

PIERRE REVERDY: THE DIMENSIONS OF A POETIC IMAGINATION

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## Abstract

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Reverdy's conception, both of the self and the self's being there, in the world is characterised not only by fragmentation and dichotomy, but also by factors of at least potential relationship and solidarity. Broadly speaking, poetic creation, despite its process of dédoublement and despite its exposure of internal schisms, offers Reverdy his only chance to recover a sense of his 'simplicity' and oneness. Similarly, poetry is the sole means of closing the natural breach between self and world. It involves a process of transmutation of the given that joins the aesthetic logics of heterocosmicity and porousness in achieving an ontological consubstantiality.

The movement whereby Reverdy may achieve such a transmutational sub-transcendence may take place in the horizontal or the vertical plane of the imagination, or, indeed, may involve other special means. In all cases a number of varyingly characterised and effective figures are used to project the movement towards attainment of objectives. Although it is shown that attainment and contact are theoretically and practically possible for Reverdy via a process of strategic retreat, his poetry teems with obsessive images of frustration and withdrawal, darkness and death, sinking and reduction to nothingness -- images always present, but more intensely felt and abounding in the later collections.

Reverdy's work never reaches, however, a point of definitive emotional reduction. Always some minimal trace of vitality lingers to eke out a tense thematic equilibrium in circumstances of apparent extreme imbalance. Although characterised by tension and precariousness, equilibrium is a factor that, with those of vacillation and relativity, governs to a considerable extent Reverdy's conception of the natural condition, as well as the structuring of the imaginative-thematic fabric of his creative work. Even more significant, moreover, is the fragile and occulted equilibrium achieved between existential disaster and the multi-faceted poeticity proper of Reverdy's work.

## CONTENTS

Abstract

Contents

Introduction .. .. .	1
Chapter I. Self and World .. .. .	5
The Self: Simple Presence and the Questioning of Simplicity	5
The Duality of the Self .. .. .	9
Multiple Fragmentation and Unity .. .. .	20
From Self to World: Dichotomy and Relationship .. .. .	31
The World as Theatre .. .. .	39
Notes to Chapter I .. .. .	45
Chapter II. Reality and Being .. .. .	55
I. World and Other World: The Dialectics of Reality .. .. .	55
Preamble .. .. .	55
Poetics: From Heterocosmicity and Porousness to Transmutation	57
The Poetry: Self-reflexive Shimmer and a Fusion of Worlds	72
II. The Question of Being .. .. .	86
Primary Being and Secondary Being .. .. .	87
Nothingness, Void and Filling .. .. .	93
Appropriation and Consubstantiality .. .. .	103
Notes to Chapter II .. .. .	110
Chapter III. Advance and Movement Towards .. .. .	125
I. The Horizontal Plane .. .. .	126
Roads and Crossroads .. .. .	126
Intentionality and Nomadism .. .. .	129
Advance within Advance: A Race against Time .. .. .	133
II. Some Special Means of Movement Towards .. .. .	136
Listening .. .. .	136
Seeing .. .. .	139
The Hand .. .. .	145
Dream .. .. .	152
... Mind .. .. .	158
III. The Vertical Dimension .. .. .	164
The Vertical Dimension: Upper Space .. .. .	165
The Sky .. .. .	165
The Sun .. .. .	168
Stars .. .. .	171
Rising and Climbing .. .. .	173
Elan and Jaillissement .. .. .	176
The Vertical Dimension: Lower Space .. .. .	181
The Depths of Being .. .. .	182
Exploitation of Depths .. .. .	185
The Vertical Plane: Tension and Reconciliation .. .. .	188
Notes to Chapter III .. .. .	191
Chapter IV. The Frustrations of Advance .. .. .	210
I. Hostility and Indifference .. .. .	211
Self and Others .. .. .	211

The Objective World .. .. .	214
The Thorn .. .. .	217
II. Images of Withdrawal, Blockage and Imprisonment ..	221
Discolouration .. .. .	222
Evaporation .. .. .	224
Wind: A Question of Dispersal .. .. .	228
The Wall: Thickness and Infinity .. .. .	230
Distance and Imprisonment .. .. .	232
III. Withdrawal of the Self .. .. .	235
Nakedness, Fatigue and Delirium .. .. .	236
The Danger of Self-Defence .. .. .	241
From Disengagement to Engagement .. .. .	246
The Poem: Retraction and Revelation .. .. .	249
Notes to Chapter IV .. .. .	253
Chapter V. Attainment and Reduction to Nothingness ..	265
I. Attainment: Fact and Theory .. .. .	265
Openness, Potentiality and Realisation .. .. .	265
Images of Contact, Discovery and Liberation: A Poetic Reality	269
The Abstractions of Triple Attainment .. .. .	278
II. The Obsessions of Death and Night and The Movement	
towards Nothingness .. .. .	286
The Dilemma of Loss and <u>Le Point Noir</u> .. .. .	287
Death and Some Motifs of Darkness .. .. .	293
Disintegration, Vertigo and Wreckage .. .. .	303
Viscosity, Holes and Falling .. .. .	311
The Obsession of Nothingness .. .. .	317
An Appendix: The Tensions of End and Attainment ..	323
Notes to Chapter V .. .. .	330
Chapter VI. Vacillation, Equilibrium and Tension ..	348
I. The Parameters of Change .. .. .	348
The Experience of Sameness .. .. .	349
The World as Change and The Question of Relativity ..	354
Fluctuation, Simultaneity, Sequence and Compensation ..	358
Vacillation and Equilibrium: A Joint Logic .. .. .	369
II. The Tensions of Equilibrium .. .. .	374
The Natural Condition .. .. .	379
The Image: A Matter of <u>Justesse</u> .. .. .	381
From Thematic Tension to A Truly Poetic Equilibrium ..	388
Disaster and Celebration .. .. .	409
Notes to Chapter VI .. .. .	412
Conclusion .. .. .	428
Bibliography .. .. .	432

## Introduction

Pierre Reverdy is one of the finest and indeed, as André Breton once suggested, unflinchingly 'exemplary' poetic figures of the modern age and our decision to undertake this study of his work is based upon a real admiration for his poetry and a respect for his aesthetic theory, feelings that have, in fact, been increasingly shared by poets, artists and critics since the private publication in Paris, in 1915, of his first slim volume, Poèmes en prose. Aragon, Breton and Tzara in particular were quick to recognize Reverdy's creative originality and welcome his many influential contributions to the debate on the nature and means of the poetic process; Matisse, Braque, Picasso and many other painters of the time illustrated his work and struck up with Reverdy life-long friendships based partly at least on his uncanny appreciation of their own creative activity and eloquently confirmed by the 1970 Paris exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne; and since his death in 1960 it has become more evident, with the increased critical attention his work has attracted, that Reverdy's impact upon the generation of poets following him -- Char, Ponge, Dupin, du Bouchet, Deguy, Roubaud and many others -- has been significant and at times determining. No doubt partly owing to Reverdy's self-imposed 'exile', away from the literary bustle of Paris, in Solesmes, a village he grew barely to tolerate, it is in fact only during the past ten or twelve years that extended critical studies of his work have begun to appear: 1966 saw the appearance in Europe of Mortimer Guiney's La Poésie de Pierre Reverdy and Peter Brunner's Pierre Reverdy: De la Solitude au mystère and the following year Robert Greene's The Poetic Theory of Pierre Reverdy was published in the United States. Since that time Anthony Rizzuto's Style and Theme in Pierre Reverdy's 'Les Ardoises du toit', published in 1971, has been the major contribution to

our appreciation of Reverdy's work. Other, shorter studies have, of course, been valuable and we might mention in particular here the work of Anna Balakian, Gabriel Bounoure, Roger Cardinal, Stanislas Fumet, Robert Greene (again), David Grossvogel, Michel Manoll, Gaëtan Picon, Jean-Pierre Richard, Jean Rousselot and Emma Stojkovic. This is by no means to overlook the sterling and painstaking bio-bibliographical work undertaken with Flammarion in recent years by Maurice Saillet and Etienne-Alain Hubert. Our present study, whilst building upon all of these (and indeed other) critical analyses, attempts to clear new ground and establish new insights. It is to a brief elaboration of its general orientation and most salient features that we shall now proceed.

It should be understood from the outset that our study is not chronologically structured, nor is the analysis by any means solely concerned with the poetry of Reverdy. Our principal concern throughout is, in fact, to establish the fundamental imaginative obsessions and patterns in his work -- the main imaginative motifs at play in Reverdy's creative work certainly, but also the essential imaginative factors governing his aesthetic theory and general ontological outlook. Moreover, our discussion will aim constantly to interrelate all such observations, to integrate them into a critical parcours that, whilst not imposing itself as definitive, seeks to provide a structure corresponding closely and fairly to the particular imaginative balance encountered not only in Reverdy's creative work but throughout his aesthetic writings and the personal jottings of his 'journals'. More specifically, we should point out that, although influenced by Richardian criticism, we attempt to avoid what we consider to be the weaknesses of the overly intersubjective and at times neglectful critical stance adopted by Peter Brunner and at the same time to provide a more profound and detailed

appraisal of many crucial elements of Reverdy's poetic theory (ignored almost completely by Brunner) than that offered by Robert Greene in his often perceptive, but somewhat fragmented chronological analysis. It should be noted finally that, because we are principally concerned throughout our study to elaborate an argument corresponding closely to the main imaginative structures of Reverdy's own work, our presentation and assessment of directly or indirectly relevant critical comment other than our own will take place marginally, as it were, in the notes to the main discussion. Such a procedure will enable us to trace a purer line in our analysis of what Reverdy himself, in Le Livre de mon bord, termed "l'aventure profonde [du poète]".

Reverdy was always very much -- and consciously so -- a poet devoted to an exploration and exploitation of himself, of his acute sense of being situated in a given context which, whilst capable of providing him with a sensation of rugged, firm and vital experience, did not nevertheless offer him all that he conceived of as ontologically desirable or, indeed, ultimately available. This, in essence, provides the basic framework for the discussions of the first two chapters: Reverdy's conception of the (poet's) self with respect to his composition and situation, his sensitivity to being in a given world construed in terms of its deficiencies and its potential, his perception of the joys and dangers of any poetic or ontological shift from the given to the potential, from one reality to another reality. What becomes evident at this point of our discussion is that the Reverdyan imagination is constantly grappling, in the poetry, in the texts on poetry and art, and in texts of a more general interest, with the problems of a vast aesthetic and ontological dialectic. Our third chapter thus endeavours to set out the logic characteristic of the various modes and means of coping with this

dialectic that appeal consistently to Reverdy in what we term the horizontal and vertical 'planes' of his imagination. We shall in this way be able to appreciate just how Reverdy imagines the possibility of suppressing the distance between the given and the desired and advancing towards a point of attainment of objectives.

But if such attainment is possible, as we ultimately show it to be, the channels leading to it are cluttered with many and varied obstacles that impede and frustrate movement towards and may even tip the scales of the imagination in favour of an entirely negatively construed movement towards an end that offers but death and nothingness. The Reverdyan 'adventure' will thus be shown to be characterised by tension and uncertainty, for the various modes of realisation of the poet's goals constantly expose him to risk, contingency and danger which make the outcome of his adventure highly precarious and cause the poetry to bristle with an array of darkly inspired images. Our final discussion will demonstrate how Reverdy's imagination is especially sensitive to questions of change and relativity and show that the factors of vacillation, tension and equilibrium are, in certain ways, intimately related. Equilibrium, moreover, will emerge as a factor possessing a broadly determining fascination for Reverdy, for its logic will be seen to apply in varying ways to the natural condition, to his crucial theory of the image in particular and art in general, and, most importantly, to his structuring and articulation of the creative work itself. It is this final analysis that will permit us to observe how Reverdy is able to achieve, in the midst of disaster, a marvellous and fragile equilibrium of the natural and the antinatural, the given and the aesthetically sub-transcendent.

## Chapter I

### Self and World

#### The Self: Simple Presence and the Questioning of Simplicity

The poetry of Pierre Reverdy is strongly coloured by the presence of a centrally located and in some respects controlling persona whom we shall term the self and who is often at least implicitly identified with the poet.<sup>1</sup> The simplest manifestation of the presence of the self is achieved by means of direct designation, whether it be via the title of a poem such as 'moi-même' or within the body of a poem in verses such as the following from 'Lendemain':

Et moi  
           Regardant la lumière tremblante  
 La rue qui se laissait aller  
 Tout seul devant ma vie passée<sup>2</sup>

Here, there is a certain starkness, a certain dramatic abruptness about the positing of the self whose presence is thus all the more strongly felt. Elsewhere and in fact in many poems of Reverdy, there is a coupling of this somewhat bare notion of the self to a more specific evocation of his being, his being 'there', whether or not this space, this 'there', is in itself specifically elaborated upon.<sup>3</sup> In this way, for example, Reverdy may tersely declare that "dans la cour il n'y a que moi" or "c'est moi/Contre le parapet/Et le fer de la grille", and he may even begin a poem with such a blunt statement of the self's presence, as in 'Il devait en effet faire bien froid': "Il y a moi/Et toutes les sonneries se mettent en branle à la fois dans la maison".<sup>4</sup> As in the case of other poets whose imagination is fired by notions of simultaneity and gathering of what 'is there' -- and this should by no means, as we shall see, be taken as a specific reference to outer, non-poetic reality<sup>5</sup> -- the verbs 'être' and 'y avoir' often have a vital role to

play in Reverdy's poetry.<sup>6</sup> They permit a focussing of attention upon the basic fact of the constitution of the being of the self, in a given spatial and temporal context, and, again, whether or not the latter be taken as natural or antinatural, pertaining to primary reality or to artistic reality, or both.<sup>7</sup> What concerns us immediately, then, is the Reverdyan imagination's repeated preoccupation with establishing the fact that the self 'is' and 'is there'. "Je suis là j'attends/Je t'attends", Reverdy declares in the opening lines of his early poem 'Tête perdue', for example, only to confirm shortly afterwards this simple but fundamental existential fact: "Maintenant la cloche sonne et je suis là/Près de moi il y a des gens qui ne me regardent même pas".<sup>8</sup> And elsewhere, even in much later poems from Sources du vent and Pierre blanches, the consciousness of this inescapable point of departure remains just as acute: "Je suis là contre tous/Il fait nuit noire", Reverdy may confide, or else, "Je suis là/Et le phare tourne sa tête/Une barque ou une comète".<sup>9</sup> Certainly it is clear from these few examples of Reverdy's poetry that the self's 'being there' does not occur in a vacuum, but is both enmeshed with notions such as those of waiting and the presence of other people and phenomena, and coloured, explicitly or implicitly, with a varying emotional quality and intensity. But as pointed out in our 'Introduction', questions such as these will be systematically dealt with in due course. It is important at this stage simply to allow ourselves to be penetrated fully by the extent of Reverdy's obsession with the elementary and yet capital fact of the existence of the self. The self is, the self is 'there'. But, as may be sensed again even from the above quotations, Reverdy's conception of this being there of the self lacks any aura of Claudelian exhilaration, any suggestion of the

ecstasy of such apparent 'self-discovery'. The tone is altogether more sombre and discreet and, indeed, intimates that the matter of the self's being (there) has perhaps its slightly darker and more complicated side.

In fact, the Reverdyan imagination does not tend to perceive the self as a simple, monolithic entity.<sup>10</sup> This may be most firmly stated both from the evidence of Reverdy's journals and correspondence and, more significantly, from that of his poetry, whether we look at the Poèmes en Prose or later works such as Bois Vert or Sable Mouvant.

Not that his critical writings engage in any thorough-going systematic assessment of the question of the self and they certainly do not result in the kind of hierarchisation and model-building that appeal to a Paul Valéry. Nor may Pierre Reverdy's poetry be said to offer any form of deliberate symbolic representation of abstract thinking and/or concrete experience centred upon the self, which we find in the creative work of certain poets -- and again we might take Valéry as an example.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, both the poetry and prose of Reverdy repeatedly address themselves to questions of the identity, the fragmentation and the stability of the self in a given space, at a given time (and in a spatio-temporal perspective that often links past or future to the present). If Reverdy's journals, Le Gant de crin, Le Livre de mon bord and En Vrac, are concerned, as we shall see, rather with the provision of answers, his poetry endlessly poses questions. It is a questioning which embraces boldly and lucidly the most fundamental aspects of man's existence and therefore most persistently those questions of being and identity to which we have just referred. "Où sont mes papiers et mon identité vieillie et la date de ma naissance imprécise", Reverdy asks perplexedly in 'Civil' from Poèmes en Prose,

"et, d'ailleurs, suis-je encore celui de la dernière fois?" <sup>12</sup> "La face écarlate illumine la chambre où il est seul", Reverdy announces at the opening of 'Mouvement interne' in Etoiles peintes, "seul avec son portrait qui bouge dans la glace. Est-ce bien lui? Serait-ce l'oeil d'un autre?" <sup>13</sup> The questioning is often overwhelming. It is a questioning that cannot help itself, an impulsive gushing forth that constantly floods Reverdy's imagination. <sup>14</sup> "Qui est-ce", he must seek to know, "que vais-je devenir", "où ira l'ombre qui me suit/A qui est-elle?" <sup>15</sup> Moreover, if we have taken the liberty of accumulating instances of this questioning, it is not merely to reveal the extent of its occurrence. Of greater importance are the basic unspoken implications behind it, namely that the identity of the self, even if it were a firm, compact, non-hybrid reality at a given moment, is temporally unstable and forever becoming; that, even in a context where familiarity may have been thought likely to stifle questioning, the opposite is true: a basic dilemma and an uneasy ignorance persist. Of significance, too, is the suggestion behind such questions that, even if the component parts of the self and all the factors affecting the self, its being and its identity, could be established, identity could only be understood in those terms, that is to say as a fragmentation or proliferation of the self into multiple selves or aspects of the self. It should be noted also that Reverdy's poetry tends to promote in a more subtle and indirect way a further questioning of the nature of the self. All the pronouns used in the above poems, for example, je, celui, il, ce -- and elsewhere often tu, nous, vous -- remain unspecific, signs without referents. They are words 'for' a noun, a person, a fragment of a person, and yet remain words without specific bearing -- or if some specification occurs, it does so without significantly reducing the

anonymity clinging to the persona. The fact of the at once discreet and yet evident anonymity of the self thus complicates and epitomizes Reverdy's whole gesture of questioning of the identity and constitution of the self. It is to matters such as these, which haunt Reverdy's imagination and which quietly penetrate its most basic creative structures, that we shall now give our fuller attention.

### The Duality of the Self

The poet's constant and necessary preoccupation with himself is regularly reaffirmed by Reverdy in his notebooks. Unlike the novelist, the poet is constantly forced to consult only himself in the establishment of his creative universe.<sup>16</sup> The poet is essentially self-centred, though his self-centredness is not simply the mundane egocentricity that inspires all men at least intermittently.<sup>17</sup> The poet's concern with himself maintains a purity that arises from the fact of his disinclination at the time of creation to consider his audience and its reaction.<sup>18</sup> In Reverdy's eyes the poet is genuinely introspective and his poetry is a massive elaboration of a single character, a single being, a single subject.<sup>19</sup> But equally clear, from the evidence of all of Reverdy's work -- and related no doubt to the fact of the poet's need to explore in depth his own 'singularity', to proliferate into artistic meaning the minimal data of himself -- is the view that the self cannot be reduced to the simplicity of a single-chambered vessel. On the contrary, the poet is obliged at once to recognize and to probe the complexity, the divisions and the hiatuses of the self. This dual function of the poet's activity is, for Reverdy, both disturbing and stimulating. The poet cannot escape recognizing within himself the evidence of a division and fragmentation which may perhaps work towards his own disintegration, his disunity and disequilibrium; and yet in his

writings he is drawn to a curious, self-analytical questioning and probing of his constitution in order to know better what, in fact, remains equally disquieting whether explored or merely recognized.

Reverdy's imagination is, in effect, powerfully and frequently summoned by the notion of the self's being split in two or somehow bearing within itself a factor which is often painful and contradictory. "Je suis un témoignage fendu de la tête aux pieds", Reverdy states in 'Etoile filante', "une indication précise mais fugitive de ce qu'a voulu dire la création en remontant de nos jours jusqu'au commencement des termes".<sup>20</sup> Cleavage would thus appear basic to any concept of the self, in Reverdy's view. It is 'original', a quite inescapable datum of primary existence that is reflected in many of Reverdy's observations on the human condition. "Au fond de soi il y a toujours un pauvre enfant qui pleure", he may tell us, insisting upon the self's capacity to store up within him all his once experienced forms;<sup>21</sup> "l'homme porte en lui à la fois un maître et un esclave", we may read in Le Gant de crin, where Reverdy points to the conflicting, antagonistic nature of the dualism that characterizes the self's constitution.<sup>22</sup> The forces inhabiting the self are thus not at all concentrated into one smoothly functioning unit, but tend to pull him apart, tugging him simultaneously, for example, towards subjugation and mastery or, as Reverdy suggests in Le Livre de mon bord, towards being and self-fulfilment on the one hand, death and darkness on the other: "Nous portons en nous un moi pour la vie et un moi pour la mort. Un moi noir et un moi blanc. Lumière et ténèbre".<sup>23</sup> None of this should be taken to imply that the self is neatly divided into two constituent parts. The cleavage that occurs may assume many forms as we can already sense even from the above and as will become increasingly clear throughout

this chapter. What remains constant, however, is the principle of cleavage and the tensions that accompany it.

Before turning to an examination of the manifestation and extension of this fundamental concept of duality in Reverdy's creative work, let us briefly elaborate another important aspect of the matter at issue: the fact that the poet is obliged, in order to perform his creative task, to engage in a constant demonstration or enactment of cleavage, as, observing and listening to himself, he empties out on to the page a particular 'form' of himself. The creative act involves, for Reverdy, a division into two, a placing before himself of a part of himself, an objectification of one form of the self before another form of the self that remains to observe it. "L'artiste est toujours un contemplatif qui se dédouble", Reverdy argues in Le Livre de mon bord, where he adds in a later note the crucial idea that "on écrit pour sortir de soi, pour se sentir un peu plus fermement un autre en face de soi".<sup>24</sup> This gesture, as we have already suggested, may undoubtedly be disturbing not to say anguishing, as it constantly thrusts the poet up against the principle and latent dilemma of division and duality.<sup>25</sup> But there is no doubt that this process of dédoublement or, indeed, détriplement may also be beneficial and salubrious. As Reverdy remarks in Le Gant de crin, "déplier son esprit, le dédoubler, le détripler, le rendre simple, c'est le rendre plus large, plus vaste, plus blanc".<sup>26</sup> To divide oneself in this way, to place before oneself the other of oneself, is evidently for Reverdy a specially significant act. It need not be stressed here that what is involved is a movement away from one natural mode of being to another artistic mode of being that is more privileged and revealing despite this division and distancing. We shall need to discuss all this later on in connection with Reverdy's

aesthetic theory and his conception of Being.<sup>27</sup> The dédoublement in which the poet engages in the act of writing is thus held to be salutary because it allows the self to witness its own operations and complexities and because viewing them is paradoxically capable of restoring them to a certain wholeness or simplicity in which the self's boundaries are extended, its space broadened and a movement in the direction of liberation and fullness occasioned. We might strike, however, at this point of mildly euphoric culmination, a rather more sober note by recalling that in Reverdy there is always great tension between attainment and non-attainment, fullness and emptiness, wholeness and fragmentation;<sup>28</sup> and that, whilst to cast before the self a form of the self, the other of the self (constantly shifting from text to text, moreover), by means of dédoublement's self-division, may offer the chance of some fulfilment and self-recognition, the principle of fragmentation and duality still operate and, as Reverdy affirms in En Vrac at a particularly depressed moment towards the end of his life, self-recognition and self-coincidence may well seem beyond reach for the poet: "C'est moi, ce n'est pas moi [...] j'ai beau chercher, je n'arrive pas à trouver le rapport entre ce que j'écris et ce que je suis [...] C'est moi, c'est toujours moi, que j'agisse, contemple ou écrive, mais, au total, que reste-t-il qui soit identique à soi-même."<sup>29</sup>

Many of Reverdy's poems would seem to be structured around his view of the self being split into two or in some way being affected by cleavage. There are a number of ways in which Reverdy presents the division, but all evoke the same basic images of complication and self-observation, the fundamental fact that, as he argues in Le Gant de crin, "[il n'y a] pas une pensée, pas une idée simples. Un esprit compliqué, deux hommes en un qui s'observent l'un l'autre. Les actes, les pensées

de l'un toujours jugés et contrôlés par l'autre".<sup>30</sup> The creative imagination commonly manifests the phenomenon of divergence/convergence of 'forms', aspects or fragments of the self by setting up an interplay between a moi and another persona taking the form of lui or celui. In 'La maison hantée' from Risques et périls, for example, we read:

Je voulais m'élancer par-dessus l'appui de ces  
balustrades aériennes pour apaiser les lamentations  
importunes de cette voix sinistre. Mais il ne me  
fut pas permis de franchir cette distance. Je ne  
pouvais ni monter ni descendre. Car celui qui  
criait au fond des abîmes de la terre, c'était moi.<sup>31</sup>

Here the division of the self and the distance that is established by this division are particularly disturbing and would seem to represent a separation beyond remedy, a breach as impossible to heal as the eery moanings of the other-self wallowing in the depths of the earth are to appease. In the poem 'Bruits du soir' from Grande nature Reverdy again produces a certain amount of tension by creating a dialectic between a moi and a celui, self and other-self. This time, however, the nature of the dialectic, whilst secretive and enigmatic, appears somewhat different:

Et c'est moi  
Contre le parapet  
Et le fer de la grille  
Sous la poudre du temps  
Le blanc de la poussière  
Ou l'interlocuteur pressé dans la lumière  
L'heure qui tinte au loin  
Celui que l'on appelle  
Quand l'écho seul répond  
C'est une voix nouvelle  
Une autre forme de mon nom  
Une silhouette moins sûre  
Les rides qui datent mon front  
Et les traits d'une autre figure<sup>32</sup>

The moi or overtly stated self of the poem finds himself in a given space at a given time. Various phenomena -- plants, rocks, wind, light, wall, gate -- mainly already registered before this, the

concluding half of the poem, impinge upon the self's consciousness and sensibility. At the same time, Reverdy sets in play a dialectic between past and present, self now and self then. The latter, this other self, "celui que l'on appelle", perhaps that "interlocuteur pressé dans la lumière", who responds in a new voice and with another form of the self's name -- is this the self as he was, a disappearing other self? Perhaps so. Or is this a self-provoked other-self, a new other-self unstable in its form, yet alluring and appealing as that special form of the self that only poetry can offer? Perhaps so again and, indeed, in our view more probably so, although both interpretations may be said to coexist. After all, even if we are drawn to read the poem in the first manner, is it not still true that what the poem achieves, in accordance with what we have already heard Reverdy say about the act of writing and artistic dédoublement, is precisely a re-view of the self fragmented yet fragily re-formed by the poet's voice?

