for the sonnet form. This is a simplification, but one could also call Mallarmé poet of the soul, preferring words expressing lightness such as *flocon*, *écume* and *pétale*. He is drawn towards purity and the colour white, whereas Jarry can be defined as the poet of vertigo, drawn towards darkness and the abyss, preferring thudding, resonant words, such as *tambour*, *tintamarres*, *démon*. This difference also colours their ideas about the dance. In a sense they can be said to represent two sides of the same coin.

With 'Un coup de dés,' the very antithesis of pattern poetry and antithesis of the sonnet, Mallarmé, however, breaks away from form and daintiness in his effort to create 'Le Livre,' the Great Alchemical Work. We must therefore draw a clear distinction between Mallarmé's two views of the dance. The earlier conceives it as *écriture corporelle*, a sort of code of steps and gestures, but nevertheless a message from the choreographer to the spectator, using the dancer as both pen and paper, as he explains in this well-known passage from *Ballets*:

A savoir que la danseuse *n'est pas une femme qui danse*, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu'elle *n'est pas une femme*, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme, glaive, coupe, fleur, etc., et *qu'elle ne danse pas*, suggérant, par le prodige de raccourcis ou d'élans, avec une écriture corporelle ce qu'il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la rédaction: poème dégagé de tout appareil de scribe.⁶⁶

So Mallarmé here insists on the metaphorical nature of the dancer, rather than her corporeal

⁶⁶ Mallarmé, OC 304.

qualities. In 'Il dansait quelquefois la nuit' Jarry, no less than Mallarmé depicts the dance as metaphor. He merely replaces *glaive, coupe, fleur*⁶⁷ with the more grotesque and mobile forms adopted by Mnester, namely *lamproie, toupie, boule*. There is a similar grotesque character to the lunar pallor of Mnester's skin. White for Jarry often suggests blankness, and he uses it of creatures which have not been exposed to the light ("Le lombric blanc rentre en ses tanières") whereas Mallarmé's snowflake and foam metaphors are encapsulations of purity. There are nevertheless clear signs Mallarmé's ideas on the dance provided a focus for Jarry's. His later, less publicized statements speak of it as *rite sacré, parole divine*, and *sortilège* respectively, a view which very closely matches Jarry's portrayal.

What is especially important is Mallarmé's idea that the dance could act as a unifying force between the mortal and the divine. He articulates the sense of separation which so often surfaces in Jarry's poetry and fiction. Particularly striking is his view of the dancer as a neutral sign, which absorbs or 'drinks' the divine inspiration, flash of lightning or Dionysian thunderbolt:

Une armature, qui n'est d'aucune femme en particulier, d'un instable, à travers le voile de généralité, attire sur tel fragment révélé de la forme et y boit l'éclair qui le divinise;⁶⁸

Although Mallarmé here still insists on the female gendering of the dancer, his idea of an impersonal armour cloaking an unstable form approaches Jarry's presentation of the masked dancer and certainly describes the ambiguous and inhuman figure of Ubu. Moreover, Jarry's 'greedy,' gape-mouthed *lettres-corbeaux*, and his vision of the rows of equally greedy,

⁶⁷ With implacable logic, and using the damning words "banal" and "faux", Jarry attacks the flower metaphor:

Quand une femme tourne ainsi avec rapidité dans un plan vertical, la jupe, projetée par la force centrifuge, mérite d'être comparée - ce qui est banal et faux d'ailleurs en d'autres circonstances - à la corolle d'une fleur, laquelle, comme on sait, s'ouvre vers le soleil et jamais en bas.

'Balistique de la danse' *La Revue blanche* (15.1.1902) (PL II 336)

⁶⁸ Mallarmé, OC 311

gulping myrrhines, represent a simplistic, grotesque portrayal of Mallarmé's idea.⁶⁹ Jarry expresses this so-called act of drinking in concrete terms when the dancer's lips and his body, enclosed in reflecting golden scales apparently "drink" the deep wine-like purple of the near-night which characterizes the moment of the eclipse and are thereby obliterated:

Un disque noir mordait à même le soleil, jusqu'à n'en plus laisser qu'un croissant rouge, comme *la pénombre* rouge des lèvres de Mnester et les milles mailles en croissant aussi, subitement pourpres de sa tunique, buveuses de la chair sidérale avec toute l'insondable gloutonnerie qu'ont les miroirs. (PL II 113)

The metaphorical theme of drinking which runs parallel to the theme of dancing in *Messaline* carries connotations of fellatio, unthinkable in the context of nineteenth century mainstream fiction. Jarry here forms a plait of the obscene and the sacred, pertinent both to Caligula's practices and to the invocation of a savage god such as Kali or Dionysos himself. At a cultural level, biographical documentation reveals the deliberate pink bordering ("ourlet rose") around Mnester's lips as a specific sexual signal, demonstrating that Jarry reinforced his literary and mythical sources with firsthand experience of current practices in the Montmartre underworld community of transvestite acrobats and prostitutes.⁷⁰

This mixing of "low" and "high" source material may seem very distant from Mallarmé, yet the visual cancelling of the dancer can be seen to correspond to Mallarmé's call, in his essay, 'L'Action restreinte,' for the writer to enact a mirror-like dance of auto-negation and to break out of his normal existence in order to make an authentic gesture. Mallarmé describes this process as a ritual self-sacrifice that the poet performs in order to consecrate the fact of

⁶⁹ Lonsdale states that the derivation of *choros* is not definite but that *chortos*= an enclosed space and the Latin equivalent *hortus*= garden is possibly linked to *choros* in its sense of sacred and bounded space. He points to the Lithuanian word *zaras* = row, arrangement related through the verbal root *gher-* = contain or hold, which would put the rows of myrrhines of the hippodrome and the previous garden motif into a satisfyingly cohesive relationship with the overall theme of the dance.

Lonsdale op. cit. n. 16 to ch. IV, p. 295.

⁷⁰ "Jarry ayant spécifié dans *Messaline* que le mime Mnester gardait ses lèvres désourlées "pour une cause" j'interrogeai là-dessus l'auteur, et cet homme universel m'apprit que tel était l'effet de certaines suctions condamnables. Et depuis, averti, je constatai qu'était bridé de la sorte l'orifice buccal de plusieurs personnes du sexe féminin, qui n'étaient pas toutes célibataires."

Letter from Fagus to Henri Martineau, 15 fev. 1933 in *Le Divan*, no 189, oct.-nov. 1934, p. 330 (PL II 750)

his own existence (as a poet) and that of the metaphysical Idea:⁷¹

Plancher, lustre, obnubilation des tissus et liquéfaction de miroirs, en l'ordre réel, jusqu'aux bords excessifs de notre forme gazée autour d'un arrêt, sur pied, de la virile stature, un Lieu se présente, scène, majoration devant tous du spectacle de Soi; là en raison des intermédiaires de la lumière, de la chair et des rires, le sacrifice qu'y fait, relativement à sa personnalité, l'inspirateur, aboutit complet ou c'est, dans une résurrection étrangère, fini de celui-ci: de qui le verbe répercuté et vain désormais s'exhale par la chimère orchestrale.