It is of course evident that the above two texts, like Reverdy's poetry in general and, indeed, like that of a Rimbaud or a Char, refuse to cross the threshold separating subtle allusion and self-reflexion from blatant didacticism or explicitness. And at all events, despite any ambiguity that attaches to these texts,<sup>33</sup> certain important constants remain to be observed. We may thus confirm, regardless of any interpretative play the texts allow, that division gives rise to the need to deal with the self in terms of certain aspects or forms of the self that are deemed other. In this way a difference is verified and a dialectic established between the elements of the self (in this case represented by moi and celui) which are distanced one from the other. Such a dialectic tends naturally, moreover, to stimulate other related and often merely implicit considerations such as the possibility or

impossibility of reconciling what is different, of bringing about a convergence of what is divergent.

These notions of duality and division of the self are in fact by no means restricted to the moi-lui or moi-celui 'dialectics' we have just observed. Various other twinned structures are frequently found in the work of Reverdy. One such commonly recurring pattern, for example, projects duality in the form of a moi and its shadow. "Les têtes des arbres me menacent", Reverdy nervously declares in 'Ça' from Flaques de verre, "elles courent tout le long du mur et j'ai peur d'arriver à l'endroit où l'on ouvre la grille. Sur la route mon ombre me suit, oblique, et me dit que je cours trop vite. C'est moi qui ai l'air d'un voleur." <sup>34</sup> The self's shadow may thus play the role of a regulating conscience and this particular division of the self might seem to have a practical and useful application. But in effect such duality may easily spark off feelings of anxiety and even guilt, and the kind of dialogue the self holds with his other-self -- "car vivre comporte à la fois la question et la réponse", Reverdy notes in En Vrac, "et, pour ce terrible dialogue, il faut être au moins deux. C'est ce qu'on nous dit que Dieu lui-même n'aurait pas très bien réussi" <sup>35</sup> -- such a dialogue is by no means necessarily comforting. Certainly Reverdy is conscious of the fact that guidance is available in this moi-ombre relationship. "Une ombre", he tells us in 'L'imperméable', "je suis accompagné partout de ce conseiller taciturne qui dirige mes pas et mes regards." <sup>36</sup> But the fact that this 'guidance' naturally depends on the initial orientation of a self who still needs to be led, the fact that the relationship of the self to his shadow appears to be unstable also in its level of explicit verbal communication, and the fact that the relationship is clearly disquieting in its unequalness -- all this

points finally to Reverdy's basic awareness of the defectiveness of this particular mode of fragmentation of the self. In effect, such division leads to tenseness and imbalance. There is by no means any automatic, neat marriage of efforts or dovetailing of the self's functional parts.

Another way in which Reverdy likes to evoke the fragmentation of the self into self and some form of other-self, involves the use of the rather more intimate combination of the pronominal personae moi and toi. (It might be noted that here, as with the other twinned structures and particularly with respect to the moi-celui (or lui) combination, we do not wish to imply that Reverdy, in using them in his poetry, is always intent on evoking the dialectics of the division of the self. There are certainly texts where this is not the case. There are, however, many instances when Reverdy does articulate quite firmly such division and such dialectics by means of such structures, and of course it is to these that we give our attention.) In the poem 'La tête pleine de beauté' from Flaques de verre, for example, Reverdy elaborates in a series of almost visionary yet sensitively concrete metaphors that fundamental schism of heart and mind that besets the poet.<sup>37</sup> "Dans l'abîme doré, rouge, glacé, doré, l'abîme où gîte la douleur", Reverdy begins, "les tourbillons roulants entraînent les bouillons de mon sang dans les vases, dans les retours de flammes de mon tronc. La tristesse moirée s'engloutit dans les crevasses tendres du coeur. Il y a des accidents obscurs et compliqués, impossibles à dire." Reverdy opens his poem by depicting the emotional turbulence of the poet or self of the poem. Even though he has not at this point evoked precisely the heart/mind dichotomy, he still manages to convey a sense of splitting and separation by insisting upon the notion of the self's blood being

carried off and by his uses of images of cracks and engulfment.

Already, then, the self's heart is a locus of complication and mishap and, indeed, the poem suggests multiple divisions between the observing moi, the self's heart and the blood of the self's heart which is being somehow swept away into other obscure and viscous 'regions' of the self.

The poem continues:

Et il y a pourtant l'esprit de l'ordre, l'esprit régulier,  
l'esprit commun à tous les désespoirs qui interroge. O  
toi qui traînes sur la vie [...] Toi, source intarissable  
de sang [...] Toi, lumière [...] Toi, ce matin, tout  
seul dans l'ordre, le calme et la révolution universelle.  
Toi, clou de diamant. Toi, pureté, pivot éblouissant du  
flux et du reflux de ma pensée dans les lignes du monde.

The division of heart and mind <sup>is</sup> ~~are~~ thus firmly established. The mind is set, somewhat compensatorily, against the heart. <sup>38</sup> Order, light and purity conflict <sup>with</sup> and yet counterbalance turbulence, obscurity and confusion. The kind of moi-toi intimacy that is evident in the poem, stems undoubtedly from the position of high worth given to the mind, the creative mind, in Reverdy's scheme of values. <sup>39</sup> The latter fact accounts also for the aura of adoration and elation surrounding this intimacy. But it should be noted that, if the 'dialogue' occurring here is positive, in contrast to that taking place between self and shadow, it is a dialogue that occurs between the self and the other-self that is the self's creative mind. It is therefore by no means a dialogue healing the breach between the self's heart and the self's mind. The mind may become, indeed, another source of blood, but the turbulence of the heart's blood remains, along with the fundamental feeling of a heart/mind dichotomy and duality.

The poem 'Lendemain de saison' from Ferraille is another poem in which we may observe this fairly recurrent moi-toi interplay and here again there is much to make us equate the toi with the poet's mind or,

more precisely here, with the poetic form that is produced by the mind's action and that emerges or endeavours to emerge from latency and imprisonment into self-liberation. Reverdy begins the poem with a long unanswered question:

Irai-je plus loin que moi-même  
 Sur le courant aigu qui frise à l'aviron  
 Qui frise la folie 40  
 Qui frise la chanson

The whole notion of division of the self, of separation of the self from himself, is voiced at the outset. But, as the poem will ultimately make clearer, the movement in which the poet wishes to engage in order to go beyond the self, whilst opening up a gap between self and whatever lies beyond, does so only to attain and to contact, precisely as in the case of the process of artistic dédoublement. The risks of this division of the self that simultaneously seeks a superior contact with the self, are well understood by Reverdy: poetry and song are only finely separated from madness and delirium.<sup>41</sup> The second stanza and the one with which we are principally occupied at the moment, picks up this question of possible deterioration of the self, before switching somewhat elliptically to the object of the self's concern, the toi that is to be contacted at the end of the self's movement beyond himself:

Aurai-je le temps de voir la santé disparaître  
 Et toi plus emmuré que mon coeur au repos  
 Toi qui troubles la nuit de ton vol équivoque  
 Toi poussière du ciel forme mal établie

There is no doubt that the poet continues to be disturbed by the thought of the self's disintegration in time, by the fragmentation and ultimate erosion of the self under the effect of "la poussée tranquille de la mort" (l. 13). Yet the self is also concerned by the effect of time upon his efforts to resolve the moi-toi dichotomy. As the three lines addressed to toi suggest, the latter, the object of the self's feverish

"amour sans raison" (l. 23), is difficult to reach. The toi that is form, poetic form, that other form of the self, does not allow its vol équivoque to be released without a struggle. Its form is difficult to establish and would presently seem to defy the efforts of the self, forcing him, as Reverdy declares in the remaining part of the poem, to hesitate in his movements and to plunge even more deeply 'into the mine' <sup>42</sup> in order to transform what is at yet a forme mal établie into a form whose fullness and accomplishment are better assured. The risk entailed in the effort of the self to close the gap separating him from his other-self is, of course, great. The poet may only succeed in confirming the distance between himself and the object of his desire, never closing it. It is a risk he clearly must take. The tensions of the moi-toi duality may remain, division may prevail. But the moi-toi relationship is articulated along the axis divergence/convergence, disunity/contact and attainment, and, for Reverdy, to risk the problem is to risk the solution.

Although Reverdy generally prefers to project the division and duality of the self by means of the twinned structures we have described to this point, it should be observed that Reverdy may equally dispense with all references to a moi and yet continue to project the same fragmentation. Very occasionally this may take the form of a seemingly objectified interplay of second and third persons, as in the poem 'La jetée' from Les Ardoises du toit, though, as so often elsewhere, the toi of the poem would seem to be addressed as the other-self by the self -- only here the moi who is addressing the toi has no overt presence. <sup>43</sup> Much more frequent and, in our view, effective is Reverdy's tendency to completely objectify the interplay which is thus seen to take place between two third persons. "Il est seul, on le croit seul", Reverdy

tells us in the early text "Une apparence médiocre" from the Poèmes en prose, "pourtant quelque chose le suit ou peut-être quelqu'un dans la forme étrange de son ombre".<sup>44</sup> The parallel between the duality evoked here and that expressed by means of earlier examined combinations of personae is plain to see. Reverdy is fond of the procedure, particularly in his prose poems and other creative prose. In the interestingly titled conte 'Le dialogue secret', for example, we read:

Ils sont deux sur le chemin tournant. On ne sait pas exactement si l'un n'est pas l'ombre de l'autre, et s'ils sont trop unis, trop liés l'un à l'autre, enlacés trop étroitement l'un l'autre. Mais ils sont deux marcheurs qui s'éloignent sur le chemin tournant.<sup>45</sup>

Although the expression is often subdued and discreet in such texts, the same basic principles of expansion or fragmentation into two apply as in those texts where the presence of the self in the form of a moi is explicitly voiced. The message of division and consequent dialectic between constituent parts of the self may, indeed, be conveyed by 'structures' involving an overt self or moi, so that it is, in effect, a first person plural that is functioning, so that it is "nous [qui] sommes deux/Sur la même ligne où tout se suit/Dans les méandres de la nuit", as Reverdy may say, for example, in 'Couloir'.<sup>46</sup> But Reverdy's message remains the same when the nous becomes eux, when the self is divided into two third persons: man, poet or not, is divided and the site of forces that pull unevenly, in different directions and with divergent logics.

#### Multiple Fragmentation and Unity

Although we have dealt principally with the question of the division and fragmentation of the self in terms of a division into two, and although Reverdy's work tends most frequently to project such division in terms of a duality, it will perhaps already be sensed that the division

that besets the self in Reverdy's eyes is in fact by no means a simple splitting of the self into two separate functional units. This is exemplified to a certain degree by the fact that a good many of Reverdy's poems operate a loose and ambiguous interplay between first one pair of personae and then another, so that moi and toi may be dialectically engaged initially, then moi and lui or toi and lui. What the imagination presents is a pair or even a series of dualities or simple divisions that form an overall tripartite structure or even one whose divisions are sensed to be more complex and multiple. A number of poems openly articulate this tripartition of the self, which would seem to correspond, moreover, to Reverdy's notion of détriplement to which we have already referred.<sup>47</sup> In the early poem 'Passant' from Cale sèche, for example, the final stanza reads:

Le soleil incendie la route  
 Ce dur miroir qui m'a séduit  
 Nous sommes trois avec mon doute<sup>48</sup>  
 Et l'ombre intime qui nous suit

Or, as in the poem 'Les mots qu'on échange', Reverdy may inform us that "En partant nous étions trois/Mon ombre et moi/Et toi derrière".<sup>49</sup>

Elsewhere, Reverdy presents the notion of division into three and interaction between three parts by means of a subtle interweaving of three personae. This is the case, for example, in the poem 'Vue d'autrefois' from Les Ardoises du toit,<sup>50</sup> where we observe first of all the typical Reverdyan dédoublément involving the fragmentation of the self into the moi and toi combination. The poem then produces a further fragmentation ("Les traits de ton visage s'écartent/Un autre vient") and ends in the following way:

Un enfant qui courait ne te rappelle rien  
 Et celui qui s'en va là-bas  
 Tes lèvres tremblent  
 Dans un pays lointain et noir  
 Tu lui ressembles

Reverdy thus creates additional tension between the toi and what may be even another lui (different from the 'other' already produced) by articulating the relationship between them in terms of similarity, on the one hand, and yet distance, non-recognition and fear, on the other.

There are two important points implicit in our discussion to this point of Reverdy's conception of the self which in fact should be drawn out a little more forcefully. An appreciation of their significance will then leave us well placed to bring to a conclusion our present assessment. The first point demands a fuller appreciation of the extent and nature of the division of the self with which Reverdy is preoccupied. In essence, this division is not simple, not merely into two or three. Reverdy does not conceive of the self as being neatly compartmentalized, composed of elements that are stable and, as it were, always straightforwardly retrievable. On the contrary, for him, the fragmentation of the self would seem to be multiple and proliferating; and he clearly envisages it as taking place on various planes.

Let us press the point a little more. Firstly, Reverdy's writings reveal an acute sensitivity to the divisive and fragmenting effect of time upon the self. The latter is constantly becoming in time and Reverdy's work repeatedly evokes the necessity felt by the poet to confirm a difference or distance between what the self is in the present and what he was in the past -- or what in fact might be thought of as a series of pasts. "Il voyait son nom représenter un autre personnage bien différent de celui qu'il était autrefois", Reverdy relates in 'La conversion'.<sup>51</sup> For the self sheds his skin daily. He is "celui qui ne reconnaît pas tous les jours son visage. Celui qui n'a pas au-dedans et au-dehors la même forme."<sup>52</sup> Each old skin of the self, as it were, becomes an other-self, so that the past is turned into a vast repository

of other-selves separated from the self in the present. Now it is the other-self that seems to have been transformed, now Reverdy emphasises the constant becoming of the self in the present. The result is the same: a rift is created, a difference is observable. Reverdy may, indeed, attempt to establish a dialogue between present and past. In a letter to Jean Rousselot, for instance, he writes: "Avant de passer à Paris, une minute pour essayer de retrouver celui qui y allait partir".<sup>53</sup> Reverdy is thus endeavouring to secure a closing of the gap between the pre-Paris self and, not only the Paris self, but also the self in the act of writing the letter. An attempt is being made to establish coordinates between various points of reference in time, in order to resolve the problems of recognition and identification which confront the self. And here, despite difference and distance, Reverdy succeeds in positing certain points of contact. Elsewhere, however the complications of temporal fragmentation seem overriding or the perspective in which Reverdy views the latter may itself shift. In 'Période hors-texte', for example, Reverdy significantly undermines the idea that a real dialogue between past and present selves is feasible by stressing the one-sidedness of the 'exchange', resulting from the other-self's ignorance of the continually emerging self in the present. "Tu ne sais pas à quelle altitude je suis", Reverdy declares, "ni où et surtout plus bas que tout ce que tu peux imaginer."<sup>54</sup> In an entry in Le Livre de mon bord, on the other hand, the angle from which Reverdy views the question of the fragmentation of the self in time changes somewhat, although in effect the change is more apparent than real. The past, Reverdy argues, is enslaving, the other-selves that live on in the memory cumbersome. "Pour être entièrement libre, il faudrait tuer sans cesse l'homme d'hier au profit de celui d'aujourd'hui, celui d'aujourd'hui au profit de celui

de demain. Et ainsi de suite." <sup>55</sup> It is, of course, a fine dream and an apparently ideal solution to the problem that time poses the self. To live purely with oneself (one self) in the present would eliminate the past and with it the necessity to heal the wounds caused by time's fragmenting effect upon the self. Unfortunately, to forget the past and in effect kill the self's history, is not possible; and memory, which brings about this impossibility, even were it never to malfunction in itself, is equally unfortunately an imperfect tool for the healing enterprise thus still required: divergence may remain, despite, and indeed often paradoxically because of, the efforts of the memory.

The fragmentation of the self by time may in fact be appropriately contrasted with Reverdy's appreciation of the effect of artistic dédoublement or détriement which, as we have shown, may constitute a deliberately undertaken and healthy gesture. The past selves flake off, without provocation, from the continually eroded, but living, central core of the self in the present. Division of the self on the temporal plane is therefore uncontrollable and perhaps all the more likely to provoke anguish. It should be observed, however, that, even if Reverdy could release the self from the problems of fragmentation and diffusion in time, across time, the self would continue to experience the same basic problems in the 'pure' present to which he would be abandoned. To suppress the past would perhaps ease the self's dilemma, but it would by no means offer a definitive solution. Even in the present the self is fragmented in multiple ways.

But in what ways precisely does this additional fragmentation come about? Let us elaborate the question briefly. In the poem 'La tête pleine de beauté' of which we spoke earlier, Reverdy establishes a crucial and disturbing opposition within the self of heart and mind.

Such an opposition or division is emblematic, for Reverdy, of man's general complexity which is in fact his most distinctive feature.

"L'être des bêtes", Reverdy remarks in a note in En Vrac, "est à sens unique, celui de l'homme à double et à multiple sens, et toujours placé à un carrefour. C'est tout, mais c'est assez, car c'est toute la source de son tourment." <sup>56</sup>

The self is thus caught in various magnetic fields whose pulls tend to draw him apart. He becomes a zone of great tension as his multiple constituent parts exercise upon him their divisive influence. Reverdy is particularly fond of recording and analysing this tension and multiple division of the self in his notebooks. Le Gant de crin, Le Livre de mon bord and En Vrac are full of entries that point to the idea of the self being divided into (and by) his mind, his senses and his heart. And there are many pages that point to further complications or subdivisions involving distinctions between, for example, mind, imagination, spirit and conscience, or else heart and soul. <sup>57</sup> Cleavage is thus heaped upon cleavage. The fragmentation and loose compartmentalisation proliferate. They do not, however, stop there for Reverdy. Quite naturally each part of the self functions in such a way as to produce further kinds of divergence within its own realm: feelings fluctuate, the mind is the locus of contradictory mental impulses, the sensory experience of the self is varied, often discordant in nature and uneven in quality. In short, fragmentation of the self at any given time is, for Reverdy, extreme and, indeed, seemingly endless. To eliminate the fragmentation of the self in history is not therefore by any means a cure for the fragmentation experienced naturally in the present.

Before moving on to the second point which we wish to accentuate, it will be useful to observe very briefly the way in which Reverdy's

poems often project this fragmentation of the self into a multitude of cognitive, perceptual, emotional and other parts. We are not concerned here with Reverdy's use of the personae moi, toi, lui and so on, although given fragments of the self -- mind, heart, hand, eyes, for example -- may be, as it were, allocated to given personae which therefore tend to act as bare structures which Reverdy may drape and attire to correspond to his particular vision of fragmentation at a given moment. What interests us is the fact that, with or without the use of 'supporting' personae, Reverdy consistently projects the self in his poetry as a divided entity, a collection of parts. As he suggests in the poem 'Le coeur écartelé' from Ferraille, the self is the 'vaguest' of assemblages, an entity that is 'quartered', in the process of losing itself in this disintegration into scattered fragments of blood, hands, eyes, feet and spirit.

Il est si vague qu'il se perd  
 Le temps le roule sous ses vagues  
 Parfois son sang coule à l'envers  
 Et ses larmes tachent le linge  
 Sa main cueille les arbres verts  
 Et les bouquets d'algues des plages  
 Sa foi est un buisson d'épines  
 Ses mains saignent contre son coeur  
 Ses yeux ont perdu la lumière  
 Et ses pieds traînent sur la mer 58

The self almost literally comes apart at the seams and is depicted not in its continuity but as a series of disembodied elements distributed throughout space in what is felt by Reverdy to be the 'vaguest' of ways. This impression of a self conceived of in terms of scattered, ill-related pieces rather than a cohesive whole is voiced by Reverdy with increasing intensity in the later volumes of poetry published from 1930 on. The poem 'Et maintenant' from Bois vert is a fair example of this and shows Reverdy dealing with the self almost exclusively in terms of disembodied fragments, each carrying different, isolated and often

conflicting traces of experience, whilst pointing collectively to  
Reverdy's haunting sensation of the self's multiple divisions:

Pas de source ce soir  
 Pas de fruits sous les feuilles  
 L'orage s'est calmé trop tard  
 L'amour ni la raison ne montent à l'oreille  
 Les tranches détachées du coeur dans les allées  
 [...]
 La plaie sèche et noire d'orgueil  
 Dans la lumière éblouissante de la bouche  
 [...]
 Un nuage sur l'oeil  
 Un front comme le ciel sur les ravins vertigineux  
 de la figure  
 [...]
 Les pointes de feu du désir  
 Les cicatrices de la haine  
 Et rien pour retenir la vie  
 Rien pour couper le fil qui se dévide  
 Alors tous les échos perdus dans la rumeur  
 Les voix éclaboussées sur la mousse des murs  
 Les traits de la passion tordus dans les décombres  
 [...]
 Dans la forme des mains  
 Dans la source des poches  
 Il y a de l'or et de l'argent  
 Il y a de l'esprit dans la manche  
 Quand la couleur coule à pleins bords  
 Le coeur va plus loin que les yeux  
 [...]
 L'espace devient noir  
 La fenêtre est bouchée  
 Le coeur est à peu près éteint  
 Les mains sont sans abri  
 Tous les arbres couchés  
 Il n'y a que quelques mots confus dans les  
 derniers remous de la poitrine 59

A full discussion of the passages quoted from 'Et maintenant' is not, of course, appropriate to our present purposes. It will be offered in a later chapter dealing with intensively negative thematic concerns. 60  
 However, it is hoped that the extent of the quotation may be excused by virtue of the fact that all the passages serve as eloquent testimony to the truth of the point at hand, namely the strength of feeling that attaches to Reverdy's conception of the self as a locus of severe fracture and fragmentation. The self is not presented as a cohesive

whole, an even imperfectly functioning assemblage of constituent parts. It is only by pure implication that ear, heart (with its abundance of additionally divisive emotions), mouth, eye, hands, mind and so on, constitute a whole and may be said to be anchored in the confines of a self whose 'overall' presence is never rendered explicit. This situation is no doubt extreme and reflects the general trend of Reverdy's poetry towards an increasingly negative and oppressive tonality. But the fact remains that in this, the concluding poem to one of Reverdy's last collections, the self is conceived of exclusively in terms of a series of parts never overtly bound together, but rather viewed as the multiple fragmentation of a self seemingly no longer envisaged as being able to maintain any wholeness.

After having elaborated Reverdy's obsession with the above notions of multiple fragmentation and division, it may at first seem improbable that the second point we wish to bring out pertains, in effect, to Reverdy's appreciation of the fact that the self, despite the incohesion, may be said to retain a significant measure of unity and wholeness. In many respects there is nothing surprising about this. In En Vrac, when Reverdy, in seeking to find "le rapport entre ce que j'écris et ce que je suis", is led, in a mixture of pessimism and honesty, to observe a disturbing lack of identification between self and other-self across the years, he nevertheless is forced to acknowledge the impossibility of completely detaching his earlier work from his present self, because such work, in the final analysis, "c'est moi, c'est toujours moi".<sup>61</sup> When Reverdy speaks of recognizing and laying before oneself, in the act of writing, one's complexities, one's multiple inner divisions -- "déplier son esprit, le dédoubler, le détripler, le rendre simple", we have heard him say<sup>62</sup> -- it is clear that such a gesture also permits

the writer to know his own 'simplicity', the complications of his oneness, as it were, and that an equation between the whole and its multiple fragments, the one and the many, is implied. Furthermore, although the divisions between past and present selves or between the function of heart and mind, senses and the imagination or, indeed, one 'sensory' tool and another (such as hand and eyes) -- although divisions such as these may often seem sharply defined, Reverdy often softens or blurs the edges of division in certain ways. Despite distance, there may thus be a verification of resemblance between past and present selves: "Autrefois j'avais regardé ce miroir vide et n'y avais rien vu/Du visage oublié à présent reconnu", Reverdy tells us in 'Les vides du printemps'.<sup>63</sup> Despite, for example, the extinction of the poet's eyes, the ear may continue to function, registering sounds in their totality: "On entend tous les bruits mais les yeux sont éteints", we read in 'Le flot berceur'.<sup>64</sup> The ear thus comes to the aid, so to speak, of the impaired being of the self, restoring to it an at least partial fullness and demonstrating that compensation and reciprocal assistance are possible despite fragmentation. And despite the compartmentalisation of the mind, the sensibility and the emotions, Reverdy frequently specifies the extent of their interdependence, the degree of overlapping and interweaving that characterises their functioning. "Les sens et l'imagination s'enflamment mutuellement", Reverdy declares in Le Livre de mon bord, "mais les sens n'auraient qu'une piètre flamme, sans l'étincelle de l'imagination."<sup>65</sup> "Les oeuvres ne sont solides et fortes que si elles sont édifiées par une tête", he argues in Le Gant de crin, only to qualify his argument significantly and doubly by adding, "mais, sublimes, elles ne le sont que par le coeur, et c'est tout un malheur s'il y a trop peu de tête et trop de coeur".<sup>66</sup>

We are now in a position to draw to a close the discussion of Reverdy's conception of the self and to resume our findings. The 'initial' verification Reverdy makes of the apparently straightforward but fundamental fact that the self is, and is there, rapidly gives way to the realisation that the self is not a solid, monolithic structure. Any wholeness or 'simplicity' the self may possess is often characterised by a duality, that is in fact understood to be symptomatic of greater division and more widespread fragmentation of the self. Such factors of division and incohesiveness, which may be of a temporal order (thus fracturing the self into an endless series of historical other-selves) or of a physiological/spiritual order (thus causing the self to subdivide into those numerous components with their varying functions, such as the hand, the mind, the heart and so on), are often made to crystallise around the personae (moi, toi, lui, ombre, etc.) that fill Reverdy's creative universe. Although Reverdy finds this proliferation of fragmentation distressing, he equally appreciates that to know oneself is boldly to confront such proliferation. Indeed, for him, the act of writing, in itself a setting before the self of his other-self, also permits what may be thought of as an actual provocation of the very fragmentation of the self that is distressing. Dédoublement, détriplement, expressing in one's writings the many forces that tear at the self and pull him in different directions -- such acts also allow one to know oneself, the wholeness of the self, even if in terms of division and complication. To venture to know the self is thus, for Reverdy, to discover the disturbing fact of its fractured, multi-faceted structure. But, equally, to discover such a structure, is to know the complexity of one's 'simplicity' and the extent to which the self's multiple divisions are affected by factors of interdependence,

closeness, reciprocation and compensation. The self's equation thus operates in both directions, after all. If Reverdy's decision to open up the Pandora's box of the self leads to an awareness of schisms and tensions, it is clearly a decision that has to be made for any knowing to be possible at all and one that at least allows Reverdy to reconcile the parts with the whole, the many with the one that somehow is responsible for them. <sup>67</sup>

#### From Self to World: Dichotomy and Relationship

If, as we have shown, Reverdy shows himself to be extremely sensitive to the at once simple and fundamental fact of the existence of the self, it is important to observe that he is equally aware that the self exists not in a vacuum, but within the context of a multitude of phenomena, both human and non-human, that impinge upon his consciousness. The poem 'Les traits du ciel' from Sources du vent opens in the following way:

Le feu qui danse  
 L'oiseau qui chante  
 Le vent qui meurt  
     Les vagues de la glace  
     Et les flots de rumeur  
 Dans l'oreille les cris lointains  
     du jour qui passe  
     toutes les flammes lasses  
     la voix du voyageur <sup>68</sup>

Reverdy thus typically operates a nomination and, indeed, a catenation of the things of the world -- visual and auditory phenomena for the most part -- that would seem to have special significance for the poet at this particular moment. Very often, however, and especially during the earlier part of Reverdy's literary career, he is concerned not just to register and to name these phenomena, but to go one step further and accentuate a most basic fact that nevertheless seems to obsess him, namely the very existence of the world, the fact that its things and its

inhabitants are there. In the opening verses of the poem 'Pêcheurs d'étoiles', for example, Reverdy tells us that "il y a le mot qui chante/  
Et le bruit du décor/Le vent qui passe et entre"; in 'L'homme aux étoiles' we are told that "il y a la mer entre le mur et l'homme et la nuit dépliée qui arrête le bruit. Il y a le bateau blanc qui écarte les lames et l'aile du soleil qui partage le vent"; and elsewhere Reverdy may insist even more firmly, as in 'Les jockeys mécaniques':

Il y a des lueurs sur le fond noir du ciel  
Il y a des lumières qui courent entre les  
étoiles  
Il y a des yeux qui s'ouvrent à la lueur  
des étoiles 69

As with Reverdy's appreciation of the fact that the self is there, we should understand that this verification of the elementary is simultaneously a verification of a primordial existential datum. When Reverdy names phenomena by stressing the fact of their being there, he is therefore not indulging in a banality. His notation indicates rather an experience of the mystery of what is fundamental, an attention to what, because it is immediate and obviously given, may seem elementary, but which the poet considers resonant with potentially profound significance.

It is useful to note, in connection with the above, Reverdy's sensitivity to the precise location of phenomena and the events in which they are caught up. If things are there in an abstract, philosophical sense, as it were, they are there also in a specific locus. In 'Poème', for example, we read:

Au coin de la fenêtre  
La lune  
Et une femme brune  
C'est là  
Quelqu'un passe et ne me voit pas 70

And in 'Verso', from Cravates de chanvre, Reverdy is similarly eager to pinpoint attention, to designate the crucial place:

C'est là  
la tête penchée au dehors  
les rayons de soleil près de la chevelure  
le visage noyé  
les larmes 71

In these instances and others like them, Reverdy seeks deliberately to point to the location of phenomena in such a way as to indicate that they, like the self, are on display, so to speak, situated in a specific, concrete manner and, explicitly or implicitly, in relation to the self. Reverdy does not care, therefore, to evoke only the notion, the abstract fact, of the world's being there. His poetry tends rather to focus attention upon the concrete realisation of existence, the fact that phenomena may be specifically perceived and designated, that they pertain to a particular space in relation to the self. Once more, this habit of pointing to things that are there in very basic terms that stress both the what and the where of their existence, <sup>72</sup> reveals Reverdy's preoccupation with the most ordinary and yet the most fundamental of existential data. It is, moreover, a most characteristic habit and one that shows to what extent his poetry refuses to take the humblest and apparently the barest of experiences for granted.

To observe that the world is there, that phenomena exist in a specific and different place, is of course to posit a distinction between the self and the world. This distinction between self and all that is other or non-self, whilst applying to all phenomena, is, for example, recorded with particular sensitivity when Reverdy speaks of the division between the self and other people. 'Lui et eux' is the title of a poem in which Reverdy elaborates a distressing dichotomy between the self and other men. <sup>73</sup> "Ils sont là et moi aussi", Reverdy

tells us in an early and unusually light-spirited poem 'Trajet' which nevertheless succeeds in articulating the fact of separateness in the midst of the forced mingling of people during a bus-ride.<sup>74</sup> Reverdy, indeed, seems to be mildly obsessed with the fact of this basic difference and uniqueness of the self in relation to all that he is not, whether the latter be human or non-human phenomena. "L'idée de soi à l'égard de tout ce qui n'est pas soi", he notes in Le Livre de mon bord.<sup>75</sup> In fact, as he suggests in the same volume, it is precisely in better appreciating the nature of this difference between self and other that a clearer understanding of the way in which the self is constituted may be achieved. "Si nous pouvions connaître clairement ce qui fait que nous ne sommes pas les autres, nous serions bien près de savoir ce que nous sommes", he declares.<sup>76</sup>

Reverdy's conception of the distinction between the self and other people does not imply a static and congealed separation, but, on the contrary, suggests the idea of a dialectic based upon difference but conscious of the real or potential relationship that exists between the self and "tout ce qui n'est pas soi". This is true of the situation in which the poet seeks to know what he is by realising what he is not, just as it is true of his ability to conceive intellectually of his uniqueness and apparently utter isolation whilst appreciating the emotional bonds that, whether negative or positive, bind him to relationship with what he is not. "La vie interne de chacun est si personnelle, absolument incomparable à toute autre", Reverdy argues in En Vrac, adding that "deux êtres dans le même présent vivent deux moments non identifiables, et c'est pourquoi d'ailleurs, la communion si rare, si imparfaite qu'elle soit, est parfois si savoureuse et émouvante".<sup>77</sup> However we look at it, then, the distinction between self and other (whether people or

things), between what Reverdy very commonly depicts as an inside/outside dichotomy, is appreciated by Reverdy to involve perhaps less an absolute division than a dialectical, quasi-osmotic relationship. Inside and outside, self, people and things, do not, for Reverdy, and despite appearances, live in an independent manner. "L'eau et la nuit sont dehors qui attendent", Reverdy tells us in 'Vieux port'; or we may read, as in 'Réveil intérieur' for example: "Le calendrier dehors, le livre ouvert des arbres, les feuilles de soleil se fanent sur le mur; mais que veulent dire cette main qui cherche, ces yeux qui courent, ces paupières qui battent et ces gouttes d'eau qui restent au bord des lignes du matin?" <sup>78</sup>

Poems such as these certainly present the phenomena of the world caught in an outer space and time that mark them off from the self and from the implied inside or inner space he occupies. But at the same time they tersely articulate the idea of a relationship between inside and outside, the possibility, however tenuous (mere waiting continues in the one poem, puzzled questioning in the other), of a resolution of the inside/outside, self/world dialectic evoked.

It is, of course, the aim of this study to develop in the chapters to follow the specific nature of this dialectic, to examine in detail its phenomenological and psychological expression, to pinpoint the forces of repugnance and attraction that characterise it. At this point in our discussion, however, it is important to stress the extent to which Reverdy's writings present this self/world, inside/outside dialectic in the most fundamental and classic phenomenological terms. <sup>79</sup> Repeatedly, as we have shown, Reverdy is drawn to express the at once primitive and staggering fact that the world is there, just as the self is there. Repeatedly, Reverdy affirms either in the titles of his poems ('Dehors', 'Crépuscule au-dehors') <sup>80</sup> or in the body of his poetry,

the basic partitioning of space into the world that is outside and the inside space of the self which may perhaps include those things most intimately pertaining to it ("Dehors des vapeurs en formes humaines courent sous la clarté. A l'intérieur la flamme ardente brûle jusqu'à l'heure où la lune tombe de l'arbre enfin décapité").<sup>81</sup> And, finally, Reverdy repeatedly asserts his conception of the centrality of the self, his idea that the inside occupied by the self is central, at the core of the world.<sup>82</sup> The world and its things are not just outside, therefore, but are felt to be around the self. Often this feeling of being encircled by the world is limited to Reverdy's sensation of things being in front, caught in a specific segment of the circle around the self -- "le monde devant moi", Reverdy may declare, or again, "le rayon clair se tient debout/Là devant moi"<sup>83</sup> -- and in this way Reverdy still tends to stress the inside/outside separation in terms of what may be thought of as a linear division rather than a global or 'spherical' relationship. Very frequently, however, Reverdy chooses to express in most forthright language this sensation of being "au centre du monde", surrounded, as he suggests in 'Chemin de pas', by the paraphernalia of the world: "Les carrés tout autour/Les formes/Les objets".<sup>84</sup> In 'Période hors-texte', for example, a work that is strongly 'autobiographical' in tone and character, Reverdy twice evokes in a quite unambiguous fashion the feeling that the self has of his own centrality, of being at the centre of the phenomena around him, constituting his world. "Les montagnes forment un arc de cercle dans le ciel", we read, "tu remues au milieu comme une étoile";<sup>85</sup> and, elsewhere in the same piece, Reverdy declares a similar sensitivity: "Moi: qui n'ai jamais pensé qu'au lieu où je n'étais pas, au temps où je ne vivais pas/Et sur qui tous les regards se fixaient parfois comme les

rayons vers le centre d'une roue qui tournait dans le même sens que la terre".<sup>86</sup>

Two points remain to be clarified in connection with the above. In the first instance and as we may observe from the second of the two quotations just given from 'Période hors-texte', the sensation of the poet's centrality does not in any way prevent him from straining outwards, towards other spaces and times or in a gesture of exploration of the world that is outside and around him and to which he feels himself, precisely, to be related in some dialectical manner. What is involved on such occasions is a displacement of the self's central location, a shifting of the self in his exploration of the world which does not affect his sense of centrality, but which, on the contrary, and as we shall see,<sup>87</sup> will potentially lead to the self's appropriation of the world in such a way as to maintain the self's centrality whilst defusing the tensions of the inside/outside dialectic. Secondly, we may at times hear Reverdy voice the idea that the poet may find himself situated, out of choice or force of circumstance, in a fringe or marginal space, and thus seemingly displaced from the central position he is normally held to occupy. Reverdy may thus speak, as in the late poem 'Chair vive', of "ma vie dans la coulisse/D'où je vois onduler les moissons de la mort".<sup>88</sup> He may declare the need of refuge, of withdrawal into the periphery: "Il s'agit enfin de se sauver sans se perdre -- bref, il s'agit de vivre à côté", we read in Reverdy's last book of notes, En Vrac.<sup>89</sup> Or, speaking this time in a slightly different context of the poet-artist who 'puts on the show', who masterminds the performance from behind the scenes, Reverdy suggests that "il est dans la coulisse aussi bien de la nature que de l'art".<sup>90</sup> From evidence such as this we can of course see that there exists a tension

in Reverdy's consciousness between centrality and the 'marginality' that results from being 'in the wings' or withdrawing into peripheral space. Whilst we can accept that this tension exists, we should nevertheless argue that it involves no fundamental contradiction of Reverdy's conception of the self's/poet's centrality.<sup>91</sup> Being in the periphery may afford the opportunity to pull the artistic strings or benefit from a relatively salutary seclusion. It may equally reflect a forced and painful alienation and solitude.<sup>92</sup> But, whatever the case may be, the fact remains that for Reverdy the self is the "foyer de l'univers", the single, central figure of the poet's world, the 'only subject' at his disposal and thus the substance at the heart of his every utterance.<sup>93</sup> 'Quelle a été la rencontre capitale de votre vie?', an enquête sponsored by the review Minotaure asked of Reverdy in 1933. His response was unambiguous, highly revealing and noticeably at variance with most other replies that dealt with amorous encounters. "La seule, capitale et trop évidemment nécessaire", Reverdy wrote, "dont l'importance s'aggrave au fur et à mesure de la persistance dans le temps -- celle que j'ai cru faire de moi-même, avec qui je n'en aurai fini jamais. Fortuites m'apparaissent les autres, avec les contre-parties diverses, dans les chocs successifs qui me rabattent toujours, avec plus ou moins de violence, vers ma propre réalité".<sup>94</sup> Not only is it true that the poet must take care not to 'lose himself', as Reverdy put it in En Vrac, in any movements to which he might commit himself;<sup>95</sup> but, from a certain point of view, it would seem that in Reverdy's case he cannot 'lose himself'. Any sensation of 'marginality' or venturing forth towards other encounters and contacts is thus always underpinned by the poet's self-centredness. The poet may indeed elect to be 'in the wings' or he may feel himself hounded there and exiled in

peripheral space, but he is always at the same time on stage.

Reverdy's notion of being in the periphery would seem to provide at the most a reduction of the self's conspicuousness, but self-centredness and centrality remain. The poet is necessarily the focal centre of the world, the point to which all other phenomena and experience relate, the 'logic' in the name of which all the poet's gestures and movements in the world about him are undertaken.

### The World as Theatre

But if, in his basic conception of the inside/outside dialectic that exists between the poet or self and the world that surrounds him,<sup>96</sup> Reverdy is powerfully drawn to emphasize the self's central, pivotal role and the crucially self-centred, self-interested nature of his relationship with the world, it is nevertheless clear from Reverdy's poetry and other writings that the world is felt to be a place of fascinating activity, of dynamic movement, at once independent of the self or poet and yet capable of sustaining a more intimate association with him. A good deal of the remaining part of this study will look in some detail at matters pertaining to such a discussion. It is not therefore our wish here to plunge into even a synoptic statement of the powers of attraction and repulsion exercised by the world upon the self. In conclusion of this liminal analysis of Reverdy's conception of self and world, we should however like to attract attention to Reverdy's use of one particular imaginative motif which is not only recurrent and obsessive but which points to a conception of the world as a privileged and oddly 'spectacular' zone worthy of the attention the poet feels obliged to accord to it.

In many of his poems and prose writings Reverdy conceives of the world around him as a theatre, a vast stage upon which spectacles and

dramas endlessly unfold their changing scenes and acts. The night sky in 'Spectacle des yeux' is the site of a brilliant theatrical illumination and a flickering movement of half-real shapes making their miraculous balletic emergence upon stage:

Etrangers merveilleux qui passent sans mourir  
 Le soir rallume ses lumières  
 Le spectacle dresse ses feux  
 La danseuse enflammée sort du portemanteau  
 Les maillots gonflés se raniment  
 La fortune court sur le corps  
 La lune roule dans la piste  
 On saute à travers ce décor <sup>97</sup>

Similarly in the poem 'Galleries' the world is held to be projected on- to a vast screen where its particular but fleeting reality becomes available by assuming a theatrical, unreal appearance:

L'aube  
 Le soleil naissant  
 Une boule à peine ronde  
 Le reflet du monde  
 Sur l'écran <sup>98</sup>

As Reverdy puts it in 'Le passant bleu', "la réalité prend un aspect théâtre". <sup>99</sup> Everywhere the poet appreciates that there are "des scènes [qui] se déroulent", that there are "des drames sans témoins qui se passent dehors". <sup>100</sup> The self or poet becomes spectator, the observer of an immense and continuous/discontinuous theatrical performance whose very existence, let alone significance, is often neglected by other people. This capacity of the world to assume the dimensions and character of a theatre and Reverdy's corresponding propensity to exploit this capacity, are perhaps nowhere in better evidence than in two splendid 'entries' in Reverdy's second journal of notes, Le Livre de mon bord. The first records his experience of a frosty, brilliantly sunny morning conceived of as a "prodigieux décor" which has been suddenly revealed to the poet in all its exhilarating limpidness by the action of a gust of wind "[qui] a tiré le rideau de brume en sifflant,

comme les anneaux sur la tringle".<sup>101</sup> The second also evokes a wintry dawn scene, but more clearly articulates what appears to be the world's ability to transform itself into the most marvellously fantastic and unreal of theatrical decors, but what is of course Reverdy's own inclination to operate this transformation:

Un soleil éclatant se lève au-dessus d'une  
épaisse couche de neige. La lumière sculpte  
dans la distance un fantastique, un irréel  
décor. Un décor de joie sans raison et qui  
ne correspond à rien de définissable -- aucun  
plaisir que celui des yeux devant un spectacle  
insolite, éblouissant [...] <sup>102</sup>

Of course, one might argue, Reverdy is just indulging in a little 'embroidery' of the plain, the natural. But this is precisely what interests us. Whenever Reverdy/the poet conceives of the world, expresses the world -- whether it be by means of an 'everyday' observation, as above, or within the more privileged context of a poem -- the natural world tends to shed its simple factuality, its most evident phenomenality. And it does so in order to assume a theatrical, artificial, surreal appearance. To view the world as theatre, as Reverdy does, is to cause the line between reality and irreality to shimmer. A theatrical world is clearly no longer a world viewed as purely natural. To view the world as theatre betrays, rather, Reverdy's tendency to transform, to shift the balance from the given to the imagined, to see in the reality of the world around him a potentiality that the poet in him will more fully exploit.

The apparently simple Reverdyan gesture that consists of regarding the world as theatre is therefore a gesture that in fact suggests to us a good deal about Reverdy's conception of reality and the relation existing between poet and world. Indeed, throughout our study we shall be obliged to bear in mind directly or indirectly the basic message

inherent in this gesture whose 'logic' we shall explore more fully in our next chapter. The poet is certainly a spectator of the world's phenomena. But he is no ordinary spectator. His task is by no means simply to register and blandly to record the 'theatrical' events unfolding before him. He must on the contrary endeavour never to lose "son rang de spectateur particulier et supérieur, subtil, pénétrant, imaginatif, et capable de relier toutes choses par des rapports qu'il est seul capable de leur découvrir et de faire voir".<sup>103</sup> The poet's function is thus to see, but to see what is not readily available, and then to make visible or show this special 'what'. He observes the theatre of the world only to produce his own theatre which he presents for our observation. Just as there is no 'innocent contemplation' of the world,<sup>104</sup> so there is no simple and innocent notation or catenation of the world's elements in Reverdy's poetry. Instead, the poet busies himself with the production of a new scenario dependent upon his subtle, imaginative observation of the raw theatre going on around him. The form, the movements, the happenings which he witnesses in the world, whilst never ceasing to fascinate the poet and finding an abundant expression in his work,<sup>105</sup> are always understood by the poet to be 'aspects' of the world's reality which he is in the (poetic) process of exploiting, of adapting to the overall (poetic) vision he is producing and putting on show (in his poem). If, therefore, the form and geometry of observed phenomena continually attract Reverdy's attention,<sup>106</sup> if he is captivated by the teeming, pulsating phenomenal dynamism characteristic of the world's natural theatre;<sup>107</sup> and if he is therefore repeatedly drawn to evoke the fact that the world's phenomena pass by, process and continually change in their coming to pass or occurrence;<sup>108</sup> then we must not forget that Reverdy is equally (and often simultaneously)

sensitive to the fact that, in sharing, in 'faisant voir' what, as a "spectateur particulier et supérieur, subtil, pénétrant, imaginatif", he has observed, he is committed to a restructuring, a transposition of reality that entails a radical distinction between raw or natural 'theatre' and poetic 'theatre'.<sup>109</sup> The shape, geometry and topography of natural phenomena may thus be seen to draw Reverdy's attention, but he is equally, if not more, preoccupied with the specifically poetic gesture of shaping or re-shaping of phenomena, whether with respect to the 'plasticity' of their mutual relationships or correspondence or with respect to their typographical/syntactical disposition as words upon the page.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, the poet may be highly concerned with certain notions or motifs of phenomenal movement (passing, processing, happening, changing and so on), but he is every bit as much concerned with the poem's own movement, the way it too 'passes' or 'processes' into itself precisely by assembling all its component motifs into the 'river-bed' along which the poem flows.<sup>111</sup> In Reverdy's eyes, then, the poet is he who distinguishes between the natural theatre of the world or what is there, naturally, and, on the other hand, theatre as a poetic development of what is there in the given, external world, theatre, that is to say, as a poetic production of a reality other than the one that is given.

We can see, therefore, in conclusion, that the question of Reverdy's fascination with the dialectic existing between the self (whose composition and being remain firmly lodged at the centre of his concern) and the world that lies before him (at once apart from and potentially related to him), is somewhat more complicated than at first seemed the case. This complication stems from the poet's particular conception of reality, a conception in turn underpinned by precisely

that conception he has of himself as a poet. To conceive of the world as theatre may thus appear to be an innocent act of embroidery. But it is not. For it is to conceive of the world as capable of existing in terms of what it is not (i.e. 'theatre'); it is to conceive of the world's phenomena as capable of establishing relationships amongst themselves when none seem evident; it is to appreciate that reality is relative, pliable, transposable, and that it may be thus produced by the poet, live on (and in) his terms. The aim of our next chapter is to explore more fully Reverdy's conception of reality. To do this will permit us to appreciate better that 'raw theatre' and 'poetic theatre' are at once separate and yet interdependent, even interlocked; and to realise also that Reverdy's conception of reality involves not only a dialectic of a material/aesthetic order, but is overlaid with deeply felt ontological considerations.

## Notes to Chapter I

1 In the context of a particular poem, the term 'self' is clearly equivalent in meaning to 'this particular self'. As we shall show, however, Reverdy considers the poet's self to be the sole 'subject' of his poetry (though, as we demonstrate, a self that is often projected in the form of various personae or in other fragmented forms) and it is for this reason that the term 'self' is used to refer conveniently and unambiguously to the recurrent figure of the poet in the poetry. Ultimately, in subsequent chapters, the term 'self' will commonly be replaced by the term 'poet' for reasons of elegance of expression and where no ambiguity is held to exist.

2 See Plupart du temps, 297 and 187, respectively. See the Bibliography for full publishing details of those of Reverdy's works to which we refer. Where more than one edition exists, reference is made to the following (editions that have been reprinted are also noted, with the date of reimpression given in parentheses): Plupart du temps, Paris: Flammarion, 1967; Main d'oeuvre, Paris: Mercure de France, 1949 (1964); Flaques de verre, Paris: Flammarion, 1972; Le Voleur de Talan, Paris: Flammarion, 1967; La Peau de l'homme, Paris: Flammarion, 1968; Le Gant de crin, Paris: Flammarion, 1968; Risques et périls, Paris: Flammarion, 1972; Le Livre de mon bord, Paris: Mercure de France, 1948 (1970).

3 As will be made clear in Chapter II, 'The Question of Being', Reverdy's conception of being is somewhat dualistic, involving a distinction between being-in-the-world as a sensory, cognitive and empirical process and a transcendent mode of being capable of providing a sensation of ontological fullness.

4 See 'La saison dernière', Plupart du temps, 243; 'Bruits du soir', Main d'oeuvre, 26; and ibid., 285, respectively.

5 For a full discussion of the question of reality, see Chapter II, 'Reality and Being', and in particular the section entitled 'The Poetry: Self-reflexive Shimmer and a Fusion of Worlds'.

6 We shall see later in our section entitled 'From Self to World: Dichotomy and Relationship' that these expressions are also applied forcefully and obsessively to the designation of the presence or being-there of all other phenomena, objective and human, and thus reveal Reverdy's sensitivity to the basic existential significance latent in their mundane grammaticality (which philosophers such as Heidegger and Gabriel Marcel similarly refuse to take so readily for granted). It seems reasonable to add that Rimbaud and Apollinaire in particular may well have aided with their poetry in the unconscious shaping of this sensitivity.

7 The term 'antinatural' is Reverdy's and is broadly equivalent to 'artistic'. Cf. Chapter II, passim.

8 Plupart du temps, 132.

9 See 'Révolte d'amiraux' (Main d'oeuvre, 208) and 'Rivage uni' (ibid., 256), respectively.

10 Michael Hamburger, in his book The Truth of Poetry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), points out the extent to which this consciousness of the self's duality and, indeed, 'multiple personalities' is shared by many poets of the modern era, and suggests that this consciousness had in fact been roughly shaped by poets such as Baudelaire (and surely all the Romantics?), Mallarmé and Laforgue. Quite clearly, too, Freud's own writings, filtered through the Surrealists, were influential -- though Reverdy's own awareness of the factors of duality and fragmentation pre-dates by many years the Surrealist era proper.

11 Cf. Valéry's 'Le cimetière marin', for example, which, for all its formal attractions, is clearly a closely scrutinised effort of self-analysis, as various critics have stressed and as Valéry himself has intimated.

12 Plupart du temps, 35.

13 Ibid., 328.

14 Questioning constitutes for Reverdy, moreover, as for a philosopher such as Heidegger, man's basic means of knowing.

15 See 'L'amour dans la boutique', ibid., 288; 'D'un autre ciel', ibid., 115; and 'Poème', Main d'oeuvre, 134, respectively.

16 Jean Rousselot, in his essay 'Pierre Reverdy romancier ou quand le poète se dédouble' (Lettres à Jean Rousselot, Mortemart: Rougerie, 1973, pp. 61-83), argues that Reverdy, especially in his roman populaire La Peau de l'homme, had attempted to "sortir de lui-même, se multiplier, être partout à la fois dans l'univers" (p. 78) -- to escape in fact from the imprisoning self-centredness that he knew characterised the poet and that the novelist seemed able to dispense with in his much freer manipulation of ideas, feelings, places and so on, addressing himself to the reader "par personnes interposées", personae that do not necessarily pertain intimately to his own being, his own self (cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 131-4). We tend to agree with this appraisal, as also with Rousselot's comment (and Reverdy's own realisation) that Reverdy was incapable of such a gesture, that the poem constantly drowns out the novel, the poet replaces the novelist, Reverdy being irresistibly obliged to "se replonger à la fois dans son fonds biographique et dans son état de prédilection, qui est la poésie" (p. 79).

17 In En Vrac Reverdy declares that [les hommes] ne sont curieux que de ce qu'on leur cache et aussitôt distraits dès qu'on a la sottise de satisfaire leur curiosité, chacun, d'ailleurs, ne s'intéressant puissamment qu'à soi-même" (p. 21).

18 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 44, for example: "le poète, en écrivant se préoccupe fort peu d'autre chose que de lui-même, [...] il ne pense à aucun public, à aucun lecteur éventuel même. De là, l'obscurité apparente de ses poèmes".

19 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 134: "le poète n'a qu'un seul personnage -- lui-même -- foyer de l'univers"; and Le Gant de crin, 48: "le propre du poète, c'est de ne connaître et de n'avoir à sa disposition qu'un seul

être, qu'un seul sujet, lui-même". Mortimer Guiney shows himself sensitive to this essential datum also (La Poésie de Pierre Reverdy, Geneva: Georg, 1966, p. 50).