Une salle, il se célèbre, anonyme, dans le héros.

Tout, comme fonctionnement de fêtes: un peuple témoigne de sa transfiguration en vérité.⁷²

This passage amounts to a call to writers to sanctify themselves and their texts through their transfiguration in a sacrificial dance. We would argue that Jarry responded directly to Mallarmé's call and set himself the task of depicting the transfiguration of the poet-dancer, as conceived by Mallarmé, metaphorically in a literary text. This is precisely the matter of the chapter "Il dansait quelquefois le nuit" and accounts for the large part given in this novel to a Roman mime of very minor historical importance, also for the connection that Jarry fabricates between Mnester and Messalina in order to draw a parallel with the John the Baptist/Herodias story. There are several elements in the passage quoted above which find their reflection in Jarry's narration of Mnester's dance. The sacred Place is not a stage, in Jarry's vision, but an arena, open to the sky, and which reflects the sun:

Le soleil (...) se remira, comme l'impératrice, pour voir s'il n'était plus trop rouge, à la fulgurante poussière de l'arène sphingitique. (PL II 114)

In characterizing the arena as the sun's mirror, Jarry is emphasizing that the sacred space of the dance and the dance itself must be regarded as a single composite unit. He has already gone to some trouble in the previous chapter, where Messaline is seized by panic and hysteria

⁷¹ Mary Lewis Shaw, 'Ephemeral Signs: Apprehending the Idea through Poetry and Dance,' *Dance Research Journal*, 20/1, Summer 1988, p. 7.

⁷² Mallarmé, OC 371

under the “eyes” of the myrrhines in the empty arena, to transmit the impression that it is no commonplace Roman arena but a place of dream and great strangeness. He further weights its significance, as we have seen, by metaphorically linking it to the history of aesthetics through his reference to the passage on Achilles’ shield and the charioteer-ploughman. The implication is that any events taking place in this special arena have a bearing on aesthetic theory. Mallarmé’s allusion to the “spectacle of Self,” made possible by the intermediaries of light, flesh and laughter, can be applied to the description of Mnester’s performance, as does the “sacrifice made of the inspirer’s identity,” symbolized by the dancer’s obliteration during the eclipse. Jarry’s text only deviates from Mallarmé’s on account of his mistrust in the people’s ability to bear witness to the writer’s “transfiguration into truth.” The blinding of the crowd by the eclipse is intended metaphorically as well as literally. Messalina’s unwavering, lascivious gaze meanwhile misinterprets the dancer’s mimed self-negation, the zero of his final posture as the self-pleasuring *Baiser de Narcisse*.⁷³ Although he is constantly guilty of laying false trails, Jarry’s message is that the writer’s or artist’s effort to communicate with the ordinary crowd is in any case doomed.

6.11 Crossing space: dance as communication

The second aspect of the dance which seems to fascinate both Mallarmé and Jarry is its intrinsic linking nature - its ability to bind one individual to another. This is gesturally expressed, either through linked hands, (*cheir epi karpoi*), the frequent motif decorating the rims of Greek pots, or the arm outstretched, that conveys one human being’s effort to reach another. Mallarmé’s posthumously published *Livre* contains a poem with this theme. Mary Shaw cites “Le mythe des deux femmes” where two women, although physically separated and on opposite shores are able mentally to reach each other. Oddly, the gesture is not towards each other, but one arm up, one down:

⁷³ Cf. Foulc, op. cit. p. 124.

Il s'opère un mystérieux rapproche-
ment, chacune
tendant d'où elle est,
y soit allée ou
les bras à son absence
de l'autre côté, à la fois future
et passée

(un bras bas, un
autre levé, attitude de danseuse)⁷⁴

Does the raised arm and the dropped arm contain the idea of past and future? Is the single raised arm extended with the white palm outwards and fingers extended, signalling or waving? Whatever the exact dance position, the verse indicates an outward-reaching mental tension linking the two figures. Dance, through its characteristics of ritual gesture and rhythmic movement in unison, possesses an almost magical binding and healing power. In Greek dance the essential gesture of the members of the chorus was to grasp one another by the hand and unite themselves into one body.

As we have seen, Jarry was much preoccupied with the idea of the individual's unconquerable isolation and his inability to commune with anyone other than himself. This is the subsidiary theme of *Les Jours et les Nuits*, and finds its most vivid expression in the final scene where Sengle, in the grip of hallucination, is drawn forward to kiss the likeness of Valens, whom he would have the reader believe is his own younger *Doppelgänger*, in the form of a plaster mask. It is also a theme of *L'Amour absolu*, where the first chapter is deliberately ambiguous as to whether the central figure, Emmanuel Dieu, is in a real prison or, as we read in the text, "il n'a d'autre prison que la boîte de son crâne." The initial verses of the poem *Une forme nue...*, which should be considered as a separate poem to its second half, provide a more optimistic statement about human communion. *Le Surmâle*, in which it appears, is actually a study of the contradictory nature of intercourse between man and woman. Little

⁷⁴ Partially cited in Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, pp. 206-7, which relates this piece to the myth of the split androgyne. For the whole passage see Jacques Scherer, *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, pp. 18(A)-19(A). Jarry's spoof piece 'L'Ambre,' ostensibly on the same theme, is convincingly related by Eruli to the practical process of developing a photograph from a glass plate: "l'être et l'image s'aiment à travers la muraille." (PL 1791) Eruli, *Jarry. I Mostri dell'Immagine*, op. cit., pp. 64-67.

different from the lethal mating procedures of scorpions or spiders, Jarry depicts the repeated copulation between Marcueil and Ellen as both dance and contest. The introduction of the phonograph and the putting on of a record, to accompany their efforts, enhances this impression. We referred in the previous chapter to the pugilistic nature of their encounter, which is announced by the resounding clash of their chests, like the clash of stags' horns. It is only in the aftermath of their exertions, when Ellen has apparently died as a result of Marcueil's repeated "attacks," that he is overcome by tenderness.