20 Flaques de verre, 128.

21 Le Voleur de Talan, 10.

22 Le Gant de crin, 93.

23 Le Livre de mon bord, 87.

24 See ibid., 70 and 234, respectively.

25 The dilemma is precisely that of finding that Je est un autre, but, as we show below (cf. En Vrac, 181), this realisation may involve not simply self-objectification, but an act whereby one ceases to recognize oneself in one's transposed form.

26 Le Gant de crin, 86-7.

27 See Chapter II.

28 See Chapters V and VI for a full appreciation of the extent of this tension.

29 En Vrac, 181. In effect, one would even expect a further complication or division to arise as a result of imposing artistic dédoublement upon 'natural' cleavage. To observe here, as Reverdy does, moreover, this frightening absence of self-coincidence, is to realise to what extent the artist risks losing himself or, as Ortega y Gasset puts it, of 'betraying' himself (cf. The Duhumanisation of Art, New York: Doubleday, n.d., pp. 175-9) -- despite his most authentic attempt at self-realisation via 'doing'.

30 Le Gant de crin, 84. Georges-Emmanuel Clancier, in his commentary on Plupart du temps, notes the alternation of pronouns such as on and je and adds "on croit d'abord entendre un langage parlé. Mais c'est le langage de quelqu'un parlant seul à mi-voix" (Fontaine, 51 (Apr. 46), 663).

31 Risques et périls, 176.

32 Main d'oeuvre, 26-7.

33 On the question of ambiguity and polysemic functioning, see in particular our final discussion of 'Coeur à la roue', Chapter VI.

34 Flaques de verre, 11.

35 En Vrac, 78.

36 La Peau de l'homme, 127. Cf. Anne-Marie Supervielle (in Fumet, Etudes, 1968): "Son ombre est une sorte d'ange gardien un peu fou avec lequel il a des relations compliquées et mystérieuses" (p. 385). Peter Brunner, in his often sensitive Pierre Reverdy: De la Solitude au mystère,

(Zurich: Juris Druck und Verlag, 1966), also engages in a discussion of the moi-ombre relationship and, indeed, of the relationship existing between the moi and other personae. Brunner's basic argument is predicated upon the idea that Reverdy is in search of a companionship with and knowledge of a toi (which may be thought of in terms of an alter ego, an other person or some "but mystérieux") and yet willing to maintain the distance between himself and his goal. In our view, however, Brunner's argument, despite its honesty and many insights, is often too fragile, the supportive texts adduced are at times inappropriately applied and, most importantly, the aesthetic theory, so essential to an understanding of Reverdy, is severely, almost entirely in fact, neglected.

37 See Flaques de verre, 134-5.

38 For a full discussion of the factors of compensation, see our concluding chapter.

39 See Chapter III for a full discussion of Reverdy's conception of the role of the mind.

40 See Main d'oeuvre, 348-9 for all quotations in this analysis.

41 For a closer look at the question of delirium, see Chapter IV, 'The Frustrations of Advance', which deals in detail with some of the dangers and obstacles of the movement towards attainment.

42 For an examination of the motif of descent and of the mine in particular, see, in Chapter III, the section entitled 'The Vertical Dimension'.

43 The closing lines of 'La jetée' (Plupart du temps, 202) read as follows:

Tu restes là  
                     Tu regardes ce qui s'en va  
 Quelqu'un chante et tu ne comprends pas  
 La voix vient de plus haut  
                     L'homme vient de plus loin  
                     Tu voudrais respirer à peine  
 Et l'autre aspirerait le ciel tout d'une haleine

44 Plupart du temps, 30.

45 La Peau de l'homme, 191.

46 Plupart du temps, 228.

47 See supra, and Le Gant de crin, 86-7.

48 Main d'oeuvre, 455.

49 Ibid., 283.

50 See Plupart du temps, 232 for all quotations.

- 51 Risques et périls, 68.
- 52 'La bonne piste', Flaques de verre, 76.
- 53 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 40.
- 54 La Peau de l'homme, 146.
- 55 Le Livre de mon bord, 198.
- 56 En Vrac, 104. Mortimer Guiney in his book Cubisme et littérature (Geneva: Georg, 1972) speaks of Reverdy's use of the "procédé de fragmentation et de réorganisation cher aux cubistes" (p. 85), but does not stress that, in Reverdy, this self-fragmentation is less a 'technique' than a reflection of an inner bewilderment and torment. We distinguish here, moreover, between the visual, typographical distribution (or 'fragmentation' -- this is not an appropriate term, however) and the fragmentation of the self proper.
- 57 We are not concerned here to map out the details of these patterns of division, but rather to observe the principles that govern them. Typical samples of Reverdy's ceaseless analysis may be found in Le Gant de crin where we read of the divisions of heart and mind which, simultaneously, require each other for a satisfactory co-functioning: "Le coeur rend bête. Plus on a de coeur, plus il faut d'intelligence et de force pour le soutenir. Mais le coeur rend aussi sublime" (p. 88); in En Vrac, where Reverdy distinguishes between skill, conception and spiritual sublimeness (of the soul): "En art, le métier de la main fait l'artiste habile, le métier de l'esprit fait le grand artiste. Et c'est le métier dans l'âme qui fait le grand homme" (p. 176); or in Le Livre de mon bord where he may typically merge certain otherwise contrasted optics by speaking of man's "intelligence sensible" (p. 19). The self-analytical commentary is obsessive and is crucially related to a good deal of Reverdy's aesthetic theory, as we shall see.
- 58 Main d'oeuvre, 355.
- 59 Ibid., 531-3.
- 60 Discussion of various aspects of this and other poems of the collection Bois vert will be found in both Chapters IV and V.
- 61 En Vrac, 181.
- 62 Le Gant de crin, 86. Henri Michaux, ever sensitive to the constitution of the self's being and in particular its multiple fragmentations and changing forms, is equally alert to the equation linking division and unity, as a note from his recent Face à ce qui se dérobe (Paris: Gallimard, 1975, p. 66) suggests: "L'ensemble droite-gauche, une des nombreuses divisions de l'être, division à garder qui est aussi réunion" (my emphasis). André Frénaud prods us towards a similar awareness in these lines from 'Noël interdit': "Je suis là dans la même peau,/poitrine sans poitrine jointe,/seul en moi-même divisé,/ sans accès à l'unité bleue" (Il n'y a pas de paradis, Paris: Gallimard, 1967, p. 210).
- 63 Plupart du temps, 82.

64 Ibid., 360.

65 Le Livre de mon bord, 144.

66 Le Gant de crin, 52.

67 It might be noted that, in the poetry proper, each fragment of the self, carrying with it its particular experiential or existential data, remains, in the context of the poem or the poetry as a whole, precisely a fragment, a part, a partial metaphor for the being of the self. However, it is important to observe also that, as each fragment of the self (moi, toi, mind, hand, heart, eye and so on) surges forth in the linearity of the imaginative structuring of the poem, it assumes momentarily a quality of absoluteness: it thus becomes not merely a part of the self, but, as it were, a synecdochic metaphor for the self and his being, a part standing for the whole. In this way each fragment of the self, like each element of the poem's thematic-imaginative structure, is at once relative (in that it is but one element amongst many) and non-relative, absolute, (in that it presents itself as a 'stopped' moment, as it were, in the poem's temporal flow of being and imagining, and thus attracts our entire attention, demands that we accord it a fullness of status so that its full import may be felt).

68 Main d'oeuvre, 90.

69 See ibid., 15; Flaques de verre, 98 and Plupart du temps, 257, respectively. The poet-critic Renée Riese Hubert, in her study 'L'Evolution du poème en prose dans l'oeuvre de Pierre Reverdy' (HPR:ELA), shows herself sensitive to Reverdy's use of il y a and stresses the idea of inventory of things of the world. It should be affirmed here, however, that there is nothing arbitrary about this inventory: what is there gains its aura of synthesis in relation to the central self -- and, needless to say, in the context of his poetic consciousness and concern. If then, as Lucien Erba suggests ('Une poésie du vertige cosmique', HPR:ELA, 103), Reverdy is 'le premier [...] à nous offrir la primeur de la réalité, vierge de toutes les sédimentations de la mémoire', we must not overlook the fact that, within the world of the poem, things are, of necessity, gathered, relocated 'there', with reference to a consciousness that is both existentially and poetically governed. As we shall show in Chapter II, there can be no question, despite appearances, of 'virginity' and 'innocence' in the poetic act. Nomination is bound up intimately with creation: what is, there, depends very much upon the self/poet for its being (cf. Chapter II and Gaëtan Picon, L'Usage de la lecture, Paris: Mercure, 1960, pp. 246-7).

70 Main d'oeuvre, 134.

71 Plupart du temps, 386.

72 This habit is really quite common in Reverdy. One further example from Flaques de verre will serve to demonstrate the strength of appeal of this experience, whilst showing at the same time to what extent the experience may be 'transferred' to and enjoyed on a 'visionary' level: "Le bon vent vient gémir doucement sur la plage tragique des boutiques. C'est là que la dormeuse aux rêves blonds viendra mourir, quand le soleil se lèvera, plus lentement dans le sens mystérieux de sa poitrine, au fond des gorges de son coeur. C'est là que les sombres sapins qui bordent les paupières s'enfoncent dans les défilés humides de l'oubli pour celui qui a passé le plus clair de son temps dans les racines du brouillard et les bourgeons trop tendres du soleil. Là que la mort ruisselle à pleines dents, là que s'élève le terreau noir où se cultive la plante grasse de la

bêtise et du mensonge" (Flaques de verre, 123-4). Oliver de Magny ('Pierre Reverdy et la contradiction poétique', PR:MF, 181) argues justifiably that Reverdy, in localising things, "en leur assignant un lieu", transfigures them, supplies them with a more infinite dimension. Like the 'cubist' painter (cf. Kahnweiler, 'Reverdy et l'art plastique', PR:MF, 173), Reverdy thus tends to focus a special attention upon things, telling us they are there, but in so doing (and often in conjunction with techniques of syntactic and typographical isolation) de-naturalising them somewhat, giving to them an aura they lack in either a natural or an anecdotal context. In so doing, as Deguy suggests ('Pour Reverdy', preface to Sources du vent, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 16), Reverdy is equally proclaiming the (grammatical) passing of things into the zone of being of the poem, where they are precisely in relationship with the self or poet. A number of modern poets have, of course, particularly concerned themselves (with considerably varying emphases) with such matters as 'announcing' and 'naming' the (things of the) world: Deguy himself and Claudel might be mentioned in particular.

73 Plupart du temps, 388.

74 Main d'oeuvre, 482.

75 Le Livre de mon bord, 198.

76 Ibid., 70.

77 En Vrac, 141.

78 See Plupart du temps, 315 and Flaques de verre, 68, respectively.

79 Edmund Husserl, in his examination of the notion of 'The World of the Natural Standpoint: I and My World about me', gives what is perhaps the most cogent articulation of this naturally perceived dialectic (cf. Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, New York: Collier, 1972, 91-6). Cf. also Martin Heidegger, What is a Thing?, Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967, p. 21 and passim.

80 See Flaques de verre, 25 or Main d'oeuvre, 473; and Flaques de verre, 97, respectively.

81 From 'Autre éclairage' (Main d'oeuvre, 64).

82 Reverdy never really argues the absolute objective reality of perceived phenomena, but everything he writes leads us to believe that phenomena do exist in nature independently of man and his existence. However, what interests Reverdy is that he has precisely the sensation of being at the centre of things, but that this in itself is insufficient. It is not therefore adequate that the world exists for him in a Kantian or Fichtean sense (whereby, as Kant says, "external things exist as well as I myself, ... upon the immediate witness of my self-consciousness"; or, as Fichte says, "the Ego is the source of all reality"): it is necessary to assume this centrality in a new fashion, to affirm one's capacity to reconstitute the world, to create reality on one's own terms, though by means of natural percepts and affects. (Cf. J. Bennett, Kant's Dialectic, C.U.P., 1974, p. 50 and J. G. Fichte, The Science of

Knowledge, London: Trübner, 1889, p. 111. Cf. also infra, 'The World as Theatre' and Chapter II.) Such a move, for Reverdy, involves transforming what is for him, as we shall see (Chapter II) an ontologically sterile natural Begegnen-lassen (Heidegger's interpretation of Kant) into an ontologically and aesthetically rich antinatural Begegnen-lassen (cf. Martin Heidegger, op. cit., p. 242.).

83 See Main d'oeuvre, 218 ('Le monde devant moi' is the poem's title) and 'Le couloir' (Plupart du temps, 228), respectively. Cf. also the closing line of 'Départ' (Main d'oeuvre, 506): "Devant nous tout l'espace"; the closing line of 'Encore marcher' (Plupart du temps, 96): "Et seul je suis perdu là devant vous, devant vous tous et je ne peux plus m'en aller"; or the poem 'Au bord des champs' (Plupart du temps, 308) where we are told that "Ma place est marquée devant eux".

84 See Main d'oeuvre, 178 and Plupart du temps, 343, respectively. Cf. also, with respect to the notion of the self being surrounded, the last stanza of '4 et 9' (ibid., 66). Other examples may be found in Flaques de verre, 13 and Main d'oeuvre, 204 or 289.

85 La Peau de l'homme, 145. We might add that the conte 'Période hors-texte', as Maurice Saillet suggests, "concerne une époque révolue -- antérieure à la vocation littéraire -- de la vie de l'auteur" (ibid., 219).

86 Ibid., 137.

87 In Chapter II.

88 Main d'oeuvre, 522.

89 En Vrac, 58.

90 Le Livre de mon bord, 229.

91 The term 'self' will generally be replaced by the term 'poet' in subsequent analysis (now that Reverdy's conception of the self is established), for reasons of elegance of expression and where no ambiguity ensues.

92 See Chapter IV for a fuller discussion of these and related matters.

93 See Le Livre de mon bord, 134 and Le Gant de crin, 48.

94 Cette émotion appelée poésie, 175.

95 See supra and En Vrac, 58.

96 Concerning the use of the terms 'self' and 'poet', see again supra, n. 91 and n. 1.

97 Main d'oeuvre, 150.

98 Ibid., 125.

- 99 Risques et périls, 106.
- 100 See 'L'air vibre' (Main d'oeuvre, 70) and 'Calme intérieur' (Plupart du temps, 224), respectively.
- 101 Le Livre de mon bord, 221-2.
- 102 Ibid., 224.
- 103 Le Gant de crin, 38. See also, with respect to this discussion, our section on 'Seeing', in Chapter III.
- 104 The expression is that of Jacques Dupin ('Commencer comme on déchire ...', L'Embrasure, précédé de Gravier, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 146). Cf. supra, n. 69).
- 105 Picon argues that there is "rien de moins statique qu'un poème de Reverdy" (op. cit., 250) and speaks of the 'secret vibration' pervading his work. A recent thesis (which I have not yet seen) has been devoted entirely to this phenomenon (Jean P. Schroeder, 'The Theme of Movement in the Poetry of Pierre Reverdy', City University of New York, 1975).
- 106 Many poems in fact reveal such a sensitivity which is characterised in two ways: firstly, it reveals Reverdy's fascination with the individual geometries of things, their roundness, their sharp angularity and so on (cf. 'Traits et figures', Plupart du temps, 21; 'En avant', Main d'oeuvre, 63; 'Peut-être personne', ibid., 203); and, secondly, it shows us that Reverdy is very sensitive to the spatial interrelationships of phenomena, to a broader geometry in which individual forms are situated naturally (or, indeed, may be situated antinaturally, artistically) (cf. La Peau de l'homme, 18; 'Papier à musique et chanson', Au soleil du plafond, 65-6; 'Après-midi', Plupart du temps, 327). As we suggest, then, Reverdy's sensitivity to raw or natural geometry is intimately related to his awareness of the potential of artistic space and antinatural 'geometry'.
- 107 We might draw attention here to Reverdy's special valuation and depiction of the beating, pulsating movements of all things, "les battements du coeur" (Main d'oeuvre, 368), "ces yeux qui courent, ces paupières qui battent" (Flaques de verre, 68), the interminable pounding of the sea "comme une immense artère -- tempe de la nature et de notre univers" (En Vrac, 94), "la pulsation de [la] vie intérieure [du poète]" (Le Livre de mon bord, 134). A similar sensitivity is shown repeatedly, in all Reverdy's writings, to the palpitation, the vibration, the trembling and the rhythmic dancing of phenomena.
- 108 In Chapter VI we discuss the relationship between, on the one hand, natural passing, procession and 'eventing' or coming to pass, and, on the other hand, antinatural or poetic sequencing or coming to pass, the poem's act of passing into itself or becoming.
- 109 It might be noted here that, although Reverdy distinguishes between raw theatre and poetic theatre, his presentation of nature as theatre (already, in the poetry, a specifically poetic gesture) and antinature (or art) as theatre comes about simultaneously in the poetry. This

particular point will be elaborated in our next chapter, in the section entitled 'The Poetry: Self-reflexive Shimmer and a Fusion of Worlds'.

110 Such matters will be examined from various angles in the following sections: Chapter II, 'The Poetry: Self-reflexive Shimmer and a Fusion of Worlds'; Chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse' and 'From Thematic Tension to a Truly Poetic Equilibrium'.

111 The expression is Deguy's: cf. 'Car le monde a besoin d'être annoncé', Actes, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, pp. 36-7). Whilst Deguy's consciousness of such matters is demonstrably more developed, Reverdy's sensitivity, perhaps more latent, is nevertheless certain. Cf. Chapter VI, our discussion of simultaneity and sequence.

## Chapter II

### Reality and Being

#### I. World and Other World: The Dialectics of Reality

##### Preamble

If the notions of self and world -- their fundamental being there in contiguity and indeed in varying and soon to be explored inter-relationships -- may be said to form an essential part of the core of Reverdy's creative imagination, further penetration into the substance of Reverdy's work reveals that notions of other worlds and spaces coexist, in a spirit at once of separation and overlapping, with those notions already elaborated. The basic phenomenon with which we are concerned is easy to conjure. The poet may thus speak of being "entre deux mondes"; <sup>1</sup> he may tell us that "les mondes se rapprochent"; <sup>2</sup> or he may evoke the tensions of what he calls "les vieilles promesses/la terre végétale et le paradis". <sup>3</sup> Reverdy's poetry thus commonly demonstrates a consciousness of the existence of more than one world or space. Two worlds are set into play, one with the other. A potentiality of movement between the two spaces is intimated, as well as the possibility of a certain closing of the gap between them either by movement of the self or by other means.

Many of Reverdy's creative texts, moreover, have a tendency to evoke this idea of dual spatiality either in a rather more thoroughgoing, extensive manner or with an increased level of poetically self-reflexive explicitness. It should be noted from the outset, however, that Reverdy's poetry always retains a basically discreet allusiveness. Even if, for example, we may sense that Reverdy has offered a fairly blunt articulation of an earth/paradise, nature/supernature dichotomy in

speaking of "la terre végétale et le paradis", we must be finally prepared to grant that the notion of 'paradise', particularly in the context of Reverdy's generally somewhat unstable metaphoricalness, retains a degree of openness that allows religious, aesthetic and other connotations to coexist. At this purely introductory point of our discussion we of course limit ourselves merely to stressing Reverdy's fascination, repeated as it is not only in his critical texts but also in his poetry, with the basic fact of a mysterious 'otherness', an other space at once awesome and yet "transformable en habitation", a reality or 'life' that is "factice", art-ificial and yet "délicieuse plus réelle".<sup>4</sup> In the following pages it remains for us to obtain a fuller appreciation of the parameters of this fascination with what Reverdy terms in a Coeur de chêne poem "ce monde dans le monde/où la musique a un autre air/les pas comptés un autre nombre/Et la glace un autre reflet".<sup>5</sup> We might add also by way of preparatory comment that Reverdy's imaginative figuration of the two world-spaces -- which, in the concluding part of this chapter, will be shown to constitute two veritable dimensions of being -- will be seen to be caught between the equally attracting poles of their relatedness and their divorce. In this way Reverdy will on one occasion accentuate the 'transformability' of things into an inhabitable other realm and thus insinuate the interconnectedness of the two worlds; whereas elsewhere he will prefer to focus upon the 'unbound' nature of the poet's somewhat 'dehumanised' activity,<sup>6</sup> forgetting about the transformedness of things and concentrating rather on the degree of independence achievable in the other world-space after the act of 'decanting' or poetic transmutation has occurred.<sup>7</sup>

To achieve this understanding of the degree and manner of functioning of Reverdy's preoccupation with the notion of two world-

spaces or realities we shall turn our attention initially to Reverdy's poetic and general aesthetic theory elaborated almost obsessively in notebooks, essays, prefaces, enquêtes and interviews throughout his lifetime. We shall then look at the poetry proper in the light of such considerations. Most importantly, perhaps, we shall at this point be in a position to perceive the degree of mutual relevance, indeed imbrication, of the self-world dialectic already discussed and of the dialectic existing between the two world-spaces or realities of which Reverdy is eminently conscious and which we are about to examine. Such a perception will of course apply specifically to the poetry where we shall find that the two dialectics are fundamentally interwoven, so that when one world or reality is presented in dialectic with the self or poet, a kind of shimmering effect is produced enabling both dialectics to flash before us simultaneously, almost as if one were laid over the other, the text thus offering the hallucinating and richly tantalising appearance of a palimpsest. Our final discussion of the 'Question of Being', we might add, seeks to go beyond a consideration of poetics as what might be held to be a narrowly aesthetic matter and to show to what extent the aesthetic and the ontological quests in Reverdy are intermingled and crucially interdependent.

#### Poetics: From Heterocosmicity and Porousness to Transmutation

Pierre Reverdy's many critical essays and notes repeatedly and compulsively focus attention upon what is considered to be a necessary and fundamental distinction between the two world-spaces of art and nature. Their 'realities' are deemed, from a certain point of view, essentially separate, their realms of functioning and being crucially discrete. The earliest aesthetic models sketched out by Reverdy in the pages of Nord-Sud point certainly to the need to recognize such a separateness.

Art and nature cannot be superimposed one upon the other. Art may 'present' and produce, but art is not, must not be, representative and reproductive.<sup>8</sup> "Il serait impossible d'identifier l'art à la vie sans le perdre", Reverdy declares in his 1917 'Essai d'esthétique littéraire'.<sup>9</sup> Instead of working from a base of mundane, naturalistic (or even esoteric and symbolic) equivalence, Reverdy opts for what has been thought of as the 'cubist' aesthetic model which grants the work of art -- be it poem, painting or sculpture -- a certain self-containedness, the fabrication of its own heterocosmic space.<sup>10</sup> In the same essay Reverdy elaborates:

Il faut préférer un art qui ne demande à la vie que les éléments de réalité qui lui sont nécessaires et qui, à l'aide de ces éléments et de moyens nouveaux purement artistiques, arrive, en ne copiant rien, en n'imitant rien à créer une oeuvre d'art pour elle-même. Cette oeuvre devra avoir sa réalité propre, son utilité artistique, sa vie indépendante et n'évoquera rien autre chose qu'elle même.<sup>11</sup>

It is towards the final postulation of the independence of the creative work that Reverdy's argument here leads. The Reverdyan work of art must be able to demonstrate its uniqueness, the fact of having stepped beyond what is given in the world of primary experience in order to establish a discernably 'other' space. This space, far from evoking what is outside it and thus depending upon a system of external referentiality, claims for itself an essential functional autonomy. According to this aesthetic a Reverdyan poem, operating in the realm of "ce juste ciel ... au delà du réel", as Reverdy puts it in 'Circonstances de la poésie', points to itself rather than across the margin surrounding it to a realm left behind.<sup>12</sup> In this way an individual part (word, line) of the poem may be said to evoke itself, or, better, present itself, and, in addition, lay down perceptible but vibratory, fluid relationships with other parts of the poem. But the resonances that carry from word to word, thing to thing, gather internally and do not penetrate the walls of the poem.<sup>13</sup>

They form a shifting, dynamic ensemble of relationships that operate in terms of themselves and whose sum only is the poem. It is by virtue of this antinatural, created realm that the poet or painter comes to recognize that there is within him "un lieu sans lien apparent avec la commune mesure des événements" and that this other locus, projected before him in the form of words or painted things, "doit être celui où il se ressemble le plus à lui-même".<sup>14</sup> The full implications of these last words will be drawn out later in our examination of Reverdy's conception of being. Suffice it to say for the moment that they demonstrate the immense significance of the realm of art for Reverdy: it is here that the poet's inner world ("la réalité de son monde intérieur") is most truly realised;<sup>15</sup> here that the poet's place of self-coincidence is to be found. And yet, curiously, as Reverdy's words also reveal, such an act of self-coincidence and self-realisation comes about in a realm of otherness set aside -- apparently -- from primary experience. To appreciate fully the dimensions and mode of functioning of the other world of art and poetry we shall be obliged to probe further the relationships between nature and art. Does it in fact follow that there is a complete divorce between the two because Reverdy may speak of the poem's or painting's independent, self-supporting structuration and functioning? Is it not indeed possible to insist upon a crucial distinction made by Reverdy between the primary world and the world of art, rather than their utter, irreparable divorce?

In 'Note éternelle du présent', one of Reverdy's principal essays on aesthetics, we encounter the following passage whose argument, dealing with certain specifics of painting, applies generally to art as a whole:

Un art vrai, c'est-à-dire qui se donne pour ce qu'il est, sans tricherie, florissant non pas en faux-semblants mais dans des oeuvres qui ne sont ni plus ni moins que le résultat des investigations des sens et de l'esprit dans le domaine sensible et des apparences, l'organisation dans l'espace des éléments conquis, et le moins arbitrairement choisis au cours de ces investigations, sur un autre plan, celui où l'art prétend à être autre chose et plus qu'un simple miroir déformant de la vie. <sup>16</sup>

The world-space established by the artist in his work is, Reverdy reaffirms, something else, something other than the reality of the primary world. It neither seeks to merely reflect the palpable world nor to deform it, to denature it by means of inauthentic, superficial and kaleidoscopic rearrangement of its component parts. <sup>17</sup> On the other hand the secondary world of art comes from primary reality, depends upon it for its raw materials, although its final state and mode of functioning may be said to have become independent. There is a shift of levels between the two worlds and it is this shift that causes the permissible and essential distinction between nature and 'antinature'. <sup>18</sup> To better examine these questions, we shall briefly concentrate our attention upon two capital points at issue: the degree to which the work of art is held to be permeable or porous and not merely hermetically sealed off from the primary world; and the crucially related matter of poetic transmutation.

It is most important to understand that, in Reverdy's aesthetics, the two paradoxical notions of the heterocosmicity and the permeability of the (world of) poem or painting are not contradictory but rather complementary and that their point of reconciliation is to be found precisely in the notion of transmutation. Reverdy's notebooks are full of jottings that clearly show his concern to articulate in an adequate manner this apparent paradox of separation and connection. The work of art may finally develop an internal self-reliance and demand to be viewed in terms of itself, in terms of its own finely equilibrated composite parts;

but, ontologically, existentially speaking, life and art interpenetrate and reveal their mutual relevance. "L'art pour l'art, la vie pour la vie, deux points morts", Reverdy declares in Le Livre de mon bord, "il faut à chacun l'illusion des buts et des raisons. L'art par et pour la vie, la vie pour et par l'art".<sup>19</sup> In this perspective, life -- nature, the primary world and the artist's brute sensory and cognitive experience of it -- lays itself down for art, so that art may come to be, in life and by means of life;<sup>20</sup> art itself can only reciprocate this gesture by not drawing in upon itself and remaining locked up in some realm of esoteric or phantasmagorical hermeticism.<sup>21</sup> Instead, art is an activity (and finally a fabricated realm) that offers a remedy for that old Baudelairian-Mallarméan enemy, ennui, and in so doing "donne un sens et son prix à la vie".<sup>22</sup>

It should not surprise us therefore to discover that Reverdy's aesthetics readily absorbs the idea of art's fundamental 'earthiness' -- "L'art est une chose éminemment terrestre" we read in Le Gant de crin<sup>23</sup> --, whilst at the same time continuing to posit its 'otherness'. It is indeed an idea to which Reverdy is compulsively drawn and which reveals to us the chasm separating both his work and his theory from those of the Naturalists and Symbolists alike.<sup>24</sup> For Reverdy art is and must be 'terrestrial' to the extent that primary reality continually provides the artist with the 'fuel' he requires to bring about that combustion which alone converts nature into art. This image, like that of the poet discovering his raw, but potentially 'imaginative' or 'antinatural' materials in nature and ultimately refining them, recurs regularly in Reverdy's critical writings.<sup>25</sup> Both serve admirably to stress the essential point at hand, namely that for Reverdy, in the act of imaginative creation, the ever-essential point of departure is the primary world itself.

When Piet Mondrian speaks of the world of art being "la non-nature, l'autre de nature", we can see the tension between the notions of absence and presence of primariness in art: the latter is a world apart, but it assumes its own reality only by virtue of its relatedness to nature.<sup>26</sup> Art is thus for Mondrian the other face of nature, a realm distinct from nature yet maintaining contact with it. So is it with Reverdy. The establishment of the secondary world of the poem or painting is an establishment of what Reverdy may varyingly call "surnature", "antinature", "surréalité".<sup>27</sup> But always the yardstick is nature itself: its experience and its concreteness provide the point away from which the artist moves<sup>28</sup> and yet by means of which his art maintains its fundamental accessibility and validity.<sup>29</sup> "L'art et la poésie ne sont là que pour puiser dans la nature ce que la nature ne fait pas", Reverdy asserts in En Vrac.<sup>30</sup> According to this optic, then, although the realms of poetry and nature may in one respect be deemed separate, in another respect they tend to merge, their sharply delineated frontiers blur over and the poem's (art's) open-work quality becomes revealed. For art, whilst ultimately creating what is antinatural, goes initially to nature for its skeletal substance and then proceeds to carry such substance into its bosom, back into its own realm where it remains, in and with the secondary world.

Let us probe a little further into the problem and, before going on to discuss the question of transmutation, consolidate and amplify certain gains already made. What is, in fact, occurring in the Reverdyan 'model' described to this point, is a kind of appropriation of the natural world to create an antinatural product that alone will satisfy man's (the artist's) urgent need to embrace the natural world. (The full ontological implications of this gesture of appropriation will be elaborated

in the concluding pages of this chapter; here we shall continue to concentrate attention upon questions of the heterocosmicity and the porousness of the other world of art, and, finally, the transformation of the primary world into this secondary, other world.) Faced with the chaos and hostility of an external world which is beyond his control and which, indeed, tends therefore to imprison him, the artist magically reverses the world's enslavement of man by seizing its materiality and using it to fabricate a realm in which natural and antinatural, self and world, are deemed, from a certain point of view soon to be elaborated, <sup>31</sup> to co-exist and even merge. "Pour détrôner ces choses au profit de sa conscience", Reverdy tells us in 'La fonction poétique' where he is speaking specifically of the converting function of words, "[le poète] les nomme -- et, en les nommant, il s'en empare et les domine. Mais il ne s'en empare et ne les domine qu'en les nommant comme il veut et en les pliant à sa volonté pour exprimer la réalité de son monde intérieur". <sup>32</sup> Via words and in words things are themselves dominated and imprisoned. Yet this can be accomplished only according to the individual vision and will of the poet and it is done only in order to express another world which is apart from the natural world though demanding the latter's things as building blocks. These natural materials are cemented together into new, intuitively 'self-controlled' relationships that give the world of art its special and separate reality. But it is this process that, whilst leading to a certain separateness, nevertheless points up the fact of art's special relationship with primary reality. For, if the poem constitutes the expression and materialisation of an 'other' world, it is achieved by means of the natural world, which in turn is therefore expressed, though changed and transcended, by means of the antinatural world. <sup>33</sup> The poetic gesture of seizure and domination is, therefore,

in fact, at once aggressive and affectionate, self-centred and outgoing. It seeks to satisfy the poet by permitting the expression of the special visionary reality of his inner world; but, at the same time, it draws the external world (all its phenomena, objective and human) to the poet and in this way closes the gap between privacy and alien externality.

It is in the context of these considerations that the particular nature of the poem's essential porousness makes itself felt. Such a porousness must be understood to imply firstly the secondary world's reliance on the natural world: for the construction of art's realm -- which is simultaneously the exteriorized realm of the poet's inner and most authentic being -- , the poet needs primary reality. Secondly, the poet not only needs nature and life, but desperately loves them.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, however, his embrace of them cannot be direct. It is only via art that he may draw them to himself, though, it must be re-affirmed in *résumé*, such a drawing to oneself of the primary world can only be achieved in the Reverdyan optic by a paradoxical movement that is essentially away from primariness. It is in this very connection that our third and final point concerning artistic porousness must be made. The latter is indicative not so much of the creative work's capacity to look outwards, to draw attention to and actively thrive upon its power of referentiality;<sup>35</sup> but rather of the osmotic process that takes place during the creative act.<sup>36</sup> Porousness allows a movement from the natural to the antinatural, not, essentially, the reverse.<sup>37</sup> The transfer and transformation that this process implies for Reverdy and which we shall now seek to characterize, involves in effect a passing from realm to realm, a movement through the membranous walls that belong to the secondary, other world. But the movement seems to Reverdy to be possible in that direction only. The porous, membranous walls of the

poem permit a transmuting passage of natural substance. But once the filtering is done, the walls refuse to allow the movement to be reversed. In Reverdy's poetics porousness may thus be said to disappear at this point. It is here that the poem's substance becomes locked inside the new realm where it is 'other' by virtue of having crossed over from natural to antinatural contexts and functions and because of the new relationships into which its elements are now thrown.

To see more precisely just how important the notion of transmutation is in Reverdy's poetic and aesthetic theory and just how significant it is in the context of our overall concern with the dialectics of reality, let us elaborate in a little more detail its character and implications. In Reverdy's essay 'La fonction poétique' we come across the following important passage which provides an excellent point of departure for such an elaboration:

Le mouvement poétique est donc cette tentative téméraire de transformer les choses du monde extérieur, qui telles qu'elles sont nous demeureraient étrangères, en choses plus complètement assimilables et que nous puissions, le plus intimement possible, intégrer. Dans ce mouvement, nous nous lions davantage aux choses et nous les rapprochons de nous. Cette communion c'est, plus que dans toute autre phase de l'opération poétique, dans la formation mystérieuse de l'image qu'elle a lieu. Certainement, il n'y a pas en poésie que l'image. Un poème n'est pas exclusivement composé d'images, encore qu'en lui-même il constitue finalement une image complexe, inscrite, une fois établie, comme objet autonome dans la réalité. Mais l'image est, par excellence, le moyen d'appropriation du réel, en vue de le réduire à des proportions pleinement assimilables aux facultés de l'homme. Elle est l'acte magique de transmutation du réel extérieur en réel intérieur, sans lequel l'homme n'aurait jamais pu surmonter l'obstacle inconcevable que la nature dressait devant lui. 38

Many of the main points already examined find their confirmation here, but, more importantly in the context of our immediate considerations, are here specifically related to the act of poetic transmutation. It is in this act that Reverdy perceives the reconciliation of a series of binary

oppositions that inform his aesthetic theory. Firstly, it is via the process of transmutation-transformation that primariness and otherness are brought together whilst maintaining their distinctness. Secondly, it is via such a process that the notions of poetic heterocosmicity and porousness are made to coexist harmoniously. Thirdly, it is transmutation that allows a communion to occur between poet and the natural world -- a world that would otherwise isolate man, leaving him stranded within his mere desire for contact and integration with external, 'foreign' things. Such an act or process is therefore of extreme ontological significance to Reverdy, linked as it is to the question of the self's and the world's very being. Indeed, as we shall show in our analysis of the full dimensions of this matter, the process of the constitution of the self's and the world's being depends upon it. For present purposes the fact that transmutation (with its sub-processes of assimilation, appropriation, etc.) is a means of coming into being may be retained, if only to demonstrate the vital link, in the eyes of Reverdy, between art and being and the consequently profound nature of the process under consideration.

Moreover, we shall not dwell, either, on the role of the image in poetic transmutation.<sup>39</sup> This would necessitate a considerable digression in order to examine the technical agents of transmutation which by no means limit themselves to the image, despite the latter's privileged position. Suffice it to say, here, however, that the Reverdyan conception of the image and its mode of functioning focusses its attention essentially upon the relationships established between the two 'realities' or poles of the image -- its two (word-) things. The strength of the image rests finally, for Reverdy, upon the tense resolution of questions of distance and nearness in such a polarisation: the realities or poles are as far apart as possible, but the line running between them must not fall slack,

and, indeed, on the contrary must maintain an all-important tautness, so that distance is always compensated by an appreciable measure of nearness, contact and justesse. In effect, the same tension that Reverdy holds to be essential in the realm of art, between nature and utter phantasmagoria, is considered to be equally essential in the formation of art's most crucial fragment, the image: both image and art are, in this optic, third realms, pivotal worlds situated between the somewhat banal mirroring of a naturalistic world and the wildly esoteric, utterly phantasmagorical world of pure fantasy which has cut loose from primariness for which it has no longer any concern. Transmutation, in both cases, therefore, for the image as for the poem as a whole, involves a movement away from the primary world, but it depends also, not only upon art's porousness, but upon art's continuing need to feel the strong, taut and 'just' pull of primariness within itself -- despite and, indeed, because of, its necessary establishment of its own other realm.

The principal point of relation between the various aspects of transmutation already noted resides in the fact that the latter process involves for Reverdy a movement across from one realm to another and a magical, alchemical modification of the form and nature of primary substance as it goes over to the secondary realm.<sup>39a</sup> Moreover, whenever Reverdy speaks of the process of transmutation or transformation, we are able to observe a relating or linking of the two realms that seemed initially to be posited as irremediably separate. In conclusion of this discussion, let us turn our attention to the Reverdyan notions of transfiguration and decanting or transvasement, which are, in fact, intimately associated with Reverdy's understanding of the process of transmutation or transformation. It may not be appropriate to establish a neat equation such as: transmutation = transfiguration = transvasement. Yet it is

clear that such terms are loosely interchangeable in Reverdy's imagination and operate a reciprocal clarification and amplification that reveal more precisely the broad range of implications really or latently present in the usually preferred term 'transmutation'.

Transfiguration partly resembles the transmutation-transformation process in that it clearly entails a shift or re-casting of primary form, emotion and experience. But it is equally observable from this description of the process of transfiguration in En Vrac that Reverdy links it to transformation only to allow other, more richly allusive qualities to graft themselves on to this basic notion and thus more profoundly inform it:

[Le poète] ne doit et ne peut connaître ou reconnaître, dans son oeuvre, que l'émotion qui lui a donné l'élan nécessaire à sa création. Mais, plus cette oeuvre sera loin de cette émotion, plus elle en sera la transformation méconnaissable et plus elle aura atteint le plan où elle était, par définition, destinée à s'épanouir et vivre, ce plan d'émotion libérée où se transfigure, s'illumine et s'épure l'opaque et sourde réalité.<sup>40</sup>

The natural world and its experience provide the momentum for creative realisation and gain entry to the other world of antinature by means of the latter's porousness and willingness to receive. But a shifting of levels occurs, a rising -- what Reverdy elsewhere thinks of as an overcoming or self-liberation, a kind of minimal, yet vital transcendental transmutation that does not betray the poet's fundamental immanence, for as we see here once again, distancing and nearing are held tautly in counterbalance<sup>41</sup> -- a rising, then, to a level where purification and illumination may be brought about. The association of these two processes with that of transfiguration is, in effect, not at all surprising, transfiguration containing within itself not only the notion of substantive re-formation, but also notions of brilliance, apotheosis, amelioration

and embellishment. Moreover, the whole process of transmutation being associated with alchemical reduction, the idea of purification and shedding of impurities is therefore equally anticipated and organically bonded in the Reverdyan imagination to the core concept or process.<sup>42</sup>

The notion of shedding or disposal of unusable sediment with a corresponding retention of the 'exalted' substance that is, as it were, 'racked off' the rough primary matter, brings us to the consideration of Reverdy's notion of decanting in the creative process.<sup>43</sup> It is a notion that is regularly found in Reverdy's writings and one that relates obliquely to his somewhat celebrated image of the poet as "un four à brûler le réel" and poetic creation as a firing of coarse substance, a rendering malleable prior to transmutation and, above all, a burning off of impurities with a deposition of ashes and scoria.<sup>44</sup> In utilising the image of decanting, therefore, Reverdy is able to stress once more, but with particular precision, one of the most fundamental dimensions of his theory of transmutation, namely the fact that art's solution is of a marvellously different order and functions on a plane that is not that of the initially posed self-world problem. Artistic transvasement necessitates, as Reverdy says in 'La fonction du portier', the poet's expression of himself in order that life ('real' life, 'other' life) may be possibly accomplished: "le sourd besoin de s'exprimer pour vivre -- la seule raison quelque peu valable d'exister, de s'abandonner à cet étrange mouvement qui consiste à transvaser goutte à goutte une substance inconnue dans une oeuvre où elle apparaîtra connaissable".<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, even though such a decanting or transmutational movement effects a solution that relates to primary substance in its embrace, use and ultimate 'knowing' of it, the solution itself and the level of being and functional order to which we are transferred for its appreciation, remain finally 'other'. This is

a point on which Reverdy is repeatedly firm.<sup>46</sup> The murky liquid of the natural world as experienced by the poet, is decanted, its sediment is left behind, its clear substance is carried over into a realm where poet and natural world may commune -- antinaturally. The image of transvasement thus offers, with that of transfiguration, certain new insights into the process of transmutation which can now be seen to come about via what is in Reverdy's imagination, either a horizontal or a vertical shift between worlds, levels or orders. Let us conclude our examination of the now somewhat swollen notion of transmutation with a brief recapitulatory appraisal of its most salient features seen in the perspective of the notion that principally concerns us here, that of other or antinatural reality or world-space.

In all the processes of transmutation outlined above, whether it be transmutation proper, transfiguration or transvasement, Reverdy's imagination posits a movement across from a natural realm to an anti-natural or 'super-natural' realm. On the one hand, there is the primary world where search, contact and solution are frustrated by lack of possession and lack of knowledge; on the other hand, there is a 'surreal' world where natural impediment is transcended via a process of transmutation of the natural involving its decontamination, reduction and ultimate assimilation. The Reverdyan process of transmutation would seem therefore to imply two distinct phases. The first demands a preliminary and, indeed, preparatory de-naturing or de-realisation of primary substance to the extent that nature is not directly assimilable in its original, brute state and at the 'level' it offers itself to the poet. Such a de-naturing constitutes by no means an abuse of the natural. Rather does it give to natural matter a required ductility that prepares it for the more properly artistic process of re-realisation that is the

second phase of transmutation.<sup>47</sup> It is here that Reverdy considers the special act of 'carrying over' or re-situating to take place, for re-realisation involves that very significant shift in levels of functioning and being to which Reverdy's analytical mind constantly returns.<sup>48</sup> In addition, and at the same time as the re-situating occurs, the process of re-realisation brings about a fundamental re-shaping of the matter that has been initially rendered ductile. Such a re-shaping, as many texts other than those we have had the occasion to examine reveal, involves the establishment of new, previously non-existent configurations, of new relationships between 'things'.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, it is in this way and at this point of the transmutation process that primariness is positively and constructively re-formed and that the heterocosmicity, the real 'otherness' of such re-realised phenomena is palpably achieved. The re-realisation inherent in Reverdyan transmutation thus leaves room neither for an abusive, arbitrarily destructive deformation or disfiguration of nature, nor for its gratuitous, kaleidoscopic rearrangement -- no more so than art's other world seeks to offer a locus for a simple mirroring of natural reality.<sup>50</sup> What re-realisation does permit, however -- and we shall have good cause to pursue the point in the closing pages of this chapter -- , is a certain having of things. Indeed, the process depends upon it. Re-realisation without primary reality is unthinkable, according to Reverdy's poetics. But, in the final analysis, re-realisation is a process whereby otherness is generated, so that having or possession of natural substance is paradoxically possibly only in so far as the possession is a possession of the natural in its transfigured, newly cast and re-related antinatural form(s).

The Poetry: Self-reflexive Shimmer and a Fusion of Worlds

Our analysis of Reverdy's projection into his poetry of considerations already elaborated is placed somewhat in parentheses in the development of the overall argument of this chapter. In many respects it would have been neater and simpler to present Reverdy's conception of reality first in aesthetic terms and then in the full light of their ontological implications. Our observations will remain, therefore, relatively succinct, for we have no wish to belabour the arguments already developed. However, to leave the discussion of the dialectics of reality at the purely conceptual level, did not seem entirely appropriate and would have left untouched a number of delicate questions. To deal with these, we shall, in the following pages, give attention firstly to the significant and justifiable impact poetic theory may have upon our reading of certain imaginative structures in the poems proper; secondly, to the fact that this poetic self-reflexiveness, whilst at times overt, is more often quite delicately voiced and may even remain at a purely implicit level. Finally, we shall also wish to draw attention to the way Reverdy's creative texts may be said to operate a fusion of perspectives of world and other world, so that, whether or not the dialectic between two (primary and 'other') spaces is explicitly voiced, fundamentally it is always implicit.

As we began by stressing at the outset of this chapter, many of Reverdy's poems posit not merely a single world or space, but a dialectic between two worlds, spaces or realities. His texts may thus speak of the poet as being "entre deux mondes";<sup>51</sup> Reverdy may conceive of two worlds as zones at once apart but not irretrievably compartmentalised, as "[d]es mondes [qui] se rapprochent";<sup>52</sup> or the evocation of spatial otherness or heterocosmicity may be rather more implicit, as in the

title of the poem 'Quand on n'est pas de ce monde'.<sup>53</sup> Very often, then, the allusion to otherness is forceful and direct, as in the already suggestively titled poem 'Le reflet dans la glace Fête foraine' from which we quoted earlier and where Reverdy may talk of "ce monde/dans le monde/où la musique a un autre air/les pas comptés un autre nombre/Et la glace un autre reflet".<sup>54</sup> But at other times, whilst still focussing strongly upon the fact of otherness, Reverdy may allow the notion of dialectic (emanating from the latter quotation, for example) to fade into implicitness, as in the titles of poems such as 'D'une autre rive', 'D'un autre ciel' or 'Autre face'.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, we may observe here, parenthetically, how the specific notion of 'other world' may commonly give way in Reverdy's poetry to the broader notion of other space -- a variety of other spaces (shore, sky, side, 'face' and so on) which are all imaginatively united in the precise fact of their otherness.

There are, as already hinted, a number of creative texts in which Reverdy's characterisation of otherness suggests, despite a certain semantic veiling and in fact with a degree of forceful self-reflexive allusiveness, that the two worlds-spaces dialectic established is one that operates between nature and antinature. In Le Voleur de Talan Reverdy thus confronts the other reality of the poet's "vie factice et délicieuse plus réelle" with what lies 'below' such a (sur-)reality, namely "un abîme familier".<sup>56</sup> In the poem 'Epine' from Sources du vent Reverdy has clashingly juxtaposed, with an equal degree of self-reflexive overttness, on the one hand the impenetrable enigma of a seemingly 'useless' level of being of primary reality, of "l'anneau de ce monde incertain", and on the other the relative freedom of movement of the mind's -- and art's -- inner, imaginative world sculpted in a strangely de-realised marble substance: "Mon mouvement à moi s'étend sans aucun

lien/Cette pensée sculptée dans le marbre sans veines".<sup>57</sup> And in another poem, 'Bande de souvenirs', from Cale sèche Reverdy has voiced those prime tenets of his poetics, the porousness of art and the fact that the natural is "transformable en habitation/Où naît et meurt ton émotion".<sup>58</sup> Examples such as these, moreover, are by no means isolated. One could continue to provide ample support for the argument that Reverdy's poetry contains within itself a rich vein of fairly pointedly self-reflexive metaphoricity, as is again the case, for example, in the final poem of Flaques de verre, 'La tête pleine de beauté', where Reverdy once more contrasts a world of nature that embroils the self in the abyssal depths of raw sensibility and emotivity, with the world-space of the poet's mind, a world of light, of purity, of reconciliation of paradox, a world apart from and yet related to a naturalness in which the self is simultaneously plunged.<sup>59</sup>

We must not, however, overlook the fact that the majority of Reverdy's poems, when evoking otherness and setting up a dialectic between two zones and characters, between what is other and what is not, do not offer overt, supportive notions of 'mind' or 'transformation' enabling us to explicate or situate such otherness and throw light on to the precise nature of the dialectic engaging Reverdy's creative imagination. This may be seen in the poem 'D'un champ à l'autre',<sup>60</sup> or in the rather difficult 'D'une autre rive':<sup>61</sup>

Un être qui n'aurait jamais connu son coeur --  
quelqu'un qui n'en aurait pas l'air.

Il pleure.

- Vous avez brisé mon miroir.

- Pourtant je n'ai fait que crier.

- Vous avez crié trop fort et vous avez brisé  
mon miroir, les bambous et cette tige encore plus  
mince que j'aimais. Vous avez brisé son sourire.

La face grimaçante se détourne, et, de l'autre  
côté de l'eau, une forme très blanche entre les  
arbres verts qui bougent.

- Elle n'est plus prise dans ton miroir, ni  
cachée derrière la fumée trop noire de ta pipe.

Relève un peu ta rame et, sur l'eau, allonge  
les rides mouvantes du sourire.

Here the motif of otherness and other space retains an intense air of enigma and ambiguity, despite the muted interplay of notions of divergent levels of emotivity, of the differing modes of having and being that may be associated with things.<sup>62</sup> Any poetically introspective, self-conscious orientation the poem may possess is thus offset by its final semantic openness -- that is to say its ultimate heterocosmicity, its ability to be itself, to point loosely to experience, even to creative experience, but without relinquishing by any means entirely its semantic purity.<sup>63</sup> To interpret this poem -- or indeed many others -- as being solely self-centred in the sense of developing a discourse upon its own fabrication, would no doubt be inappropriate. What we wish to point to here is a rather more discreet phenomenon, namely the poem's ability to preserve a certain semantic irreducibility, whilst at the same time being capable of prompting and indeed subtly developing a mode of articulation that is self-reflexively metaphorical. That the title as well as the body of the poem 'D'une autre rive' -- which is deliberately chosen to reveal the possible fragility of such an imaginative presence -- permit an echoing within themselves of Reverdy's poetic theory, seems to us unquestionable. Reverdy's care over the selection of titles, his particular enthusiasm for provoking rich, ambiguously polysemic, distant yet finely appreciable and 'just' relationships between things, his proclivity for the ironic and the paradoxical<sup>64</sup> -- factors such as these lead to a poetry where frontiers between 'discourses' begin to haze over, to shimmer. The poem thus becomes a network of dynamic, potential relationships never finally stabilized; the reader is constantly obliged to

revise and amplify his appreciation of the poetic discourse, to recognize the quivering, vibrating quality of the poem's semanticity -- the presence of what Reverdy called the poem's internal dynamique bubbling and frothing within its 'static' framework. <sup>65</sup>

Let us look at a few further samples of Reverdy's poetry in the context of the question of otherness that particularly concerns us at the moment. Here is the text of the poem 'Quand on n'est pas de ce monde':

Il y eut, tout le temps que dura l'orage, quelqu'un  
qui parla sous le couvert. Autour de la lumière  
que traçait son doigt sur la nappe on aurait pu voir  
de grosses lettres noires, en regardant bien.  
Bientôt ce fut un autre ton. Et la couleur du mur  
changea. La voix semblait venir de derrière. On  
ne savait pas si c'était le mur ou le paravent.  
Les lettres disparurent ou plutôt elles s'étaient  
réunies et formaient un nom étrange qu'on ne  
déchiffrait pas. <sup>66</sup>

There are a few basic points to be understood here, it seems to us, if the poem's full impact is to be felt. To begin with, the title, in positing right from the threshold of the poem a dual spatiality, a dialectical tension between this world and an implied other world, cannot fail to set in play a certain shimmering effect that calls, firmly though unspecifically, into the semantic realm of the poem, obsessive Reverdyan aesthetic notions such as antinaturalness and heterocosmicity. The title thus not only evokes the possibility that the poem, as it unfolds, may constitute a discourse upon poetic creation; but, just as compulsively as in Reverdy's critical writings, thrusts upon us an oblique reminder that the poem itself, whatever the content of its discourse, is not 'of this world', but is itself otherness, d'une autre rive, d'un autre côté, d'un autre ciel -- an astonishingly externalized inner realm of imaginative, surreal being, a world-space other than that in which we are primarily immersed. Discreetly but surely, then, the whole poem presents itself,

at one level of its semantic functioning and under the sign of an already powerfully suggestive title, as a quasi-allegorical discourse upon its own production: the poet's quiet elaboration of his work in the midst of turbulence, the aura of light accompanying the act of writing, the 'changing' of things, their suddenly assumed 'otherness', the flickering uncertainty associated with the origination of the 'voice', the vague action of dis-appearance or de-realisation followed by re-grouping and re-forming of a strange and obscure text. Similarly, with the same firm subtlety, does the poem manage, by articulating its unstable but richly allusive discourse precisely in this manner, to impress upon us just to what extent it is in itself other, risen from primariness to constitute another world which it now actually represents and indeed forms, presents, before us.