Jarry's text, never so far subjected to detailed analysis, is deliberately equivocal. Marcueil, like Mnester, recites a poem which seems to have very little relevance to the preceding or following action. Although a thing of reverie, it nevertheless represents a genuine act of love which does not have the confrontational or competitive aspect of the previous eighty two that Marcueil had undertaken in the name of his wager. The reader is led to believe that the subject of the poem is a woman, and the punning tail of the poem points to Ellen, but Jarry leaves the subject anonymous and indeed sexless. This is a cryptic technique which Rimbaud had also employed, leaving the reader to select the sex of the poem's subject himself.⁷⁵

*Une forme nue et qui tend le bras
Qui désire et qui dit: Est-ce possible?
Yeux illuminés de joie indicible,
"Qui peut, diamants, nombrer vos carats?"*

(PL II 262)

The poet here observes and analyses the components of the non-verbal offer of love here, posed as a question ("*Est-ce possible?*") and not a demand, which is made to him by the anonymous desiring form. The combination of the inviting arm or hand and the sparkling eyes, antithesis of Messaline's dulled ones, (*charbons éteints*), or even Varia's contradictory *yeux de fougère*, which beckon and warn at the same time, represent a naive genuineness and directness which spoken words blur. It is the extended arm which asks the question in this poem, representing the possibility of a spontaneous feral union between two humans (*un*

⁷⁵ See Roger Little, *Rimbaud's Illuminations*, London, Grant & Cutler, 1983.

mariage fauve) as opposed to the laboured scientific experiment in which Marcueil and Ellen have taken part. The gesture of the outstretched arm, one which expresses both separation and the invitation to cross the separating space, sums up the human predicament. It is precisely the predicament described by Plato following the splitting of the mythical androgyne, whereafter each split being is compelled to seek its missing half.⁷⁶ In the repertoire of dance gesture, it is one of the most basic and most often used.

The feminine pronoun, “elle” which refers to *une forme nue* is used by Jarry in the third verse and continues to blur the sexual identity of the desiring being. The receiving ear and the eye together all too easily interpret “une forme nue” as “une femme nue.” He uses a similar technique in Mnester’s Chant with the invocation: *O ma belle idole peinte*, which, despite the martial tone of the poem, gives a feminine cast to its ostensible subject, Caius Caligula. We have already quoted the first verse of the poem. The three following verses are the most significant of this deceptive poem, which has a sexual explicitness unique in Jarry’s poetry.

*Bras si las quand les étreintes les rompent,
Chair d’un autre corps pliée à mon gré,
Et grands yeux si francs, surtout quand ils trompent,
- Salez moins vos pleurs, car je les boirai.*

*Au frisson debout elle est, endormie,
Un **cher** oreiller en qui bat un coeur;
Mais rien n’est plus doux que sa bouche amie,
Que sa bouche amie, et c’est le meilleur.*

*Nos bouches, formez une seule alcôve,
Comme on unit deux cages par leurs bouts
Pour célébrer **un mariage fauve**
Où nos langues son l’épouse et l’époux.*

It is important to realize that this part of Marcueil’s poem takes place in half-sleep (“Et simplement pour s’endormir, il fit des vers.”) At the end of this dozing dream he wakes up, and the awakening is a rude one. The fifth verse then has the role of a hinge, artificially

⁷⁶ Plato, *Symposium*, 190 b.

linking the first poem to a punning ditty on the legend of Helen of Troy, mythical representative of beauty, but here cruelty as well:

*Tel Adam qu' anime une double haleine
A son réveil trouve Eve à son côté,
Mes sommeils enfuis, je découvre Hélène,
Vieux mais éternel nom de la beauté
Au fond des temps par un cor chevroté:*

Segmentation of a poem into two parts which can be read as separate entities and which are connected by a hinge verse is a structure that Jarry had already used in 'La Régularité de la chasse.' True to the precepts of insect camouflage, the second part is used as decoy to distract the reader from the vulnerable and personal first part and to lead him into thinking that the subject of the entire poem is Ellen, transmuted into Helen, thus confusing him about the identity of the anonymous and sexless *forme nue*. The difference between the compliant, pillowing figure, *pliée à mon gré*, and the explicitly separate portrait of Helen of Troy, a cold-eyed beauty in name alone and whose hard breasts can only be quickened by shed blood, could scarcely be clearer. Verbally and visually Jarry repeats the message of separateness:

*La reine
Hélène
Se pare
(...)*

A son miroir Hélène se pare:

*"Mais non, Priam, il n'est rien si dur
Que le bouclier d'ivoire de mes seins;
Leur pointe s'avive au sang des blessures,
De corail comme l'oeil de blancs oiseaux marins:
Dans la prunelle froide on voit l'âme écarlate.
Il n'est rien si dur, non, non, non, Priam"*

(PL II 264)

There is a clear relationship between Mallarmé's Hérodiade, inspecting herself in the mirror and Jarry's figure of Messaline-Hélène, timeless and voracious female monster of many myths, demanding a male sacrifice to flatter its vanity. Messaline pointedly remarks that she has no

mirror so perfect as the marvellous glass ball of Sidon, and immediately goes on to describe it as “grosse comme une tête d’homme”. The analogy with Hérodiade’s erotic desire for John the Baptist’s head is obvious. Here again, as with Rome and Messaline assimilated to Venus (“La Ville et la Femme se parent”), Jarry depicts a city not only as arena or place of ritual sacrifice, but as the place that the presiding female icon uses to reflect herself, her vanity mirror in fact:

*Le sillon de son char qui traîne
Hector à l’entour des remparts
Encadre un miroir où la reine
Toute nue et cheveux épars,*

*La reine
Hélène
Se pare.*

Through his choice of words in *cor chevroté*, the quavering, if not false note of the trumpet which announces the theme of beauty, as traditionally represented by Helen of Troy, Jarry declines to support this myth. Classical beauty and true beauty are not the same. Nor does beauty, an abstract concept, figure in the first “true” half of the poem, in which *cher* and *chair* echo each other in a soft-falling physical succession of *yeux*, *bras*, *coeur*, *bouches*, *larmes* and *langues*. This is flesh on flesh, rather than the catastrophic conjunction of flesh on hot plaster of Sengle’s hallucination. Even though it is presented as a reverie, the validity of this poem rests in its uniqueness as the only satisfying physical human encounter that Jarry portrays. We can assume that he therefore admits to this possibility for himself.

From the invitation of the outstretched arm, Marcueil’s Lullaby follows the conventional stages of an erotic love scene. In contrast to the conscious second half of the poem, there is no dialogue, indicating that the five stages up to the final kiss could be mimed or danced. At the time of writing, such an explicit love scene would have caused a scandal as a Western dance performance, but would have been normal in the context of Indian dance. We must reiterate Jarry’s likely interest in this. The pseudonym of J. Hemgé is given for the actor

playing the part of the Old Man of the Dovere in Peer Gynt, a part which Lugné-Poë's memoirs credit Jarry with playing.⁷⁷ The same name appears in the cast list of A.-F. Hérold's adaptation of L'Anneau de Sakhountala. This is an ancient Indian drama, dating from 3 AD, which depicts a courtship and wedding through ritualized dance movements and recited texts. Its tension thereafter hangs on the inability of Sakhountala to break the spell of forgetfulness laid on her husband, and to communicate her identity to him, after losing the ring he had given her.⁷⁸ Little has been recorded about the 1895 production, but it apparently had the enthusiastic support of the young avant-garde. Le Petit Théâtre had put on a recent production with rod puppets and as an ancient gestural piece of oriental theatre, based on defined hand movements and glance, it held particular interest for Jarry and the Nabis.