The poem 'Bascule' also provides us with an interesting example of the presence in Reverdy's creative work of motifs of an other world-space bathed in the softly suggestive light of a poetic self-consciousness:

La lutte du vent dans le port  
     Les mots brouillés dans l'air  
 Que la vague pousse plus fort  
     En dessous quelque chose passe  
 On attend que tout se défasse  
 L'eau monte par-dessus  
     Les pierres disparaissent  
 Et de l'autre côté il y a des jours qui naissent  
 Les jours luisants amoncelés  
     Au bord de l'horizon qui les laisse tomber  
     Un à un  
 La main qui guide les saisons se trompe  
 Et moi je tombe  
     Ma raison  
     glisse  
 Entre les lames sous le pont  
 Je vois l'autre côté du monde 67

Here, however, Reverdy's manner of evoking such a world-space differs somewhat from earlier examples in that he specifically posits the phenomenon of a world that possesses an other side. This is of particular

interest in that it calls to mind Reverdy's aesthetic concepts of artistic permeability: an other world, separate, yet linked to the world of nature via a kind of membranous tissue that permits a one-way osmotic motion to occur to the advantage of the antinatural world lying beyond the partition. Certainly the idea of the other or reverse side of reality appeals persistently to Reverdy. We may read of "les voix qui criaient à l'envers" or we are told that "le plus grand champ du monde est à l'envers".<sup>68</sup> Reverdy's poem may declare emphatically, as in 'Bascule', that "je vois l'autre côté du monde", or the whole poem may be placed under such a powerfully determining sign, as in 'De l'autre côté' from Sources du vent.<sup>69</sup> And, should we hesitate in our appreciation of the significance of such recurrent motifs, Reverdy's journals are there to point more precisely to their implications, as in Le Livre de mon bord where we read that "le contemplatif est celui pour qui l'envers vaut plus que l'endroit" -- a note that is tellingly preceded by the gnomic formula "agir c'est vivre, contempler c'est revivre".<sup>70</sup> It is hardly necessary to recapitulate here the logic of Reverdy's theory of transmutation which distinguishes crucially between primariness (vivre) and ultimate re-realisation and re-formation (revivre). We do not, in fact, even wish to propose that Reverdy's notes point logically and indubitably to aesthetic considerations, nor that the poetic motifs of other or reverse side relate in any definitively prescribable way via such notes to poetic theory. Such a proposition would be out of place. What we do wish to maintain, however, is that all such articulated notions interrelate at the deep level of imaginative structure: it is in Reverdy's imagination that they operate a certain cross-fertilisation and fusion, and in the poetry proper that such motifs release the accumulated energy of such processes. In fact, therefore, a shimmering effect similar to

that mentioned in connection with 'Quand on n'est pas de ce monde' comes into play in a poem such as 'Bascule' or 'De l'autre côté', where the other world-space is evoked in terms of a zone existing on the hidden, reverse side of the given, immediate world before the poet. Of course, in 'Bascule', it is important to observe that the notion of 'other side' is richly associated with man's experience of the tensions of darkness and dawn, disappearance and birth, and with the fascination of that point of merging and dichotomy that is the horizon, fulcrum and point of equilibrium for the swinging movement between this (side of the) world and the other (side), its 'reverse'.<sup>71</sup> But it is equally important to ascertain the discourse lying latent beneath this 'surface', voicing itself en sourdine, as it were. Reverdy's terminal placement of the crucial information "je vois l'autre côté du monde" signals, as so often in his poetry, the need to revise our view of its total semantic thrust. It is this final line that sparks the process of cross-fertilisation, that triggers the poetically self-aware discourse. It is only when we have traversed the poem according to one perspective that we must re-traverse it according to another, one wherein waiting is a waiting for de-realisation, for a fading of reality on this side and a corresponding, irrational, vertiginous act of 'seeing' a world come into being on the other side of given reality.

In our analysis to date of the presence in Reverdy's poems of notions of other world or space we have always been able to observe in the text proper a clearly identifiable motif of 'otherness'. This has presented itself in the form of imaginative structures positing an 'other world' or 'other space', or attributing to the world an 'other side' or 'reverse side'. In all cases a dialectic is established between a space that is immediate, though often ebbing, disintegrating, in a

process of de-realisation, and an other world-space that is being born, (re-)formed. In all instances, too, the presence of the motif of otherness activates a signal that alerts us to the elliptic self-reflexive sub-text that lies beneath the surface text. The fact of otherness demands a revision of the poem's semantic value and permits a theory-orientated interpretation to weld itself on to and coexist with any other connotative structures. Our examination of the notion of other world in Reverdy's poetry will seek finally to deal with two closely related points. Firstly we shall discuss those abundant and important cases where no overt designation of otherness is manifest, although a spatio-temporal dialectic between two distinct spaces remains, expressed in the crucially related notion of journeying from one space to another. Secondly, we shall observe the degree to which the notion of world as already elaborated may be said to overlap with that of other world-space, when seen in the perspective of our present concerns.

The whole of Reverdy's poetry presents itself, from many points of view, as a vast, dynamic ensemble of positive, negative and conciliatory or compensatory motifs in which the self or poet is intimately engaged, 'centrally' placed as he is felt to be. This whole complex of imaginative motifs, ranging from motifs of journeying forth and attainment, through a great array of negative structures such as blockage, withdrawal, sinking and reduction to nothingness, to what may be viewed as the ultimately determining notions of oscillatory movement, compensation and tension, will provide the rich and varied substance of our remaining analysis. What we wish to stress briefly in this connection here may be resumed in the following way: Reverdy's poems, built as they are upon the imaginative framework just described, draw constantly upon notions of journeying across or through to realisation and thus depend

crucially and profoundly on the idea of movement from one space to another -- an other -- space. The self or poet is thus repeatedly engaged in a process of seeking, assimilation and moving towards, a process that may be met with frustration and impediment, as with contact and accomplishment. He is thus drawn to spaces all around him, over there, beyond, up there, behind, to the side and so on, in a seemingly never finally appeased need to enquire, to know, to attain. In this optic all space not occupied by the self may be deemed other to a degree. It is other of course already to the extent that it is non-self. But it is clear that such space is not obviously other in the sense that we have most recently ascribed to this notion -- other, that is, meaning antinatural, transmuted, artistic. But, if we remember that primary reality, what is immediately given and there, is receivable and modifiable, that any natural substance is capable of being de-realised or anti-naturalised, we must not then overlook the fact that travelling into the world in this way is a movement precisely analogous to, and indeed fundamentally simultaneous with, that movement occurring between primariness and art. Seen in this perspective, the journeying forth of the self into the world around him and the seizing and assimilation of the world that may result from this movement, may be broadly taken as a veiled, but nonetheless solidly and persistently voiced allusion to the poetic act of conversion of nature into art, given world into other world.

The consequences of the above for the appreciation of Reverdy's poetry as a whole are considerable. But they do not need to surprise. What is more natural than that a poet should speak of his poetic act, that his direct experience of the world should be related to the ultimate and transcendent act of creation that naturally obsesses him and -- anti-naturally -- fulfils him? What is more comprehensible than that every

gesture of movement in and towards the world, every contact or lack of contact with the world, should be appreciated in terms of its consequences for poetic attainment? Whilst it is, therefore, again important to remain sensitive to the semantic openness of Reverdy's poetry, to the degree of metaphoric purity it possesses and which makes it often inappropriate to confer upon it one or more definitive connotative systems -- it is for this reason essentially that we deal with Reverdy's work largely in terms of its own inner forces (advance, blockage, movement in the vertical dimension, obsessions with night and death, reduction to nothingness and so on), taken as absolute figures of the imagination rather than emblems representative of other structures -- , whilst we should not relinquish such a sensitivity, then, we should certainly be negligent were we not to stress the extent to which the meaning of Reverdy's poetry is self-reflexively valued, directed towards itself, as it were, concerned therefore with life's essential relation to art, with the fact that all that is experienced on the primary level of existence is, for Reverdy, vitally relevant to what the poet seeks to accomplish on the secondary level.

In the light of these considerations we may now turn our attention to the final point in our discussion of Reverdy's conception of other world-space. It is important, first of all, to emphasize that, for Reverdy, the relationship between the centrally located self or poet and the world around him, must, unless it is to remain static and become finally atrophied, involve a movement between two zones, a going forth and a receiving whose function it is to suppress the fact of separation. Moreover, whilst this movement, this establishment of relationship, may be construed as occurring at a primary, experiential level between poet and world, we have also just seen that it may be equally construed self-

reflexively -- in whatever form it takes: advance, ascent, descent, listening, touching and so on, as we shall see. In this way the movement undergoes an often elliptical and subliminal metaphorisation in which Reverdy tends to bring about a quasi-Claudelien equating of doing and creating and which at all events evokes that movement in which the poet engages to extricate himself from primariness in order to attain to antinaturalness.<sup>72</sup> What it is essential to note here is that, in effect, the two movements -- towards the world and towards the other world -- are imaginatively fused, even, one might say, fundamentally identical to the degree, specified in Reverdy's aesthetic theory, that the poet needs primariness, needs the natural world in order to fabricate his antinatural heterocosms. The movement towards the natural world, then, is, in this optic, a movement towards the antinatural world.

In many, many poems of Reverdy we may begin our reading by appreciating the text as containing a discourse of a purely natural order, a nomination or designation of (certain fragments of) the lived, given world -- only to become aware, often via what we have called some shimmering effect, via the presence of some fragile imaginative motif that sets up a broader connotative resonance in the ear, that more is being said than we had at first realised. This was the case in the poems 'Bascule' and 'Quand on n'est pas de ce monde', and it is also the case in, for example, 'La réalité immobile',<sup>73</sup> where, if we must accept the force of a discourse that takes as its point of departure a basic primary experience, perhaps forgotten but recovered by means of an old photograph, we must recognize too that notions of 'immobilisation' or fixing of a dynamic reality that is there, summoning the self, belong not only to this original, basic discourse concerning the photograph, but bear particular relevance to Reverdy's aesthetic theory.<sup>74</sup> The notion of

'reality' voiced by the poem is thus able to transcend any simple, direct referentiality in order to intimate the idea of the poem's capacity to fix and establish its own independent reality. Here, as elsewhere, we may wonder where precisely we are, with which 'reality' or world we are dealing -- only to comprehend that, indeed, we are not definitively caught either at one level of the poem's discourse or the other, but rather we are plunged into both. We are in fact able to appreciate that both 'realities', like both levels of discourse, have indeed undergone a certain fusion, to the degree that what is retained, in the poem, of the primary world and the poet's particular experience of it, has now become, precisely, the poem itself. In the poem, nature or r  el<sup>1</sup> can only exist as antinature or r  el<sup>2</sup>.<sup>75</sup> 'La vie fragile' that is evoked in the poem of that name,<sup>76</sup> is thus a selected fragmented reality that appears in the poem as a gathered, transmuted and 'other' reality. 'Fragility', 'life', things, movements, space and time, all have been reduced and re-shaped to the dimensions of the poem as we know it. Such forces, 'evocative' as they may be of the primary world's reality, have now become forces, motifs, imaginative structural elements of the poem's antinatural world -- the matter providing the energy which allows a new world to be created and to continue to function by means of this newly released energy.<sup>77</sup>

The texts of Quelques po  mes entitled 'Carr  s' are, of course, striking illustrations of the way Reverdy may concern himself with the idea of the constitution of the text as po  me-objet.<sup>78</sup> Here we have no calligrammatic presentation, no coincidence of form and content.<sup>79</sup> Reverdy prefers merely to point, self-reflexively, to the heterocosmic nature of the poem's realm as he conceives it according to his aesthetic theory. That is to say that the title, the notion of square, points, as

it were unidirectionally, towards the fact that the world-space in which the 'things' of primary reality are now functioning, is precisely poetic. Everything is now re-situated, offering its substance so that the poetic space -- square, here -- may have sufficient energy to constitute itself. Although many, indeed the majority, of Reverdy's titles tend to point deceptively in the opposite direction, towards the primary world and its experience -- witness the poems 'L'angoisse' or 'Le toit s'incline' -- , this sensitising of the reader, through the very title, to the réel<sup>1</sup>/réel<sup>2</sup> dialectic and the notion of poetic heterocosmicity, is by no means unusual and, in fact, is often achieved not at all by a unidirectional pointing, but by an unobtrusively ambiguous, but deliberately ambivalent and simultaneous pointing in two directions. This was precisely what was happening in 'La vie fragile' and it is the case with the poem 'Espace':

L'étoile échappée  
L'astre est dans la lampe

La main  
tient la nuit  
par un fil

Le ciel  
s'est couché  
contre les épines

Des gouttes de sang claquent sur le mur

Et le vent du soir 80  
sort d'une poitrine

Whilst, then, Reverdy's poem points us, on the one hand, towards the notion of a world-space that is primarily experienced in terms of certain phenomena (star/lamp/hand/night/sky/thorns/blood/wall/wind/breast) and their movements, it is evident too that we are also directed towards the appreciation of another notion: that of a space in which things are specially gathered, newly shaped and organised, both typographically and

imaginatively. In this way we become aware of the poet's re-relating of things, his establishment of a world of new and subtle correspondences and allusions (star-lamp/delicate, tenuous seizure of things/bleeding-sunset/wind-breathing or voicing).<sup>81</sup> An other world-space is thus simply fashioned, a new energy and dynamism is caught and made to function in an essentially internal manner, in a new, carefully delimited space. Reverdy's poem 'Espace' thus demands, like other poems we have examined, a kind of double focussing of attention upon two spaces at the same time, a double focussing that is only possible precisely because, in the poem, réel<sup>1</sup> and réel<sup>2</sup> coincide or are, as it were, superimposed in quasi-palimpsest fashion. The world-space we are confronted with in Reverdy's poems is also, simultaneously, the world-space as which his poems constitute themselves. In the poem proper, but nowhere else, may world or réel<sup>1</sup> be considered coextensive with other world or réel<sup>2</sup>, for it is there only that transmutation takes place and reveals itself. If, therefore, we care to look back through the membranous wall of the reality that faces us, we must not forget that this reality is now most fundamentally other, antinatural, poetic.<sup>81a</sup>

## II. The Question of Being

It will by now be apparent that Reverdy's poetic and general aesthetic theory, whilst clearly developing the special significance of art, by no means restricts itself to the narrow confines of a concept that would postulate art existing merely for its own sake. "L'art par et pour la vie, la vie pour et par l'art", we have already heard Reverdy affirm in Le Livre de mon bord.<sup>82</sup> Despite the essential Reverdyan notion of a work of art's heterocosmic mode of functioning, art and life are somehow bound together in a relationship at once of dissimilarity and yet crucial interdependence. As late as 1952, during an interview

with André Parinaud in which Francis Ponge and André Breton also participated, Reverdy was to respond with typical forthrightness when questioned as to the poet's fundamental aim: "Je crois que l'intention profonde du poète, c'est d'être selon les exigences que lui impose sa nature et dont personne ni lui-même ne pourrait se rendre compte s'il ne parvenait pas à s'exprimer".<sup>83</sup> Questions of being thus underlie aesthetic considerations for Reverdy. Indeed, we may go further. Being and the expression of being are the poet's principal and overriding concerns and it is for this reason that Reverdy's aesthetics shows itself to be ontologically orientated. Neither poetic theory nor poetic practice may be limited to its aesthetic dimension. Each constantly overflows such limits and invests itself with a significance that is rooted in the poet's obsession with the question of his being. The task that thus falls to us now is that of elaborating the principal mechanisms of Reverdy's thought with respect to the question of being and to see to what degree these mechanisms interconnect both with the imaginative patterns already established and with those we shall describe in the remaining parts of this study. Such a task will plunge us into consideration, firstly, of Reverdy's distinction between primary being and secondary being; secondly, of the dialectic established in his writings between being and nothingness; thirdly, of the all-important Reverdyan notion of consubstantiality.

#### Primary Being and Secondary Being

Just as Pierre Reverdy distinguishes in his poetic and aesthetic theory between réel<sup>1</sup> and réel<sup>2</sup>, so his writings reveal a parallel division with regard to the broader question of being: there is a positing of a primary being and a secondary being. Throughout Reverdy's writings one may observe the tense and compulsive articulation of a dialectic between

the two dimensions, a dialectic that finds its locus of reconciliation only in the notion of consubstantiality. An early text from Le Gant de crin outlines the basic opposition in play: "ce qui est, ce n'est pas ce corps obscur, timide et méprisé que vous heurtez distraitemment sur le trottoir, -- celui-là passera comme le reste, -- mais ces poèmes, en dehors de la forme du livre, ces cristaux déposés après l'effervescent contact de l'esprit avec la réalité".<sup>84</sup> Primary being is thus radically subordinated to that of secondary, antinatural or artistic being. Indeed, it is clear from this passage that the being available to the poet in his contact with the palpable world, whilst not being entirely denigrated (the poetic 'crystals' of réel<sup>1</sup> emerge from réel<sup>2</sup>), is nevertheless denied the right to constitute the true, the most authentic, locus of being of the poet. The world of passing bodily anguish and shifting primary emotions cannot be the place of the poet's most essential and permanent being. Yet it is manifestly the latter place that the poet seeks to locate, indeed to establish, and it is in this place that he lays down the form of his true being and concomitantly permits the blossoming of an aesthetic emotion intimately bound up with this superior mode of poetic being. "L'émotion esthétique qui éclate là", Reverdy declares in his 1933 essay 'Note éternelle du présent' and referring specifically to the locus of the work of art, "est un mouvement de l'être dans ses facultés supérieures où le coeur n'a nul besoin d'être engagé. C'est une émotion plus haute et, cependant que plus désintéressée, parfaitement complète".<sup>85</sup> That secondary being comes about on a higher plane need hardly be stressed, but it will be useful to remember this later when discussing the various motifs of verticality, for upward movement in the vertical plane is closely tied to notions such as those of purification, perfection and (re-)realisation. For the moment we shall content ourselves with affirming

Reverdy's oft-repeated conviction that the work of art is the only locus of the artist's true being.<sup>86</sup> It is there that the artist really is, there that what he is must be sought, for it is there, as Reverdy reasserts in 1950, that he has projected the traces of a being that transcends what he otherwise would be reduced to without the artistic means of creating a dimension of secondary being.<sup>87</sup>

The notion of secondary being as a transcendent being merits a few qualifying comments. Whilst there is no doubt that the idea of a certain transcendence via art is firmly entrenched in Reverdy's imagination, we must recognise that such an idea is paradoxically tied to and tautly reconciled with the opposite notion of a certain immanence.<sup>88</sup> For Reverdy, the two modes of primary and secondary being are perhaps most clearly differentiated with reference to the notion of domination. Primary being-in-the-world is imposed upon us. It is our unrequested heritage. The world to which we awaken is beyond our control, steeped in its own chaotic unrelatedness and enslaving us in a relationship with things which, if at times affording spontaneous wonderment and pleasure, remains nevertheless an anguishing relationship with the multiple faces of a vast, colourful enigma. Secondary, artistic being is thus utterly opposed to such being, for art permits a creation of being,<sup>89</sup> a being that is thus assumed rather than imposed, liberating rather than enslaving. Secondary being thus offers the chance of a splendid reversal of the world's domination of the self.<sup>90</sup> It provides the occasion for a seizing of control, for the making of a being no longer subject to the dictates of unbridled naturalness. Artistic domination is, however, by no means pure and absolute transcendence, nor is it intended to be. Rather does it allow a certain coping with r  el<sup>1</sup> as r  el<sup>2</sup>, so that what is initially posed as problematical at the level of

primary being, is offered a solution on a different level of being. The problems of primary being are thus resolved via secondary being, which, if transcendent in its effort of surmounting, remains immanent in that its attention is focussed upon a problematic of the primary realm.

In the context of our immediate concerns there are two further essential points to bear in mind. In the first place, a certain functional and imaginative convergence may be observed with respect to the aesthetic notion of transmutation and the ontological idea of transcendence. However, we should not be tempted to think that they are synonymous, for, although aesthetics and ontology are profoundly enmeshed in Reverdy's writings, they are clearly zones of consideration which are by no means logically or imaginatively indistinguishable. In the case of transmutation, the movement involves essentially, as we have seen, a de-realisation/re-realisation of the world's things and although the poet is inevitably a part of this world, the imaginative stress is upon world as surrounding externality, as opposed to the self. Transcendence, on the other hand, is at once a transcendence of world and self, the accent being constantly placed upon the poet's ability to overcome r  el<sup>1</sup> by reversing its original domination of the self. From the point of view of the question of being, then, we might say that it is the poet or self that is of foremost significance. There is a caring for the self, albeit in the context of a world, and an appreciation of the fact that this self can only find its true being, if the latter is of a secondary, antinatural order. From the point of view of aesthetic theory, Reverdy prefers to underline the fact of the poetic transmutation of the world, not of the poet. Transmutation and transcendence may run parallel, therefore, and even converge in the work of art, but they are not identical, either functionally or imaginatively. They both point to

the same locus (réel<sup>2</sup>) and level of being, but along different tracks and according to different perspectives that find their point of convergence in the heterocosmic realm of the work of art. It is only there that the aesthetic and 'ontic' thrusts are wedded and find their mutual satisfaction. From the aesthetic standpoint, the primary world's elements have been re-realised, revitalised in the establishment by the poet of an other world; from the ontological standpoint, oppressed being has been liberated and the poet may assume a mode of being that transcends the self's original involvement in the world's primariness. The poet thus emerges upon that high peak of being, that ontic "summum de puissance et de perfection dans le concret" of which Reverdy speaks in his 1938 essay 'Le poète secret et le monde extérieur'.<sup>91</sup>

It is here that we come to the second essential point of our present argument concerning a certain interlocking of aesthetic and ontological imaginative motifs. In the movements we have described above, not only do transmutation and transcendence ultimately converge, but, at the same time, so do the world and the self. Via transmutation the world is reformed, its elements re-related and 'carried over' into the antinatural realm. Via the shift from primary to secondary levels, self's essential being is "projeté dehors" to come to rest in the same locus as that occupied by the transmuted world.<sup>92</sup> It is in the poetic locus, therefore, that self and world come together most authentically and profitably and there, too, that the poet's truest mode of being-with-the-world is to be found. When Reverdy says, therefore, that "le but primordial d'une oeuvre d'art [est] de prouver d'abord à celui qui l'a faite qu'elle était pour lui le vrai, le seul moyen d'amener son être au summum de puissance et de perfection dans le concret",<sup>93</sup> we must remain sensitive not only to the tensions of transcendence and immanence (and,

implicitly, their aesthetic counterparts, transmuted heterocosmicity and porosity), but also to the fact of a magical and mysterious reconciliation of such apparently polarised forces. The attainment of the poet's summum of being is accomplished 'in the concrete', via the materiality of art, which is a borrowing and reconstitution of the world's materiality.<sup>94</sup> The leap of transcendence towards perfection, power and superiority is genuine, but it is not fundamentally a leap of escape from the world.<sup>95</sup> On the contrary, the poet or artist needs and wants the world, but prefers it 'in his terms', assimilated, appropriated, reshaped.

The full weight of the above arguments will be felt in our final examination of the Reverdyan notion of consubstantiality. What we may conclude in the interim is that poet or self and world come together via transmutation in a realm of being that is at once transcendent and immanent and that it is this secondary mode of being-with-the-world that constitutes the poet's true being, his being-as-an-artist and -as-his-art. Moreover, before turning to consideration of some of the even more distinctive features of Reverdy's characterisation of the question of being, we should do well to draw attention to a point whose importance runs the risk of being somewhat occulted. The imaginative movement described in Reverdy's aesthetic theory from the natural to the antinatural does not demonstrate merely a lucid conception of the degree of separation and interdependence of primary and secondary realities. It is also a movement from a mode of primary being that may even be deemed a nothingness (a being that does not count, as it were, or that counts only in its potentiality -- an emptiness whose positive value lies only in its potential fullness), to a mode of secondary being that offers the poet the only available fullness and authenticity. The logic of the constitution of a work of art thus obsesses Reverdy's imagination not as a mere

intellectual exercise in the theory of poetics, but because poetry has a deeply relevant functionality, offering with each newly created work of art, a provision of being, a revelation to the poet of his "être profond".<sup>96</sup> Moreover, because the movement involved in poetic transmutation is a movement permitting a constitution of being, any poetic self-reflexiveness such as we have seen associated with the réel<sup>1</sup>-réel<sup>2</sup> aesthetic equation must now be understood to incorporate into itself the profound significance of the ontological dialectic.

#### Nothingness, Void and Filling

Of central importance in Reverdy's consideration and understanding of the question of being is the notion of nothingness. Such a nothingness is varyingly imagined to be a void or abyss where a stark emptiness might conceivably be modified by an act of filling that would involve the constitution of what, in the Reverdyan optic, is deemed to be true being, being proper. Nothingness thus lies in opposition to being -- or, to be more precise, only a certain form of being, namely, secondary artistic being, may truly be held to counter the effect of the void that exists without secondariness: "La chaîne des actes depuis le commencement du monde est une suite d'actes de néant aussitôt évanouis, inexistants. L'être en actes purs, sans oeuvres est formé de néant. Seules les oeuvres qui persistent dans la durée après l'acte s'inscrivent dans la réalité".<sup>97</sup> It is important, at this point, however, to appreciate just where this nothingness or void lies, just what is its full characterisation. In particular, we must take note of the overlooked fact that the notion of void is associated, freely and without contradiction, with two loci, self and world. In the first case, the poet experiences a sensation of void by virtue of the feeling of lack or absence encountered through the very process of primary being-in-the-world.<sup>98</sup> Here the void

lies within the self, with the poet or artist. On other occasions, the void is said to lie outside the poet, in the world or more properly speaking 'surrounding' each concrete phenomenon of the world and isolating it from others in that chaotic primary un-relatedness to which we alluded above.<sup>99</sup> In this perspective the things of the world are felt to float, stranded, incoherent, in a vast void that cannot remedy their disconnectedness. Void in the poet and void in the world. In effect, as the more generalising statement quoted at the beginning of this paragraph suggests, the being/nothingness opposition is simultaneously a secondary being/primary being opposition which determines the equivalence of nothingness or void and primariness. Primary being thus steeps everything, world and self, in nothingness, so that the feeling of void is quite naturally associated with both. Indeed, the poet's feeling of void, lack or nothingness, it is perhaps reasonable to deduce, is in all probability directly proportional to his perception of the world as a series of alarmingly disunified phenomena whose gratuitous, chaotic interaction offers no sense of relief to the poet's overall interpretation of such being as constituting a nothingness.

There is, however, another face to Reverdy's notion of void or nothingness and it is from this vantage point that salvation may at last be glimpsed. For nothingness is not only intolerable in the sense that it offers a rarely alleviated anguish,<sup>100</sup> but it is intolerable, too, in the deeper sense that it cannot be accepted with fatigued resignation. And, if we say 'cannot', it is because the void itself, far from leaving the poet inescapably imprisoned within its amorphous non-being, generates simultaneously about itself a certain aura of possibility or potentiality. For the void of the artist is at once a threat and a stimulus. Artistic genius, as Reverdy says of Picasso, is an emptiness that invites a filling,

a void that desires and even demands its own fullness.<sup>101</sup> The Reverdyan experience of void is therefore, in this context,<sup>102</sup> one of utter lack, but a lack accompanied by desire and need -- desire and need to fill both the void of self and the void of the world.<sup>103</sup> Such a filling is, therefore, as we shall soon be in a better position to appreciate, a dual filling, a simultaneous, mutually gratifying fulfilment of both self and world. Furthermore, Reverdy will go so far as to assert, in 'Circonstances de la poésie', that this void, experienced by the poet prior to filling, is, indeed, the essential locus of poetry.<sup>104</sup> At all events, 'poetry' is certainly every bit as much located, according to Reverdy's imagination, within the bounds of this initial absence and the desire that complements it, as it is to be associated with the substance that ultimately fills the void, satisfies the desire and replaces absence and nothingness with presence and being.<sup>105</sup>

From the notion of void we thus move to a closer look at the Reverdyan conception of the notion of filling as it relates to the overall question of being. Here, the image of the bouche-abîme is of immediate importance and, interestingly, we may observe from the following passage from Reverdy's 1950 essay on Georges Braque, that, in principle if not in practice, the idea of God always exercised a high degree of fascination over Reverdy's imagination and is, in fact, hierarchically, qualitatively and intimately associated with the ontological function of art itself: "Il se peut qu'aujourd'hui l'utilité immédiate de l'artiste échappe même à ceux qui voudraient voir son activité servir des vues très étroites et misérablement déterminées, il n'en reste pas moins que l'art a certainement été, dès sa plus lointaine origine, le plus efficace bouche-abîme dont l'homme se soit prémuni pour assurer son existence au milieu de la nature hostile et indéchiffrable qui ne pouvait

donner à ses yeux que des spectacles insoutenables et poser des énigmes vertigineuses et désolantes à son esprit. Le premier, le plus haut, l'indépassable de ces bouche-abîme est l'idée de Dieu; la réalité de l'art, miraculeusement accessible à l'homme est celui qui vient à bonne distance, mais immédiatement après".<sup>106</sup> God, then, would provide the ideal solution to the problem of emptiness. His would be the supreme, perfect filling. The self, in preparation for the advent of such a moment, would indeed, deliberately create a vacuum within himself, ridding self of self, as it were, so as to leave all the room for the fullness of God.<sup>107</sup> It was with this intention that Reverdy departed in 1926 for the village of Solesmes, as his cryptic comment in a letter to Jean Rousselot recalls: "besoin d'absolu: être ou néant".<sup>108</sup> The outcome of this spiritual adventure is now known: God is found to resemble Vigny's in His silence and inaccessibility, no 'filling' occurs, Reverdy founders upon nothingness and grasps after the only feasible alternative, the bouche-abîme of art and the only transcendent being available to him. The silence of God is no more tolerable in the context of being than would be the silence of the poet. It may be true to say with Reverdy that, for the poet, silence would have been the only authentic means of revolt, yet the revolt of silence would frustrate the poet's overriding concern with being and once more condemn him to a condition of nothingness. To refuse all possibility of 'filling', including that available via the stop-gap of art, is tantamount to suicide.<sup>109</sup> The chance of filling one's being, of fulfilling one's self, as it were, must be seized, for, as Reverdy affirms in his preface to Antoine Tudal's Souspente, "la poésie pourrait être le seul moyen de combler l'abîme".<sup>110</sup>

The question needs to be pressed still more closely, however. In particular, we need to sort out a certain entanglement in Reverdy's

logic that is already partially visible. There are a number of essential points to be made. To begin with, we have seen in the previous paragraph that the filling or stopping-up agent available to man is art. Art is to fill the void and transform nothingness into that something of being. But we have already seen Reverdy attach the notion of void to two loci, self and world, and so we must now assume that art's function is to fill these two empty loci and provide them both with an absent, but needed being. But just how is this deemed to be possible? How can art achieve in one and the same gesture a filling of two separate loci and bring about a provision of being that is mutually satisfying? The answers to these questions demand that we recall and re-apply the Reverdyan notions of porousness and transmutation in order to specify more succinctly the ontic composition of the work of art. In our brief survey we shall be led to the threshold of the Reverdyan concept of constancy, whose full and central significance for the question of being we shall finally seek to elaborate.

Why at this point should we wish to recall the aesthetic notions of porousness and transmutation? The answer is simply that these two notions help us to pinpoint precisely the composite nature of the work of art. On the one hand we have the things of the world (including the self) upon which the artist/poet relies. It is away from -- and yet with -- them, that the artist moves in the act of artistic/poetic transmutation leading to what we have called otherness, heterocosmicity, secondariness. But it should be emphasised that the act of transmutation is his. For the simple but essential point that needs to be retained in our present context, is that the work is a conjunction of the originally separate forces of self and world. The constitution of that being afforded through art requires the 'co-operation' of self and world

alike and the absence of either brings about the collapse of the artistic being in which each has its crucial role to play. It is with such imaginative logic in view that we must approach what now becomes a relatively straightforward matter of reconciliation of three apparently different modes of filling: 1. art's filling of a void (now seen to involve both self and world); 2. the self's or poet's filling of the world's void; 3. the world's filling of the self's void. In effect, the first mode of filling can be seen to be a composite form of the other two and is therefore operative if either of the other two is deemed to be involved. The final two modes of filling are not only bound to be the first mode, but are also functionally interdependent. To a degree, therefore, all three modes may be held to be, if not one and the same mode, then imbricated figures of one another, of a mode thus observed from separate vantage points. An examination of certain specific texts is called for to permit a better appreciation of Reverdy's understanding of the last two modes of filling (and being), in particular, as well as a verification of the kind of synthesis that occurs among all three modes.

In his 1952 essay on Picasso, 'Un oeil de lumière et de nuit', Reverdy speaks of the insatiable appetite for creative activity characteristic of the great artist in his effort to "comblér ce vide, ce monde nu, sans rien qui vaille la peine d'être aimé et qu'il s'agit de remplir uniquement de soi-même parce que tout ce que l'on peut y atteindre et obtenir, loin de rassasier, rejette et repousse toujours vers soi-même et ce frénétique désir de toujours tout remplir de soi seul dans le monde présent et pour l'éternité".<sup>111</sup> Reverdy clearly indicates here that it is the self or poet who ardently seeks to fill the world's yawning void, to close the rifts that separate the things of the world and to provide them with a being that must thus be understood to be characterised by

relatedness and gathering.<sup>112</sup> But it is equally evident that the poet can only achieve this drawing-together of disparates via his art so that, when Reverdy declares that "la poésie pourrait être le seul moyen de combler l'abîme qui baille entre les choses qui existent", the filling afforded by poetry is clearly accomplished by the poet -- just as the filling accomplished by the self was clearly afforded by art. This, then, is the first step in reconciling what may have appeared to be paradoxical or even contradictory statements about the crucial question of filling.

The second step demands that we look at this mode of filling, as it were, in reverse: the transmuted world's filling of the poet's self. To do this will help us to rationalise the paradox inherent in the fact of the poet-as-void filling the world-as-void. The following marvellously compressed passage from Reverdy's Braque essay, "Une aventure méthodique", is instructive in this regard: 'La poésie est dans la formation d'un objet de remplacement susceptible de combler au coeur de l'homme le vide qu'y produit l'absence d'un objet réel désiré, de tout le réel désiré'.<sup>113</sup> According to this optic it is art, or more precisely the art-object, that fills and is alone capable of filling the void within the poet. But is this art-object not, in turn, an amalgam of certain selected, obsessive things of the world (including the self as it relates to them), so that what, in effect, is happening here, in this perspective, is that the poet or self is being filled by the world, albeit in its transmuted form? The earlier process observed is thus inverted in Reverdy's imagination: the world now fills and gives being to the self. Moreover, this is no non sequitur, no trick of the mind, for the two processes interpenetrate profoundly. Filling is thus reciprocal. Provision of being is via intermingling and exchange. The two voids of self and world

are simultaneously filled by virtue of their mutually satisfying 'ontic' interpenetration in the realm of art's secondary being. However, we are now left with a second outstanding question that complements with perfect mirror-image symmetry the earlier paradox of self-as-void filling (providing being for) the world-as-void: now it is the world-as-void that would appear to fill the self-as-void. It is this question and paradox that must now be resolved, and whose resolution will permit us to turn to our final analysis of the related Reverdyan notion of consubstantiality.

Our above declaration 'now it is the world-as-void that would appear to fill the self-as-void', will provide a valuable first clue in this matter. In effect, it is not the world as r  el<sup>1</sup>, as void proper, that can provide the poet with the desired fullness of being, but only the transmuted and transcendent world, r  el<sup>2</sup>, the world of art.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, as is evident, the world cannot transmute or transcend itself, cannot become r  el<sup>2</sup> of its own accord and cannot, therefore initiate of itself the filling process that will offer the poet being in the place of the nothingness lying within him.<sup>115</sup> The world, transmuted, may offer the poet a certain fullness of being, but it demands that the poet provide the determining stimulus. Consequently, in Reverdy's model of artistic/ontological creation, it can be seen that it is the self who must initiate the dual process of self-filling and world-filling. And yet this must come about by means of a paradoxical movement that begins with the self-as-void and ends with the self filling its own as well as the world's void. Just how this is achieved has already been partly intimated, when we showed that the void of the poet was, in fact, not merely a totally sterile lack or feeling of absence, but was also characterised by desire and need. This desire is a desire, certainly, to possess a reality that eludes the poet's 'natural' grasp, as it were;<sup>116</sup> but it is a desire,

too, to realise the self, to create the self, to give oneself being, to give expression to a being whose force is dismayingly voided in primary existence, where it remains at best suppressed and potential.<sup>117</sup> This second dimension of desire offers the key to our final understanding of the way in which Reverdy's imagination operates its reconciliation of the dual fact of self-as-void and self as an initiator of filling. There are two texts which shed special light on the enigma. The first, from Reverdy's essay on Picasso, published in translation in 1957 by Arts News Journal, speaks once more of the question of genius: "Oh, but genius is not at all what people think. In fact, it is nothing but a kind of emptiness in the pit of the stomach, an obsession, a mania, an awful blank, a vice, an excess of proliferation, a tyranny which creates another and leaves you not a day or night of peace or sleep".<sup>118</sup> The same joint stress is laid upon, on the one hand, notions of nothingness, emptiness, blankness, and, on the other, a desire which is strongly expressed here as obsession, mania and tyranny. But a third group of notions grows out of the idea of desire and obsession: namely, the notions of excess, proliferation and something being continually, relentlessly, created from nothing. In the great artist, then, the tyranny of the world provokes an at once self-defensive and self-assertive movement towards creation, self-creation and massive, inwardly generated fecundity. As the second of the two texts reveals, the self or poet thus bears within himself the leavening agent which will permit the generation of a process of self-filling capable of combating the inner void. "De notre vivant", says Reverdy to conclude his 1952 radio interview with André Parinaud, "la seule vraie révolte eût été le silence, le refus absolu de collaborer. Mais le silence, dans ce monde où la masse des êtres ne vit que de bruit, équivaudrait au néant. Or, ce qui explique peut-être le mieux et excuse



dans la plus large mesure le poète, c'est que ce besoin d'exprimer qui le caractérise, lui vient, sans qu'il y paraisse toujours très clairement, de la surabondance d'être qu'il porte en lui". <sup>119</sup> We may recognise here the by now familiar confrontation of the forces of silence and nothingness with those of a something or a fullness. But the central significance of Reverdy's affirmation (and, indeed, deliberate clarification) resides in the reference to the poet's need for expression coming from a superabundance of being already lying within himself. It is here that we reach the heart of the main paradox that may be said to govern Reverdy's conception of the nature and locus of being. And Reverdy himself points to the fact that evidence pertaining to this superabundance is, in effect, only obscurely revealed. What seems to us an essential, though only implicit element of the whole puzzle, is the fact that we must continue to distinguish between, on the one hand, the mode of being afforded by the fact of having created, of having given expression to self and world in the transcendent realm of being of the work of art; and, on the other hand, a superabundant being that exerts pressure upon the artist prior to creation and expression and which must therefore be viewed more properly as a superabundance of potential, rather than actual, realised, being. The paradox of the artist being a locus of emptiness and yet a place wherein a fullness is prepared, grows and seeks fructification <sup>120</sup> -- this level of paradox may thus remain, and rightly so, for it points to the miracle and mystery of all creation. Certainly, Reverdy never penetrates this aspect of the question beyond this point. But the other aspects of the general paradox, seen in the above perspective, lose, at the same time, any degree of illogicality that may have been thought to attach to them. The movement from nothingness to being is now largely clear and as far as it goes, logically appreciable. In the beginning

what is felt by the poet is the increasing pressure of his ever-maturing and potential being that already lies within him, yet unrealised, non-actualised, because uncreated, unmade. It is this pressure from within that stimulates the feeling within of desire and need that is equally and simultaneously a feeling of lack and absence. From this situation of non-having and non-being, the poet is pressed into the only true mode of expression that will offer relief from the prevailing emptiness and silence: creation, the artistic creation of what we may describe as substitute or replacement being. And yet it is only within the realm of this substitute being that, for Reverdy, the poet can be said to attain the most authentic and profoundly 'real' expression of his being. Only here can he truly find himself and the world, only here can self or poet and world be truly together, in the only mutually actualising and satisfying fullness of being available -- a fullness that stands in fragile defiance of the void that continually threatens them both.

#### Appropriation and Consubstantiality

We may now more suitably and knowledgeably view, from a new and yet, for Reverdy, favourite angle, the question of how self and world manage to operate a coming-together and what amounts to a certain fusion of being. Our initial assessment will concern the important and revealing Reverdyan notions of appropriation and humanisation. This assessment will be followed by a final analysis of the core concept of consubstantiality.

In the primary experience of the world, the poet finds himself faced on all sides by a world whose individual or combined phenomena appear either hostile or indifferent. This interpretation of phenomena in terms of a negative attitude toward the self reveals, of course, the sensitive reaction of the poet to the hiatus he perceives to exist between self and world. They exist together, but with no deep, 'ontic' relatedness.

Such being is, as we have seen, deemed to be nothingness and provokes the poet's sense of lack. The world is thus, in this mode of primary being, always essentially beyond the reach of the self who is dispossessed of what he desires.<sup>121</sup> The self's need for fullness of being, for a filling of the inner void, becomes, in fact, a kind of obsessive covetousness. The self thus strives to transform a situation which generates feelings of non-having (and, as we have seen earlier, servitude and subjugation at the hands of nature) into one which will allow possession and a consequent feeling of ontic fullness. At this point, it is important to bear in mind that the poet retains an essential openness in his dealings with the world and that his dream of fullness of being demands that the poet's mind function in a particular mode of operation showing it to be every bit as much absorbing and receptive, as it is out-going and actively seizing.<sup>122</sup> If, then, in the context of covetousness and dispossession, Reverdy tends rather to emphasize the act of grasping or appropriation as a means of remedying the hollow sensation of lack, we should remember throughout that receptivity and somewhat passive assimilation also have their roles to play in the drama of self-world relationships.<sup>123</sup> Active, conscious appropriation is thus merely one side of the poet's activity, the side that has been particularly stressed by critics and poets alike in their examination of Reverdy's conception of the role of the mind in creation. However, it is clear that Reverdy himself used, almost as a kind of shorthand, terms such as appropriation and seizing and that they were by no means intended to necessarily imply consciousness as opposed to intuition and spontaneity.<sup>124</sup> The notion of appropriation appearing in the following passage is, therefore, to be understood to embrace all means, active and passive, which would lead to the ultimate possession of the world by the self: "C'est grâce aux mots, c'est grâce au langage, c'est grâce aux

images que l'homme s'approprie le monde extérieur. Il est dans le monde, le monde insensible, et il s'y meut et il y vit et il y vainc grâce à l'image qu'il s'en fait. Image créée de rapports entre ce monde insensible et lui". <sup>125</sup>

Artistic means - in particular images - allow the poet to gain possession of a world otherwise beyond his grasp. The having of things in a manageable form, via the transmutational powers of poetic language, <sup>126</sup> reverses the primary situation in which the poet is, as it were, 'had', enslaved within a world beyond his control and need for possession. Appropriation, however, constitutes a having which is not undertaken out of pure selfishness. The image, like other artistic/ontological means, is an "instrument [...] d'humanisation de l'univers. Les choses ne sont que ce qu'elles sont -- il n'y a pas dans les choses autre chose que ce qu'elles sont sauf l'homme qui s'y est introduit et les rend humaines et se les approprie par l'image". <sup>127</sup> The humanisation of things is not brought about with a wish to abort and to gratuitously denature. De-realisation is not, as we have seen, crude or sadistic disfigurement, but a step towards re-realisation and, in our present context, a closing of that menacing, alienating hiatus between self and world. Humanising appropriation wishes to achieve intimacy and relatedness, its gesture of possession comes about in a spirit of love and integration. As we shall now move to show, the dominating atmosphere is really one of mutually beneficial co-being. <sup>128</sup>

Assimilation and appropriation, in themselves more refined Reverdyan concepts of domination, are thus established in Reverdy's imagination as the principal means or processes capable not only of furnishing the poet with the desired feelings of having and consequent fullness of being, but also of engineering a special kind of coming and being together of self and world which Reverdy himself finally conceives

of as a 'consubstantiality', a deep-structured ontic communion of the two. In effect, in Reverdy's eyes, self and world, to really be, must be profoundly interdependent. The things of the world rely upon man and, in the perspective of communion and relationship, need his domination and possession of them, so that they may be 'cared for' and assume a proper and full being.<sup>129</sup> This coming-into-being of things, it should be clearly noted, demands an abolition of dichotomy and also a recognition of human superiority and power which are not at all oppressive, but, rather, capable of releasing, liberating both self and world, so that they may assume their artistic/ontic fullness -- which is the only one available to them in Reverdy's view. The things of the world thus need and depend on the self for their very being, which is a rejection of their 'natural' nothingness and unrelatedness.<sup>130</sup> And, similarly, the self depends upon the things of the world to satisfy his need and will to have, to provide, as it were, a substantive filling of his inner void. The secondary being afforded by art thrives upon the recognition of art as a mutually advantageous place of expression of, and for, self and world. It is in the privileged locus of art that the world finds its expression through the poet and it is there, too, that the poet finds his own expression through the things of the world.

This latter consideration is of great import in Reverdy's eyes and he is prepared to pursue its logic to the extreme point of development in the ontological argument. In his essay 'La nature aux abois', Reverdy declares firmly: "Ce sont les objets dont un peintre se sert -- ou le poète les mots qui les désignent -- qui deviennent les moyens d'expression les plus près, les seuls propres à rendre ses sentiments et ses idées sensibles et intelligibles. Parce qu'ils sont la forme que ses sentiments et ses idées doivent prendre ils deviennent lui-même autant qu'il est

obligé, lui, de devenir eux-mêmes." <sup>131</sup> The equation is thus made to yield its full measure of significance. The artist becomes his artistic means, they become him. The expression of self and world is in this way not merely through each other, but actually as each other. Worded things or painted objects are at once the artist's stylistic and his most authentically existential or ontic means of self-expression. The true level of the artist's power, together with the secret of his consciousness and being, may thus be discovered by examining those things that obsess him and the way such things interact with him in the establishment of self-world relationships within his art. <sup>132</sup> On the one hand, the phenomena of the world come into being, in their transmuted, worded condition through and as the poet. He is their place of gathering in which they find a particular fullness of their own expression. They are the poet to the extent that they are constituted by him and dissolve without him. They are, in consequence, different from one perceiving and artistically realising subject or self to another. Without any such subject, they, the objects of the world, would lapse into the nothingness of their original, primary being. On the other hand, but similarly, the poet draws upon those very things from which he is, primarily, separated, in order to assume his being via and as them and his relationships with them. His inner intimacy is thus paradoxically, only expressed by means of "des matériaux qui [lui] sont extérieurs et étrangers". <sup>133</sup> What in primary being the poet is least capable of relating to or being, becomes, at the secondary level of being, his very self. Particular things of the world now constitute him, are him. Via the transmutational power of poetic language, a profound sense of consubstantiality is achieved.

In Reverdy's last volume of notes, En Vrac, published only four years prior to his death in 1960, we encounter the following capital

assertion: "Si la base du réel est solide et pleine, massive et souple comme un muscle, c'est ce que je peux y ajouter d'irréel qui me le rend intime, familier, savoureux. C'est par l'irréel que je l'aborde et le pénètre à fond par infiltration et assimilation progressives. Le réel est en moi et hors de moi. Par l'irréel, qui n'est qu'en moi et que j'y mêle comme un levain, il me devient consubstantiel, il devient moi, et ma réalité s'affirme, s'exalte et flambe dans une participation transcendante à la saveur incomparable de la vie".<sup>134</sup> The intermingling and fusion of self and world comes about via the magical, transmutational activity of the poetic imagination. Its yeast-like power permits an expansive rising and filling movement to occur, in which the imaginative mind at once seizes and welcomes a material substance which it inflates and transmutes.<sup>135</sup> Aesthetic transmutation thus becomes, for Reverdy, in the ontological perspective, a kind of transubstantiation of reality, of all primary being with which the poet is engaged (i.e. the things of the world, himself and their 'natural' contacts). Only via transubstantiation can consubstantiation occur in the poem, and it is precisely consubstantiality that offers the transcendent mode of being the poet so craves. This transcendent consubstantiality permits a true engagement in life, a deep ontic participation of man and world involving a giving and a receiving.<sup>136</sup> Ontic realisation of this kind is, therefore, for Reverdy, self-satisfying and altruistic -- the fulfilment must be reciprocal for either self or world to benefit from it. The poet must be able to know himself and gauge himself as the world that has come to be him ( -- and as those relationships, of whatever quality, he has laid down with the things of the world in the poetic locus of truly authentic being).<sup>137</sup> Only via consubstantiality can the poet -- or, for that matter, the reader -- hope to gain some measure of his profound being. Only via consubstantiality can the poet attain

some degree of control and knowledge of reality, and the interpenetration of himself and reality. In moving from merely potential, unleaven<sup>ed</sup> and preconsubstantial being, to consubstantiality and a release of his originally repressed superabundant being, it is, of course, the poet's poetic act that finally counts. It is only by virtue of this act that mutually profitable interpenetration may transpire, only in this way that a truly non-antagonistic co-habiting and ontic exchange may occur. It is, indeed, only then that Reverdy may say with any profound truth, "la nature, c'est moi". 138

## Notes to Chapter II

- 1 In 'Rien' (Plupart du temps, 231). Jean-Pierre Richard's essay on Reverdy plays upon this very notion, certainly crucial to an understanding of his imagination, of tension between two world-spaces ('Pierre Reverdy, entre deux mondes' was the original title of his essay in Onze études sur la poésie moderne, Paris: Seuil, 1964, pp. 13-29).
- 2 In 'La vitre au coeur' (Plupart du temps, 188).
- 3 In 'Une seule vague' (*ibid.*, 387). Georges Haldas ('Une poésie d'hiver', PR:MF, 146) speaks perceptively of Reverdy's "conscience douloureuse au départ [...] que d'autres mondes existent, parallèles au nôtre ou bien le recoupant, le pénétrant [...] et que le poète, lui, pressent 'confusément' sans pouvoir jamais [...] en rendre compte de manière satisfaisante". The latter remark is perhaps overly pessimistic, but does reflect something of the desperateness of Reverdy's poetic venture.
- 4 See Main d'oeuvre, 470 and Le Voleur de Talan, 5, respectively.
- 5 'Le reflet dans la glace Fête foraine' (Plupart du temps, 354).
- 6 Many critics and writers saw in the work and aesthetics of Reverdy (but also of the Parnassians, Baudelaire and above all Rimbaud and Mallarmé) what was felt to be an increasing move towards objectification and what Ortega y Gasset termed the 'dehumanisation of art'. We shall content ourselves here with saying merely that, in the case of Reverdy, this was to confuse, as Max Jacob pointed out, "objectivation de l'oeuvre avec impersonnalité" (PR:MF, 18). As he and others since have shown, his work is "not in the least depersonalised" (K. Rexroth, 'Introduction', Pierre Reverdy: Selected Poems, New York: New Directions, 1969) and, as we shall show conclusively later in this chapter ('Appropriation and Consubstantiality'), Reverdy's own conception of the process of humanisation and consubstantiation is lucid and knowledgeable.
- 7 Cf. infra, the final part of our section 'Poetics: From Heterocosmicity and Porousness to Transmutation'.
- 8 See Reverdy's own commentary on Les Ardoises du toit (signed S. Laforêt) in which he declares that "chaque poème est ici un fait poétique présenté au lieu d'être une anecdote représentée. L'art de M. Reverdy est un art simple de présentation, de création" (Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 87-8; Reverdy's emphasis).
- 9 Ibid., 41.
- 10 Richard Admussen, attempting to define the Nord-Sud aesthetic ('Nord-Sud and cubist poetry', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 27 (Aut. 68), 21-5), places stress upon the "independent and self-sufficient existence" of the Reverdyan poem, but fails to stress its 'porousness'. Tzara, commenting on the aesthetic logic of Le Voleur de Talan (Dada, 2 (Dec. 17)), is drawn to define its essential quality as

"cosmique", by which he implies the constitution of a coherent organism constituted by and revolving around man (the self or poet).

11 Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 45. My emphasis. Paul Dermée echoes this aesthetic tenet in the first number of Nord-Sud (15.3.17) where he maintains that "il y a classicisme dès que l'auteur domine son objet [...] Le but du poète est de créer une oeuvre qui vive, en dehors de lui, de sa vie propre" (my emphasis). As Robert Greene points out, moreover, in The Poetic Theory of Pierre Reverdy (Univ. of California Press, 1967), the idea of the autonomous work of art is not new, having its beginnings in the late 18th Century and lying at the root of much so-called New Criticism (p. 28). D. J. Mossop in his recent study Pure Poetry (O.U.P., 1971) carefully charts the growth and significance of this and many related concepts from Gautier to Valéry.

12 Cette émotion appelée poésie, 52. In effect E.-A. Hubert gives here a slightly modified version of the original text which appeared in L'Arche, 21 (Nov. 46), 9. The modification, given in accordance with hand-written changes made by Reverdy to his own copy, substitutes "à l'extrême pointe du réel" for "au-delà du réel" and shows that Reverdy is conscious of the need to establish an equilibrium between the concepts of poetic heterocosmicity and porousness. See Cette émotion appelée poésie, 256-7 for variants and Hubert's comments.

13 The substantive words of the poem are always 'realities' for Reverdy. They may indeed carry musical, a-referential, more purely Mallarméan vibrations, but they also, and principally, set up semantic vibrations or relationships amongst themselves. As we shall show, because this is so, Reverdy's 'word-things' do not lose their earthiness, but only sub-transcend it.