The crossing of dividing space then, the shattering of the *palais d'espace* or *demeures de pierres*, in which people enclose themselves, Jarry sees to be one of the primitive functions of dance, through gesture, glance and embrace. He extols the gymnast, the nude form, or at least the human form emphasized in a shining *maillot* without a wafting envelope of confusing veils or chiffon. In his view these only serve to shift the focus away from the purity of the physical feat, from the lines of the body and from the immediacy of the bare gesture.⁷⁹

6.12 Conclusion

In tracking Jarry's chameleon personal aesthetic, the theme of dance draws together many threads of his thought. 'Il dansait quelquefois la nuit' is a deliberate allegory of the act of writing. It provides a summary of Jarry's ideas on the writer's dual function which first involves a particularly open form of "whirling" mental receptivity, followed by the physical process of expressing the products of this intense imaginative activity in concrete terms to a

⁷⁷ But see Arnaud, Alfred Jarry, op. cit., pp. 187-8 & 245-7.

⁷⁸ Cf. Robichez, op. cit. pp. 522-523.

⁷⁹ "Il est classique aujourd'hui dans les cirques que des femmes en jupe longue et non plus en maillot se livrent à des jeux icariens et des séries de sauts périlleux en arrière, ou à des exercices de trapèze volant. Ceci permet d'apprécier pour la première fois l'utilité esthétique du costume féminin moderne, laquelle, autrement, pourrait échapper à l'observateur." 'Balistique de la danse' La Revue blanche (15.1.1902) (PL II 336)

human audience of varying intelligence and limited imagination. The idea of libation (anointing the sacred space) and of drinking, in order to induce ecstatic dance, as in the Dionysiac revelries, is an integral component of Jarry's allegorical vision. In *Messaline* the writer's task is never fulfilled. The divine gift of inspiration is successfully invoked but the writer thereafter remains sealed and the act of expression aborted. The second half of the equation, specified by Mallarmé, the mental effort of receptivity and imagination required on the part of the unknown spectator to interpret the dancer's swiftly vanishing message in his own way, is missing.⁸⁰ The blinding of the crowd by the eclipse is a clear metaphorical allusion to the *grande héméralope*. The dancer here remains nothing more than a hermetic sign - a bleak final statement by Jarry about his own failure to communicate with an audience, but one which reflects his true feelings. Whereas Mallarmé envisions his reader-beholder as a friend, at least in his published writing, Jarry remains unable to breach the sense of isolation, intellectual superiority and antagonism that he feels towards the unknown reader.

In expressing dance as a metaphor, Jarry's approach is typically scholarly. Having selected archaic Greek dance as his main source, although he does not name them, he is careful to isolate its several categories. *Orcheomai* is the generic term which serves for all types of harmonious movements, even the wind on water or corn, or the rippling of Mnester's scale costume. The *Komos* or revelry is here performed almost as a musical accompaniment by the wearers of the heavy *scabella*, Roman ancestor of the wooden shoe which Italian *pupazzi* operators still use for the vital percussive beat that carries a puppet show. Jarry deviates from the norm by including a marginal form of dance peculiar to *jongleurs* and by including acrobatics or so-called cubistic performance in the dance canon. This was usually restricted to private entertainment, as depicted in Xenophon's *Banquet*, and the performance

⁸⁰ "Celle-là (serais-tu perdu en une salle, spectateur très étranger, Ami) pour peu que tu déposes avec soumission à ses pieds d'inconsciente révélatrice (...) la Fleur d'abord de ton poétique instinct, ni attendant de rien autre la mise en évidence et sous le vrai jour des mille imaginations latentes: alors, par un commerce dont paraît son sourire verser le secret, sans tarder elle te livre à travers le voile dernier qui toujours reste, la nudité de tes concepts et silencieusement écrira ta vision à la façon d'un Signe, qu'elle est."
Mallarmé OC 307

was often in the nature of a striptease. Jarry's innovation was not only to give a savage accent to his portrayal in combining the cubistic dance with the *choros*,⁸¹ - the obscene with the sacred, but to point to an unbroken cultural heritage between the practices of Rome's low life and Montmartre's. But unlike the weary and starving acrobats which became a theme of Jacob, Apollinaire and Picasso, Jarry's dancer is a unique and privileged figure.

As we have said, it is important to realize that *choros* also refers to the dancing ground itself, the sacred space and Jarry is careful to draw the analogy between this space, reflecting the heavens and the page where writing takes place. The male dancer or *choregos*, assimilated to the writer, at first moves with the sinuousness of the lamprey, describing a series of horizontal arabesques which could be described as writing, but meaningless writing. The sudden change in his position, to both the upside down and the vertical, also the effect of motionlessness, if not invisibility, produced by his spinning, leaves the domain of concrete writing and passes to the divine, the obscene and the abnormal. The dancer-writer becomes a mere conduit between divine forces and the mortal vessel within the sacred space (or page). The writer finally becomes annulled and meaningless, like the material body of the puppet. He is only a vehicle for the divine message that is poured into him. The evidence of 'Il dansait quelquefois la nuit' suggests that Jarry was trying to rid obscene subject matter of the comic and vulgar connotations of his earlier writing and to raise it to the level of serious art. He deliberately selects the cubistic acrobat, a scorned, peculiar being on the edge of society, yet an entertainer, capable of extraordinary feats. He allies this figure to that of the shaman dancer, in touch with spiritual forces, and equally isolated from the main body of society. It is then, finally, an amalgam of the holy man and the ancient figure of the *bateleur* that Jarry wishes to present to us as a paradigm of the writer. Analogous with poetic inspiration, the dance itself is a force, a concentration of supernatural energy which can only find its focus in a true adept.

⁸¹ *Choros*, the dance space and *chorevo*, to dance a choral or round dance are normally used in relation to the choreographic activity of divinities such as Dionysos, Apollo or Artemis in divine prototypes of dance. The Roman crowd hails Mnester as Apollo and Orpheus in one.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The position of Anti-theorist that Jarry at first attempted to take up was, of course, untenable. The most that he could attempt was a general position of resistance, exposing the flaws of artistic traditions, laws, systems and frames of reference. He achieved this by a system of disruptive logic, which led to absurd, but meticulously argued conclusions. This is most evident in his satirical journalism. In the domain of poetry his demonstrations of absurdity are less easy to discern, so that the joke is often on the reader. Although both his cryptic and his overt demonstrations of absurdity were later brought under the heading of Black Humour, designating a subversive and self-cancelling category of literature, there remains a dubious in-between element which has so far allowed Jarry to evade a qualitative classification within a specific category and has led academe to turn uncomfortably away from his novels and poetry.

Jarry recognized that his anti-theoretical stance was itself a type of system and, tongue in cheek, endowed his systematic philosophy of challenge with the name of Pataphysics. As soon as he had given it the grand title "science of alternative solutions," he did not hesitate to throw on Pataphysics the same queer shadow of absurdity that he casts on other systems. As the reader and analyst, we should not be misled by his theory of an anti-theory but go back to the particular quirk which produced so-called Pataphysics. This is Jarry's irresistible impulse to examine everything from an alternative perspective to the accepted one and to accept his very simple hypothesis that there is another world existing parallel to the one that our senses can perceive. Never precisely described, Jarry's *autre monde* is not necessarily a glowing, romantic *other world*, or even the nostalgic world of Les Jours et les Nuits. His method of punching entrances into his alternative world is by use of shock, the obscene and, finally, by means of his revolver, "la Chose qui permettait (...) de le faire partout et toujours maître de la vie de tous et prince des ténèbres extérieures."

It has been the task of this thesis to examine the nature of Jarry's poetic

imagination, defined as an imagination in revolt. This means that Jarry's imaginative process has to be seen in terms of warfare, as a counter or repelling measure to another force, for which Reality is too vague a term. We have shown the deployment of this process in the novel Les Jours et les Nuits where memory images are interposed between the writer's consciousness and the debasing, dehumanizing routines of military service. This then is a particularly unacceptable type of reality - the more so in that it takes place within a scenario that has been idealized by memory. The blunt thrusts of unpleasant present experience, together with the present bleak landscape are, so to speak, parried with brightly coloured scenes from the writer's childhood. Like Jarry's beloved sport of fencing, this movement of thrust-and-parry provides the dynamic of the novel. Constantly drawn by the writer to a private ante-room with a window on to his personal memories and simultaneously drawn into sympathy with him, the reader becomes more involved in this vivid sequence from the past, than in the interleaved narration of the events of the present, to which the writer's physical body is subject. The evocation of memories becomes the 'real' dialogue between writer and reader. Although in not quite the same form, we have shown that Jarry would adhere to the same imaginative dynamic in subsequent novels, where his protagonists switch in and out of reverie, slumber or intoxication.

The thesis has identified a number of elements to which Jarry stood unequivocally opposed: to traditional values or institutions he opposed the values of the individual and any truly original idea; to *la foule* and *le bourgeois* he again opposed the lone and gifted marginal figures in society who pursued their craft or skill without public acclaim; all systems and disciplines, whether military, scientific or artistic were subject to his scorn and a target of his deadpan irony. In the introduction we set ourselves the task of seeking the reasons behind Jarry's defining urge to parody and undermine. The answer probably lies no deeper than his extraordinarily pugilistic nature. Lacking any deeply held religious faith or political commitment, his forceful and aggressive personality demanded difficult causes to espouse. There was also a natural mistrust of the obvious in Jarry's intellectual

makeup, which impelled him to question, to turn things upside down and to seek alternative solutions. There is evidence of an unstoppable hole, some suppurating wound in his emotional life which was never filled or healed. His *humour noir* represents the dark film or scab which thinly covers that lack or grief. His portrayal of sex is indeed linked with wounding and given a macabre or obscene cast, very much at odds with the few genuine poems the thesis has identified, where a strong desire for intimacy cannot be concealed. On the evidence of 'Madrigal', 'Une forme nue ...' and 'Je ne sais pas si mon frère m'oublie' Jarry only achieved this intimacy with prostitutes or with members of his own sex.

Jarry's *rire de défi*, as it is termed by Carrouges, can be perceived as a dark existential comment in some of his most masterly imaginative writing. What he calls the *ténèbres extérieures* are not the only presence which haunts him, but also the conflict between Self and Other, expressed in terms of an ever-present Jester, who perceives emotion as a weakness and will always interpose a cynical laugh before emotion takes hold. *Messaline* ends with Claudius in anguish at his self-inflicted bereavement, passing without transition to a *rire inextinguible* and *Le Surmâle* ends in a conflict between laughter and tears over Ellen's inanimate Body:

Il ricana malgré lui, quoiqu'un moi obscur lui chuchotât en dedans qu'il avait lieu de pleurer; puis il pleura quoiqu'un autre moi, qui paraissait nourrir une haine individuelle contre le précédent, lui expliqua copieusement, bien qu'en un instant, que c'était la belle heure pour rire aux éclats. (PL II 259)

A part of the task of this thesis has been to trace Jarry's *moi obscur*, the well-concealed Dark Self of his genuine impulses, rather than his better known public persona as the plaster-faced jester with the quick and cruel wit, the Kobold described by Gide.

As the thesis has demonstrated, the range of Jarry's talents and curiosity was very wide. One of the problems of this analysis has been to limit our inquiry to a bounded set of issues, in contrast to Jarry's own intellectual method which was to draw from and allude to an enormous selection of disparate sources whenever he wrote anything. We have given great

weight to his genuine interest in ornamental outlines deriving from nature which fed both his literature and his thinking about performance with marionettes. His texts tend to provoke a visual rather than an emotional response in the reader, although there is an underlying emotional current.

Jarry's innovatory views on art and his own graphic work must be assessed in the context of a personal and energetic campaign to break new ground in the art of the book, gathering the best of the avant-garde artists into this project. His fascination with gesture, acrobatics, racing and speed shapes his aesthetics and points the way towards the artistic preoccupations of the twentieth century. In the chronology of French writing on dance he deserves a prominent place between Mallarmé and Valéry.

Movement usually represents life; dance movements represent the human effort to reach something beyond mortal life. Jarry's thoughts often came to rest on the border area between the mobility of the real world and the living, and the immobility or repetitive action of the artificial and the dead. He seems to perceive a mobile water-world which at any moment can harden into a glass one. This is in addition to the alternative world of the unreal which he sensed somehow interleaved with the apparent one, and into which the dancer can spin or into which anyone can swerve or wobble by mistake, as if on a rickety bicycle.

Viewed from the perspective of the racing cyclist and the fencer, Jarry saw speed, surprise and risk as the elements essential to stimulating the imagination. The collection of forms and colours at speed, stored in what he called the *oubliettes de la mémoire* and then regurgitated, was the creative method that he proposed. If the momentum of his writing depended on the thrust and parry of sword play, his avowed method of composition owed its formulation to the sensations he derived from headlong freewheeling on his bicycle, rather than careful construction. The trapeze artist who launches himself into space without knowing if he will be caught also constituted Jarry's ideal in terms of combining anonymity with daring and the utmost skill.

We have indicated Jarry's use of different voices or styles as a method of concealing his genuine views, also his technique of segmenting his poems into the personal and the artificial to disguise his true feelings. One metre of his sincerity has been his habit of placing his genuine opinions in reviews of his friends' work. The simplicity of his style in these reviews gives the lie to his tortuous passages of deliberate mystification, sometimes larded with mathematical formulae that are impossible to verify. The more complex the argument the less likely it is to reflect his real views.

The high value that Jarry places on imagination as opposed to rational argument or academic facts has to be reconciled with his innate adversarial character. He stresses the importance of reverie, trance and dream, but as an act of opposition to dull or routine reality. He also places great value on the uniquely human attribute of nostalgic memory, which, spun out in a spider thread of gossamer or silver snail's trail, makes the individual what he is. His dictum "*Donc vivons et par là nous serons Maîtres*" came down on the side of living in preference to thinking. His original creation of the whirling ecstatic dancer as creative writer demonstrates his characterising belief that speed, risk and trance are essential ingredients to the process of poetic inspiration.

Despite several broad-based critical and biographical studies, conventional appreciation of Jarry still tends to focus on his role as a dramatist, highlighting the Ubu cycle and its role in launching the Theatre of the Absurd. We do not deny that this was Jarry's single most significant contribution, a daring act of artistic rebellion from which following artists and writers took their cue. The project of this thesis has nevertheless been to emphasize his position as a multi-talented figure and an artist in his own right, following a highly personal set of ground-breaking aesthetic precepts. We have set a part of his graphic and literary work within the context of ornament history which provides a new approach to that of previous studies and greatly helps to link the two strains. Many of the illustrations in Volume II have been selected to demonstrate this kinship.

We have also shown that Jarry's aesthetic position of revolt is not incompatible with lyrical writing and that it not only encouraged the important atmosphere of challenge and disruption of existing artistic canons which took place in the early twentieth century but upheld the primacy of the imagination as the sole valid criterion of art and literature. Jarry insisted that the reader be given spaces in the text for his own personal reverie and response to the writer's discourse. In this lightness of touch and his desire to allow the reader freedom of invention and not to overload him with detail, he demonstrates a tendency towards the abstract, which the following century would take to its ultimate point. His aesthetic aims and the schematic character of his own tiny woodcuts mark the very beginning of this tendency. We could say that Jarry's ferocious aesthetic of contradiction and cancellation leads to a welcome blank space "for our own use."

APPENDIX I

Sébastien Munster

Facsimile de deux chapitres du "Cinquième livre de Cosmographie par Sébastien Munter recueilly d'auteurs cosmographes approuuez, tant Latins qu'Allemands" première édition française, avec les bois du XV^e siècle.

Perhinderion no. 1, March 1896.

As these excerpts seem to represent Jarry's ideal of the Book as work of art we have reproduced 2 pages, showing figures and text together. (Figures 68a and 68b).

By his own statement, he also wished to demonstrate the abbreviations and vagaries to which fifteenth-century spelling was subject, in contrast to the rigidity of a single form, as required by the nineteenth-century French establishment.

SEBASTIEN MUNSTER

De la Cofmographie Vniuerfelle liure V.

Comment Alexandre le grand partift de Macedonie, & entra en Indie avec grande force & vertu: & des choses qui luy font aduenues en chemin.

Les historiographes recitēt des choses admirables qu'Alexādre le grād fait en Indie: mais il semble bien qu'il y a des grādes absurdités & beaucoup des mēsonges mestez parmy. Comme ainsi soit donc que trois cens ans ou enuiron auuant que le Filz de Di eu fuft descēdu en terre, Alexādre le grād fuft paruenue avec toute son armée iusques aux portes Caspies, & eut eſté coduyt par régions très fertiles, il arriua finalement en une terre afpre & solitaire, en laquelle il eut de grādes pertes, & tōba en de grās dāgiers. Car il voulut cercher les plus courtz chemins pour atteindre Porc le roy de l'Indie, qui s'enfuyoit de la bataille. Pour cette cause il prit 150 guides, qui cognoiffoyēt les courtz chemins, qui le feirēt passer par des ſablons ardēts & lieux fecz, prommetrāt grās salaires à ceux qui cognoiffans le pays le meneroyyēt par les lieux incogneuz d'Indie iusques à Bactriane, & iusques aux extremitez des Seriens. Mais les guides portās plus de faueur aux gēs du pays qu'à Alexādre, ne regardoyent à autre chose que de mener l'armée d'Alexādre par les lieux dangereux pleins de ſerpēs, & la mettre en proie aux beſtes furieuses, & des les faire tous mourir de foif aux defertz fecz & arides. Toutes fois ilz deſcourirēt vne riuere en ces defertz, le bord de laquelle eſtait couuert de ioncs de 60 pied plus gros que ne font pins ou sapins, deſquelz les Indois ſe ſeruēt pour faire baſtimēs. Apres donc qu'ilz eūrēt là affiz le camp pour eſtēcher leur foif, ils trouuerēt l'eau de cette riuere plus amere que hellebore ou veraire: et n'y auoit ni homme ni beſte qui en peut boire. Le roy troublé à cause des beſtes qui eſtoyēt en

son camp, a fauoir elephās, cheuaux de charrette, ſommiers, et muletz qui portoyēt le bled, les munitions, les hardes & bagages, & pour le grād nōbre de beſtial qu'on menoit pour la nourriture des souldardz et à caufe de la grāde multitude

de gens de guerre qu'il auoit avec soy, ne ſauoit qu'il deuoit faire, voyant qu'il n'auoit ne beſte n'y homme qui ſe peut tenir pour la grād foif qu'ilz enduirēt. Les souldars leſchoyēt leurs ferremēs, aucūs mettoyent quelques gouttes d'huyle en leur bouche: & ainſi taſchoyēt d'appaifer leur foif en

quelque forte. Il y en auoit plusieurs qui reittât toute honte et vergogne, beuuoyent leur vrine, estans tourmentez d'une extreme necessité. Or voicy qui augmentoit le mal, qu'avec ceste extreme foif qu'ilz enduroyēt en une region estrange, ilz estoient cōtreintz de porter leurs armes sur le doz, & lors mēme qu'il leur falloit passer par les lieux pleins de serpens: afin qu'ilz ne fussent point surprins & affailliz auant qu'ilz y peussent penser.

Suyuans donc la riue de ce fleuve, finalement ils arreuerent à une ville, laquelle estoit bastie au milieu de ceste riuere en vne isle: & les bastimens de cette ville estoient faitz de ioncz. Ilz veirēt là bien peu d'Indois, & demy nudz, lesquelz ausitoft qu'ilz apperceurent l'armée, ils s'enfuyerēt cacher sur le sommet de leurs maisons. Alexandre desirāt de les voir, afin qu'ilz monsttraffent quelque eaue douce pour raffreschir son camp, fet tirer quelques peu de fleches dedas leur ville, leur remonstrant que s'ilz ne se vouloyet point produyre de leur bon gré il fussent cōtreintz & espouuantemēt de guerre de se manifester. Mais le roy voyant que nul ne le monstroït, il envoya à 100 piétons macédoniens par la riuere, lesquelz estoient armez à la legiere. Ilz n'eurent pas si tost nagé la quatriesme partie de ce fleuve, que voicy vne horrible chose & espouuantable qui se presenta a deuant leurs yeux: a fauoir des cheuaux de riuere, qu'ilz veirent sortir

hors des gouffres profondz des eaues, & prinrent les rustres qui nageoyent par la teste, et les engloutirēt voyāt toute l'armée. Ces bestes se trouuent principalement dedās le Nil & Ganges: elles ont les ongles fēduz come un boeuf, le doz, les crainz & le hannissement d'un cheual, la queue torse &

les dentz crochues cōme un sanglier. Le roy se courrouça lors contre les conducteurs, qui auoient mené l'armée en telles embusches, & les feit ietter tous cent cinquante dedās cete riuere, et ces bestes furieuses les massacrent, comme ilz auoyent bien meritē. Partans donc de là, ils trouverēt là auprès des homes qui trauerfoient la riuere sur petites naffelles faites de ionc. On leur demanda s'il n'y auoit point quelques eaues douces là auprès: ilz respondirēt qu'ilz pourroyēt trouuer un grād estang d'eauē douce & leur donneroyēt des conducteurs et guides qui les meneroyēt là sans faillir: toutes fois ils le faisoient à regret. Ilz cheminèrent donc toute la nuit, estans accablée & opprimez de foif & de la pesanteur de leurs armes. Et avec cette grāde necessité ilz rencontrerēt d'autres grās inconueniens & facheuses auentures: Ilz eurent toute la nuit vne alarme de lyons, ours, tygres, pardes & lynces, & ainsi il leur fallu soustenir vne guerre nouuelle dedans les bois & forestz. Or cōme la foif les eut amenez à une grāde necessité, finalement ilz vinrent iusques à l'estang, enuironné d'une forest fort espesse, & contenāt mille pas de

largeur. Ilz se recreerent là, & affeirēt leur camp: ilz couperent le bois, afin que le chemin fut plus facile pour ceux qui viendroyēt abreuuer les beſtes: & faut biē noter qu'il n'auoit point d'autre eſtag d'eauē douce en toute la régiō. Ainſi donc entre les pauillons & toutes ou drefſades repars & fortifications, & les elephās furēt mis au milieu du cāp: afin qu'il se peuſſent mieux garder de nuict quād on fuſt venu pour les ſurprendre, ou s'il fuſt ſurvenue quelque bruyt ou crainte nouuelle. Il y auoit auſſi mille et cinquante feux allumez par dehors, come il auoyēt affez matiere pour y fournir: afin qu'il ne fuſēt ſoudainemēt accablez par les habitans du pays.

Comment beſtes venoyent de tous coſtez & de loing, au dit eſtang.

Après qu'Alexādre le grād eut campé & assiz ſon fort pres de ceſt eſtang, ainſi que les ſouldardz cōmençoient à dormir leur premier ſomme, et que la lune iettoit ſes premiers rayōs: voicy incontīnēt vne troupe de ſcorpions ayās les anguillōs de la queue drefſez, qui ſelon leur couſtume venoyēt là pour boire, & ſe fourrerēt parmy le cāp en fort grād nōbre. Après les ſcorpions, on vit venir vne autre bāde de ſerpēs nommez ceraſtes, & d'autres ſerpēs de diuerſes couleurs. Car aucūs auoyent les eſcailles rouges: les autres eſtoient cōme jaunes, & les autres noirs & blācs. Tout le pays retētiffoit de ſifflemes, & n'y auoit ſi hardy Macedonien qui n'eut peur. Toutesſois pour reſiſter contre telz ennemys, ilz auoyēt mis au deuāt de tout leur oſt vn grād nombre de paucis: & tenoyent en leurs mains des halebardes, piques & autres longs bois, deſquelz ilz tuerent beaucoup de ces mauuaises beſtes, & en feirent mourir pluſieurs par feu. Cela les tint en grand ſoucy l'eſpace de deux groſſes heures. Or après que ce beſtial ſerpentin eut beu, les petizs' en retournerent, & les plus grandes fuyirent: qui donna grand ioie à tout le camp. Après cela enuiron les trois heures après minuict, ainſi que les Macedoniēs s'attendoient de recouurer quelque repos, ſe preſenterēt des ſerpens ayans creſtes ou couronnes ſur la teſte: les vns auoyēt deux teſtes, les autres trois au demeurant vn peu plus gros que pilliers ou poſteaux: leſquelz eſtoient fortiz des cauernes voiſines pour venir boire faiſans grand bruyt de leurs gueules & eſcailles. Ils faiſaient
 ſortir hors leurs langues à trois
 pointes: ils auoyent les yeux
 eſteincelans à force de venī: &
 leur haleine eſtoit infecte et
 dangereuſe. Les Macedoniens
 les cōbatirent vne heure ou

plus: & en ce combat furẽt occiz vigt hõmes de guerre & trente serviteurs. Apres qu'ilz furent delivrez de ces serpens, voicy vn nombre infinv de cancrez ou efcreuices couuertz de peaux de crocodiles, qui vinrent au camp. Ces bestes avoyent la peau si dure qu'on ne pouvoit percer finon

a grãd peine. Ilz en brulerẽt plusieurs, et plusieurs se retirẽt dedã l'estãg. Apres ce cõbat les gens de guerre pensoyẽt auoir repos: mais voicy de nouveau de lyons blancs,

grans cõme taureaux & fur la fin de la nuict presenteret aufsi de grãs fangliers, lynces et tygres & pãtheres horribles: & eurẽt grãd peine à chasser toutes ces bestes farouches. Encore ne fust pas le tout: car bientoit apres y vinrent je ne says quelles chauves foriz, qui molesterẽt grandement l'armée. Apres tout cela survint vne estrange beste de nouvelle façon ayant au front trois cornes, & la teste semblable à vne cheual de couleur noire: laquelle les Indous appellẽt Odonte. Incontinẽt

que cette beste eut beu, elle commença à regarder l'oist, & faillist sur eux de grande impetuositẽ, & le feu qui estoit au deuant, ne l'empescha point de passer outre. Avat qu'on peut tuer cette beste, elle deffit 36 hommes de guerre et s'en perça 53, qui ne se peurent onques depuis ayder. Ils eurent vn autre

combat contre des ratz indiens semblables à vautours: la morsure desquelz touyẽt les bestes tout soudain. Cette morsure n'estoit point si mortelle aux hommes. Apres donc que l'armée eut esté ainfi affligée de si grans affaux toute la nuict, Alexandre fait prendre le matin les guides qui lui auoyẽt aussi esté desloyaux, & leur fait rompre les bras et iambes: afin qu'ilz fussent là consumez par les serpens & bestes nuyfibles, comme ilz auoyent voulu faire consumer les gens. Cela fait il commanda de sonner les trompettes, & fait partir son camp de là, & fait tant qu'il vint au pays des Bactriens, qui est opulent en or & autres choses precieuses. De là il alla contre Porc le roy d'Indie, qui estoit puissant en hommes & terres: & auant que luy faire la guerre, il subjuga beaucoup de villes & terres. Le peuple d'Indie ne la voulust pas du premier coup affubiettir à vn roy estrange: mais luy resista de toute la force: mais finalement apres grãde effusion de sang il fust contraint de luy rendre obeyffance.

APPENDIX 2

Jarry's main revision to the Peer Gynt script of La Chesnais's translation.

I consulted the actors' working proofs from the Oeuvre production of Peer Gynt which bear original marginal notes in Jarry's hand and two others, with stage directions and additions to the dialogue as well as deletions. No longer the *liasse salie* described by Robichez, the interest of this document lay in the marginal notes, which, in the cause of neat binding, have been sliced in mid-sentence and are now tantalizingly fragmentary. It is housed at the Bibliothèque de la Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs dramatiques, 5 rue Ballu and catalogued as a part of the Répertoire de l'Oeuvre, 1929.

The first four pages of Act V on board the ship are deleted. This is the precise extract chosen for the performance and is all written out in pencil in Jarry's hand. I have retained his spelling and abbreviations. It is the conversation between Peer Gynt and a mysterious passenger, which has clear connotations with a Faust-Mephistopheles dialogue and closely follows Ibsen's text as follows:

La tempête grandit. Il fait nuit. Un passager debout à côté du Peer le salue.

Le Passager: Bon soir,

P.G. Bon soir, hein qui êtes vous?

Le Pass. Votre compagnon de voyage pour vs. servir.

P.G. Je croyais être seul à bord en fait du passager.

Le Pass. C'était une erreur, la voilà dissipée.

P.G. Il est étrange, en tout cas, que je ne vs ai pas vu avant ce soir.

Le P. Je ne sors jamais le jour.

P.G. Vs êtes peut être malade, je vs. vois pâle comme un linge.

Le P. Mais non je me porte à merveille.

P.G. Quelle tempête.

Le P. Oui, mon ami, une vraie bénédiction.

P.G. Une bénédiction?

Le P. Des vagues grandes comme des maisons, pensez à ttes les épaves qu'il y aura dans

P.G. Oh mon Dieu, oui, il y en aura.

Le P. Avez-vous vu un homme? étouffé, pendu, un noyé.

(missing piece)

P.G. Vous dites?

P. des cadauresplutôt ils grimacent et souvent se mordent la langue.

P.G. *(missing piece)* laissez-moi tranquille!

T.S.V.P.

Le Pas. Une question seulement: si nous échouions et calions cette nuit?

P.G. Vous croyez qu'il ya du danger?

Le P. Je n'en sais trop rien, mais supposez que j'en récupère et vous noyiez.

P.G. Allons donc!

Le P. une simple supposition. Eh bien, quand on a un pied dans la tombe le coeur s'attendrit un se peut généreux.

P.G. Ben, s'il s'agit d'argent. *(Tâtant (?) sa poche)*

Le P. Non mais ne me feriez pas la grâce de m'accorder votre précieux cadavre?

P.G. Par exemple! Voilà qui est trop fort!

Le P. Je ne demande que cela. Votre cadavre, c'est pour des expériences scientifiques.

P.G. Mais laissez-moi en paix à la fin.

Le P. Voyons mon ami, réfléchissez, vs. y trouverez votre avantage. Je vs ferai ouvrir et exposer au jour le sujet de mes recherches. C'est avant tout le siège du rêve
*(***) je vs promets d'ailleurs de vous soumettre à ma critique.

P.G. Allez-vous en.

Le P. Voyons, mon ami, un corps noyé - .

P.G. Blasphémateur, qui défie la tempête! Ah c'est trop dure, ns. sommes impitoyablement menacé, [sic] est à craindre pour nos existences, et vs. semblais [sic] vouloir hâter la catastrophe.

Le P. Je vois que vs n'êtes pas bien disposé en ce moment mais ça peut changer. *(Avec un aimable salut)* Ns ns rencontrons au fond de l'eau et peut-être avant. J'espère

vous trouver de meilleure humeur.

(Il rentre dans les cabines)

P.G. Quels répugnants personnages par ces hommes de sciences. En voilà un libre-penseur. *(Au Maître d'équipage)* Eh! L'ami, un instant: quel est ce Pon (?) que vs. avez comme passager à bord?

Le M. d'E Un passager? Ns n'en avons pas d'autre que vs.

HH

*illegible

Veille de la Pentecôte dans les bois. Éclaircie. Au fond cabane. Bois de renne sr. le pignon au dessus de la poile [sic]. Peer Gynt rampe à terre cuiellant [sic] des oignons.

P.G. Une nouvelle étape! il faut bien, je le vais tâter un peu de tout avant de faire choix.

C'est égal, la vie est un drôle d'instrument.
On voudrait en jouer et l'on ne sait comment.
Muet un répondant par une note fausse.
D'un sot qui l'étudie on dirait qu'il se gausse.

(Il aperçoit la cabane et tressaille)

Là ce coin de forêt et cette cabane...

Eh!

N'ai je pas déjà vu ce site abandonné?
Au dessus du pignon, là-haut, des bois de rennes...
Sur le toit, n'est-ce pas, se dresse une sirène.

E

Solveig's Lullaby

Le jour se lève

Dors en paix, mon petit enfant.
Dors, je te bercerais doucement...
L'enfant rit et joue dans les bras de sa mère.

**Ils passeront la vie entière
un contre l'autre ... l'enfant dort.**

L'enfant dort encore ...
La vie n'est pas bonne méchante,

**L'enfant penche sa tête lasse
Sur le coeur qu'elle a bercé...**

La vie passe
La vie est passée.

Dors petit, dors mon enfant
Doucement, doucement, doucement.

Parts of this text, which closes the play and is Jarry's free adaptation, are deleted, rewritten and redeleted including the line "La vie n'est pas bonne méchante."

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