14 'Cette émotion appelée poésie', in Cette émotion appelée poésie, 18.

15 'La Fonction poétique', ibid., 64.

16 Note éternelle du présent, 21.

17 Anthony Hartley's reference to Reverdy's poetry as a "kaleidoscopic jumble of images and syntax" (The Penguin Book of French Verse, Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1966, xiv) is a rather casual remark, taking account of neither Reverdy's own pronouncements, nor the subliminal 'synthetic' reality of his poetry.

18 The term, it should again be stressed, is Reverdy's and is found in many of the essays of Note éternelle du présent and Cette émotion appelée poésie.

19 Le Livre de mon bord, 144.

20 In Self-defence Reverdy had already announced that "les passions du poète doivent servir son art et non pas son art servir ses passions" (Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 119). As we stress in our section 'The Question of Being', however, the reciprocal model best reflects Reverdy's thought: one's life for one's art, one's art for one's (true) being.

21 The 'brutal', the 'fantastic', the 'phantasmagorical' are not sought by Reverdy (cf. Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 74) and Note éternelle du présent, 174, for example).

22 Le Livre de mon bord, 146.

23 Le Gant de crin, 16.

24 Pierre Daix, in his Nouvelle critique et art moderne (Paris: Seuil, 1968), argues that modern art generally since Apollinaire and Reverdy "participe à la maîtrise de l'homme sur la nature" (p. 81), but he shrewdly reminds us that it is man's return to nature (in order, however, to re-imagine it) that we must not neglect. Reverdy, certainly, establishes the need for art to found a new city, situated between the terrains vagues of bland imitation of nature and pure solipsism, whilst recognising that "l'art, c'est l'homme" (ibid., 83).

25 See this note from En Vrac, for example: "L'art et la poésie ne sont là que pour puiser dans la nature ce que la nature ne fait pas" (p. 87); or again: "L'art est un composé sinon un compromis, un phénomène de combustion où le réel entrerait comme combustible" (ibid., 234). My emphasis.

26 Mikel Dufrenne (Le Poétique, P.U.F., 1973, p. 97) expresses something of this viewpoint when he states that "l'objet esthétique est cet objet fabriqué en qui l'artifice n'imité pas la nature, mais produit la nature" -- an other nature, as it were. Ernst Cassirer is rather more penetrating in his excellent essay 'Le Langage et la construction du monde des objets': "Quand le vrai génie lyrique exprime un sentiment, il nous le donne comme quelque chose de momentané et d'unique qui n'a jamais existé auparavant. Nous ne le recevons pas comme quelque chose de connu, de déjà donné: c'est une véritable création nouvelle; elle est en elle-même et par elle-même un enrichissement défini de l'existence. Et cependant cette innovation ne nous révèle rien qui vienne du dehors, rien d'étranger; tout se passe comme si son caractère nous était familier depuis toujours" (in Jean-Claude Pariente, Essais sur le langage, Paris: Minuit, 1969, p. 65). Art is thus at the intersection of the new and the old, the unknown and the always known -- or, as Reverdy would put it, art draws its strength from the tension between the antinaturally created and the naturally given.

27 See Le Livre de mon bord, 51 and 112, for example.

28 One might also say that the movement is not just conceived as a movement 'away' from, but also as a movement 'over'. This will become clearer in our following discussion of the question of transmutation and related imaginative motifs.

29 For a discussion of the notion of validity or justesse as it applies in particular to the constitution of the image, see Chapter VI.

30 En Vrac, 87.

31 See infra, this chapter, 'The Question of Being' for a discussion of the resolution of the self-world hiatus; and the next section of this

chapter, 'The Poetry: Self-reflexive Shimmer and a Fusion of Worlds', for an appreciation of Reverdy's 'merging' of the natural and the anti-natural.

32 Cette émotion appelée poésie, 64.

33 It must be stressed again that the full significance of this for Reverdy will only become evident in the closing section of this chapter.

34 Similarly, in speaking of his friend Juan Gris in his 1955 essay-preface, 'Dans l'obscur mêlée ...', for Au Soleil du plafond (this essay was originally drafted by 1920), Reverdy declares that "il aime par-dessus tout, sans doute, les objets". See Note éternelle du présent, 118 (and 260-70 for variants). Freud in his essay 'The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming' (in On Creativity and the Unconscious, New York: Harper and Row, 1958), points out that the child's play involves creating a world apart, of one's own, but that, like the poet, he borrows the elements of reality and "it is only this linking of it to reality that distinguishes a child's 'play' from 'day-dreaming' (p. 45).

35 Although, in fact, nature is always 'there' to provide a check upon the degree of validity/esotericalness of art -- "l'antinature, l'imaginaire, l'irréel imposé de force et toujours maintenu en équilibre précaire au-dessus du réel qui prendrait parfois magistralement sa revanche", as Reverdy expresses it (in different metaphorical perspective) on one occasion (En Vrac, 58; my emphasis).

36 Artaud uses the term osmose to refer to the 'illusory' sensation of special relationship existing between words, thought or created 'structures' and reality itself (cf. L'Ombilic des Limbes, suivi de le Pèse-nerfs et autres textes, Paris: Gallimard, 1973, p. 88).

37 Cf. Self Defence, in Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 117: "La réalité ne motive pas l'oeuvre d'art. On part de la vie pour atteindre une autre réalité". However, in an astute observation in his mémoire 'Espace et vie intérieure dans la poésie de Pierre Reverdy de 1913 à 1922', Charles Bachat points out that "l'espace poétique n'est pas totalement indépendant. Il fait plutôt l'objet d'une interpénétration avec l'espace perçu. Il s'en éloigne certes mais y reste solidement attaché, il en est comme l'envers" (p. 51).

38 Cette émotion appelée poésie, 66-7.

39 For a full examination of these and many other aspects of the image, see infra, Chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse'.

39a The notion of transmutation always remained dear to Reverdy. In his 1950 essay 'Georges Braque. Une aventure méthodique', he speaks of "la transmutation miraculeuse [qui] s'opère" (Note éternelle du présent, 67) and which enables transmuted elements to become Braque himself (cf. infra, 'Appropriation and Consubstantiality'); and in En Vrac, published in 1956, Reverdy returns to the same image on a number of occasions, of which we shall mention only the following, when he argues that art "est un dérivatif capable de détourner l'attention de l'écrasante oppression du réel qu'il a su transmuier en charme" (En Vrac, p. 234; cf. ibid., 33 and 74).

40 Ibid., 33.

41 For a better appreciation of the tense equilibrium achieved between transcendence and immanence, see infra, 'The Question of Being'.

42 The transfigured world is a world that, whilst shimmering, like a reflection of reality on water (in no way a simple, 'representational' mirroring, however), establishes precisely in this shimmer its own reality and artistic 'truth'. Whilst transfigured reality ceases to be physically tangible, it becomes possible spiritually to embrace it. Cf. En Vrac, 184-5 and Cette émotion appelée poésie, 62.

43 We are dealing here with a movement of a "réalité exaltée [qui] s'est détachée de la réalité matérielle vivante pour passer à un autre ordre, gagnant en intensité esthétique plus qu'elle n'a perdu de poids en évidente réalité" ('Matisse dans la lumière et le bonheur', Note éternelle du présent, 174).

44 Le Gant de crin, 14. Interestingly, a number of Reverdy's poems also allude, albeit obscurely, to the 'taste of ashes' in the mouth, on the lips. We might note, in addition, that a poet such as Denis Roche is intrigued precisely with the scoria, the dross, what he also calls the entame that is normally discarded because it is indigestible.

45 'La fonction du portier', in Cette émotion appelée poésie, 196. Reverdy's words point to the poet's need to sacrifice mere existence at the altar of life, real, antinatural life. As seen in our discussion 'The Question of Being', artistic self-expression offers a life otherwise denied.

46 Thus is it that Reverdy continually emphasises that we are dealing with "une réalité nouvelle" which is now situated "sur un autre plan", having passed to "un autre ordre" (Note éternelle du présent, 174).

47 One might compare this idea of re-realisation with Ponge's notion of the impossibility of explaining or understanding the world, an impossibility overcome by the possibility of a 'metalogical re-making' of the world (cf. 'Pages bis', in Le Parti pris des choses, Paris: Gallimard; Coll. Poésie, 1967, pp. 198-20).

48 Such a logic of aesthetic re-realisation puts us in mind of certain tenets of Max Jacob's manifesto-preface to Le Cornet à dés published in 1917. In particular, we might mention his notion of transplantation or re-situation and that of "la marge spirituelle nécessaire" which surrounds what he terms the "objet construit" that is the poem proper. However, Reverdy's overall poetic theory is far more rigorously expounded and subtly developed than Jacob's.

49 Reverdy likes especially to stress this idea when discussing the formation of the image (cf. infra, Chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse'), but may speak more generally of this capacity of poetry to reveal the poet's intuitively matured "sens extrêmement aigu des rapports les plus lointains qui réunissent toutes choses" (in Plupart du temps, 422).

- 50 To consider only the pronouncements made by Reverdy in Le Gant de crin we may readily observe his scorn for and dismissal of what would tend to deform (Le Gant de crin, 44), what is gratuitous (ibid., 21) or merely decorative (ibid., 47), and what would only achieve a banal imitative or mirroring effect in relation to given reality (ibid., 28).
- 51 Plupart du temps, 231.
- 52 Ibid., 188.
- 53 Main d'oeuvre, 66.
- 54 Plupart du temps, 354.
- 55 See Flaques de verre, 14; Plupart du temps, 114 and 102, respectively.
- 56 Le Voleur de Talan, 5.
- 57 Main d'oeuvre, 143.
- 58 Ibid., 470. In an otherwise good essay ('Notes marginales sur Pierre Reverdy', HPR:ELA), Gabriel Bounoure speaks of Reverdy's poem as "antipoème, en ce sens que c'est un lieu inhabitable" (p. 43), whereas we should argue, with Reverdy, that his poem, whilst 'antinatural', is precisely the world or demeure in which self and world may cohabit most successfully (cf. infra, 'The Question of Being').
- 59 See Flaques de verre, 134-5.
- 60 Main d'oeuvre, 288. Here is the text in full:

Un son de cloche vient de loin  
 Les arbres sont ouverts  
 Le silence est calmé  
 La prairie s'étend jusqu'à l'autre rangée  
 Un point noir marche avance saute  
 A travers les haies  
 Que le soleil est fort  
 Un oiseau chante  
 Un homme siffle  
 Tout s'endort  
 Comme un nuage  
 La vapeur d'eau  
 La route à travers le paysage  
 C'est un enfant couché sur le talus  
 Sur le ciel des étoiles vertes  
 Aucun signe ne bouge plus

Although there is no blatancy in Reverdy's gesture, the poem nevertheless both suggests and performs a transformational movement from one space (given: sound of bell/trees/field/hedges/etc.) to another (created: 'field' of dynamic poetic forces, yet a semantic field in which everything is caught, in which signification is, in a sense, 'immobilised').

- 61 Flaques de verre, 14.

62 See infra, this chapter, 'Appropriation and Consubstantiality' for the final argument concerning these 'modes' of being and having.

63 Thus is it that critics like Anthony Rizzuto and Eric Sellin are often obliged to speak of (and indeed demonstrate) the ambiguity of Reverdy's syntax and semantics, and that others even find his work obscure. In our final chapter, where we shall examine the poem 'Coeur à la roue' in some detail from a stylistic point of view, we shall have cause to discuss further the semantic openness and polyvalence of Reverdy's form.

64 We might stress here the fact that Reverdy's notebooks, particularly Le Livre de mon bord and En Vrac, are full of smiling and bitter ironies and taut paradoxes, and that his various contes also reveal a marked taste for an amused, yet serious linguistic play. Jean-Charles Gaudy has even devoted an essay, not without some justification, to 'L'humour de Pierre Reverdy' (PR:MF, 282-90). Reverdy's whole image theory, moreover, as indeed his complex and subtle use of syntax and typography, indicate that Reverdy is highly sensitive to the quality of semantic structuring and relationship (cf. infra, Chapter VI).

65 In effect, Reverdy always maintained that any work of art -- painting or poem -- was 'static' to the extent that it constituted "un équilibre des forces [de l'oeuvre]" (Note éternelle du présent, 19). That is to say art involves structural balance, harmony, logic (cf. ibid., 124), but, precisely, of its internal dynamic forces. Moreover, Reverdy also argues that this "équilibre des forces" is capable of producing an aesthetically emotional dynamique (cf. ibid., 19-20). For other, similar pronouncements on these matters, see also Le Gant de crin, 29, 37, 46-7 and En Vrac, 45-6.

66 Main d'oeuvre, 66.

67 Ibid., 118.

68 In 'Course' (Plupart du temps, 239) and 'Paris-Noël' (ibid., 62).

69 Main d'oeuvre, 176-7.

70 Le Livre de mon bord, 253. My emphasis.

71 For a better appreciation of the parameters of these and other aspects of the Reverdyan conception of 'swinging' or vacillation, see Chapter VI.

71a In her book Poetic Closure (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), Barbara Smith argues that the closing of the poem brings about a certain stasis or equilibrium, but adds that "this does not mean that our experience of the work ceases abruptly at the last word. On the contrary, at that point we should be able to re-experience the entire work, not now as a succession of events, but as an integral design" (p. 36). While Barbara Smith's book deals generally with much more consciously and painstakingly constructed poetry than Reverdy's, certainly her basic argument is of relevance in Reverdy's case and relates, of course, to his own notions of aesthetic equilibrium, stasis, logic and heterocosmic 'sealing in'

of the poem. David Grossvogel ('Pierre Reverdy: The Fabric of Reality', Yale French Studies, 2 (1958), 96) also comments on the often "disjunctive terminal cord" of the last lines of Reverdy's poems.

72 In Reverdy's case, however, unlike Claudel's, the doing, the creating, is a purely human activity, antinaturally sub-transcendent, involving a marriage of the spiritual and the material, but lacking that character of divinely inspired functioning of the spirit/Spirit.

73 Cf. Plupart du temps, 89-90. The poem ends as follows:

Et comme personne ne chante  
Les hommes se sont réveillés  
La pendule s'est arrêtée  
Personne ne bouge ...  
Comme sur les images  
Il n'y aura plus de nuit  
C'est une vieille photographie sans cadre

74 We are thinking here of those questions of statique and equilibrated structuring of internal dynamic forces of a work of art touched upon earlier (cf. supra, n. 65, especially).

75 Reverdy himself may use the expression le réel to refer either to primary reality or to secondary, antinatural reality (and even occasionally to what is held to be some quintessential, unifying principle governing the whole of reality). Moreover, Reverdy's use of the term le réel emphasises precisely his feeling that antinature is not irremediably divorced from nature, but, to quote Mondrian again, "l'autre de nature", a special other form of nature.

76 Plupart du temps, 280.

77 The term 'evocative' is used guardedly. Reverdy himself is eager on a number of occasions to bring home the idea that the work of art functions non-anecdotally, non-representationally, "en dehors de l'évocation ou de la reproduction des choses de la vie" (Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 20). The poem or painting therefore tends to present its forces more purely, evoking itself, as it were (cf. ibid., 45), its own inner forces become functionally 'other', structured to create together not a system of external referentiality but a system of inner aesthetic coherence.

78 See Plupart du temps, 67-8. See also Julia Husson's essay in The Australian Journal of French Studies (Jan.-Apr. 68), pp. 21-34: the title of her essay is "Pierre Reverdy and the 'poème-objet'" and she offers a useful appraisal of Reverdy's conception of the poem as an "objet construit" (to use Jacob's term).

79 Either in the fanciful and rather superficial manner of Apollinaire's calligrammes or in the 'calligrammatic' style adopted by Ponge in, let us say, Le Savon or Le Carnet du bois de pins. Nor does Reverdy's poetry offer the kind of "mimetic homology" found in Saint-John Perse's work (cf. Roger Little's essay in Order and Adventure in Post-Romantic French Poetry, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, pp. 244-56).

80 Main d'oeuvre, 224. In 'Solitude de Reverdy' (Les Lettres Nouvelles, V, 2 (Sept. 57)), Edouard Glissant chooses precisely this poem to exemplify Reverdy's ability to create what is for Glissant specifically poetic space (p. 281).

81 A number of these motifs are examined infra: Stars (Ch. III), seizure of hand and mind (Ch. III), bleeding provoked by thorns (Ch. IV), the wind (Ch. IV).

81a Arthur Koestler points out in his book The Act of Creation (London: Pan, 1970, p. 308) that artistic 'illusion' is "the simultaneous presence and interaction in the mind of two universes, one real, one imaginary" and that aesthetic pleasure is thereby derived. Although the context of his discussion is somewhat different, his comment applies implicitly to our point at hand in that the 'superimposition' of spaces and messages in Reverdy's poetry undoubtedly accounts for a good deal of its aesthetic appeal.

82 Le Livre de mon bord, 144.

83 Cette émotion appelée poésie, 235. Picon (op. cit.) astutely brings out this fact, declaring that Reverdy "vit et dit son être-dans-le-monde, mais ce n'est pas le monde, ou sa transformation, c'est son être qui est son souci" (p. 260), but he does not demonstrate the interdependence of self, world and word in the poet's realisation of his being. For other poets too the relationship between creation and being is significant, but perhaps for no other more so than for Michaux, as Malcolm Bowie shows in his penetrating book Henri Michaux. A Study of his Literary Works, O.U.P., 1973 (cf. pp. 7-8).

84 Le Gant de crin, 18.

85 Note éternelle du présent, 25.

86 See, for example, the essays 'Note éternelle du présent' (ibid., 17); 'La nature aux abois' (ibid., 32); 'Georges Braque. Une aventure méthodique' (ibid., 47).

87 Cf. 'La fonction poétique', (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 64-5), where we read that "l'évidence nous montre que le poète, l'artiste en général, le créateur de tout ordre finissent par exister bien plus dans leur oeuvre, à leurs propres yeux et aux yeux de leurs semblables, qu'en eux-mêmes. Leur être vrai, leur être essentiel qui compte et les transcende, ils l'ont projeté dehors". My emphasis.

88 Cf. Y. Bonnefoy, L'Arrière-pays (Geneva: Skira, 1972), where the idea of transcendence and rootedness are simultaneously embraced (p. 45), where the "lieu autre" (p. 14) is required to remain "de chair et de temps, comme le nôtre, et tel qu'on puisse y vivre, y changer d'âge, y mourir" (p. 62).

89 Cf. En Vrac, 238.

90 See, for example, 'Note éternelle du présent' (Note éternelle du présent, 13): "il faut reconnaître que l'art est pour l'homme un des

moyens les plus glorieux de satisfaire son inextinguible besoin de domination"; and 'La fonction poétique' (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 68) where poetry is decreed to be the place man goes to "pour accomplir, malgré les asservissantes exigences de la nature, sa fabuleuse destinée".

91 Ibid., 134.

92 Cf. 'La fonction poétique', ibid., 65.

93 'Le poète secret et le monde extérieur, ibid., 134.

94 As Reverdy says, artistic means are things, forms, colours the substance of the world expressed through the style of a particular poet's sensibility (cf. 'La Nature aux abois', Note éternelle du présent, 32).

95 See infra, our conclusion to the discussion of the Reverdyan conception of the self's withdrawal from the world, entitled 'From Disengagement to Engagement' (Ch. IV). Anna Balakian, in Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute (New York: Noonday, 1959) argues that "the only metaphysics possible for him consists in rendering matter dynamic and thereby reaching the absolute through matter" (p. 75). We should argue, however, that Reverdy can never reach any absolute: his whole poetic theory stresses the taut balance between transcendence and immanence. This is why we often use the term 'sub-transcendent' when speaking of Reverdy's poetic/ontological achievement.

96 En Vrac, 69.

97 Ibid., 172.

98 Cf. Reverdy's preface to Georges Herment's Déluges, in Cette émotion appelée poésie, 181: "Tout le reste du temps est vide, vide comme la vie vide de tout le monde." Like Baudelaire's albatross-poet, Reverdy's poet remains grounded in the torment of quotidian being when his wings will not permit a creative surging from nothingness to something/being. See also 'Georges Braque. Une aventure méthodique' (Note éternelle du présent, 68-9): "Il y a, d'une part, la sensation insoutenable de vide et d'insatisfaction que nous laisse tout le réel que nous ne pouvons embrasser ni pleinement atteindre. D'autre part, la recherche et la formation de l'objet conventionnel propre à combler ce vide par la vertu de son origine spirituelle et sensible mais purement humaine".

99 Cf. 'La fonction du portier', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 198: "la poésie pourrait [...] être le seul moyen de combler l'abîme qui bâille entre les choses qui existent".

100 See En Vrac, 106 for an indication of the profound horror and despair experienced by Reverdy at the thought of a humanity that will learn to blithely live with and even love nothingness.

101 See Reverdy's essay on Picasso, 'Un oeil de lumière et de nuit' (Note éternelle du présent, 213 and 215, for example), where he argues that genius is "le drame du plus grand vide" and the greater the void, the greater the 'appetite', the 'avidness'. See also Cette émotion appelée poésie, 238. It might be noted that Hegel's conception of desire also embraces the notion of the feeling of deficiency or want.

102 In our later chapter we discuss the notion of void in a somewhat different context and principally as the end experience of the vast imaginative movement from something to nothingness. Although we thus relate the notion of void to motifs of hole, collapse, falling, shipwreck, finality and so on and thus more fully characterise it, there is absolutely no contradiction between our analysis here and that occurring later, as we ultimately show.

103 It would be interesting to examine more extensively Reverdy's conception of desire and in doing so one might bear in mind certain important passages from Le Gant de crin (pp. 56, 91, 131) and Le Livre de mon bord (pp. 20, 49, 134-5, 149, 234, 251), especially. Of course, in the Reverdyan optic desire is intimately bound up with questions of having, appropriation and so on, but, although desire is self-centred, it is not exclusively so, as we finally show in this chapter: being, co-being, is the crucially determining factor governing desire.

104 See Cette émotion appelée poésie, 41-2, where we read that "[la poésie] est plutôt une absence, un manque au coeur de l'homme".

105 See 'Circonstances de la poésie', ibid. and cf. En Vrac, 191, where we read: "la poésie c'est le lien entre moi et le réel absent. C'est cette absence qui fait naître tous les poèmes" (Reverdy's emphasis).

106 'Une aventure méthodique', Note éternelle du présent, 53-4.

107 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 136; see also infra, Chapter IV, 'From Disengagement to Engagement'.

108 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 34.

109 An act which, if understandable, is refused as an ontological solution. It is, rather, a non-solution in the sense that we have no idea where suicide's 'solution' will leave the primary problem. Reverdy's reply to the La Révolution surréaliste enquête concerning suicide may not have entirely satisfied the editors (as Nadeau suggests: Histoire du surréalisme, Paris: Seuil, 1964, p. 66), but its anguished sincerity was well understood (as E.-A. Hubert points out: Nord-Sud, Self Defence, p. 354).

110 'La fonction du portier', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 198. Cf. 'Circonstances de la poésie', ibid., 42: "ce vide qui ne pouvait absolument [être comblé] par aucune autre activité ou matière réelle de la vie". André du Bouchet, like many poet-commentators of Reverdy, is sensitive to what he feels is a "sentiment de manque jamais comblé" in Reverdy's work and aesthetic ('Envergure de Reverdy', Critique, VII, 47 (Apr. 51), 308). As we shall point out later, however, poetry is felt to fill the void, but only temporarily: as filling or poetic closure is achieved, the void or desire returns, demanding a new filling.

111 Note éternelle du présent, 215.

112 Cf. 'La fonction du portier', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 198; we might recall here Reverdy's ideas concerning the poem as a zone of gathering of originally disparate entities to form a new and inseparable unit teeming with relationships that result directly from the gathering.

113 Note éternelle du présent, 68; cf. also ibid., 69 and 'Circonstances de la poésie', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 42.

114 It might be stressed, here again, that this world (of art), réel<sup>2</sup>, of course opens up porously upon the primary world, without in fact being any longer primary, having undergone the mediation and transformation available through words and all artistic means.

115 The artist's crucial dominating role in the establishment of art may seem almost a banal concept, but it should not be overlooked. Indeed, the notion haunts Reverdy and relates closely to his idea that it is precisely the artist's humanising activity that enables him to fill his own inner void and via which the world may be assimilated and fill the self. Cf. Note éternelle du présent, 69 and our final discussion of the notion of consubstantiality.

116 Cf. ibid., 68.

117 See the short text published in 1932 in Le Journal des Poètes under the title 'En brûlant avec Pierre Reverdy', where he declares that "le poète écrit pour se réaliser, se connaître, se former, se créer" (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 167). See also the preface to Déluges (1938), where Reverdy argues that "le poète [ne peut] se convaincre de sa propre réalité qu'en s'exprimant" (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 181): the poem provides a locus for the optimal expression of the poet's otherwise repressed being.

118 'Solidarity of the genius and the dwarf', Note éternelle du présent, 238. The original French version has, to date, not been discovered.

119 Cette émotion appelée poésie, 237-8. Reverdy's emphasis.

120 In the quotation given above, the image of 'bearing within' tends to suggest ideas of pre-natal being, expectancy and potential delivery, rather than delivered and fully matured being.

121 This is not merely a question of non-possession of the world, but also of the self. The following passage from Le Gant de crin is of interest in this regard: "L'homme se possède peu et, pour mieux dire, pas du tout. Il ne sait qu'une chose qui lui paraît certaine, c'est qu'il est là" (Le Gant de crin, 162). The self or poet may thus appreciate the fact of his primary being, but it does not assist him to really have himself. Having oneself, like having the world, can, for Reverdy, only come about via secondary being. Cf. Gabriel Marcel on this whole question of having (Being and Having, London: Fontana, 1965).

122 See infra, Chapter III, our discussion of 'Dream' and 'Mind' for a fuller appreciation of the question of the poetic mind's relative activity and passivity.

123 Cf. 'Note éternelle du présent', Note éternelle du présent, 15, where Reverdy speaks of the poet's "sensibilité exagérément perceptive et réceptive".

124 Reverdy's comment in a letter to André Breton that the mind's seizing was never understood by him to imply a necessarily fully conscious process is helpful in this context and is elaborated upon in Chapter III. See Etudes Littéraires, 3 (Apr. 70), 97-120, where Léon Somville presents and annotates Reverdy's letters to Breton (1917-24) under the title 'Trente-deux lettres inédites à André Breton'.

125 Le Livre de mon bord, 152-3. Reverdy's emphasis. Let us observe in parenthesis that Pierre Reverdy slips deftly from the use of the word 'image' implying metaphor, to the broader notion of image as representation of reality. However, given Reverdy's overall aesthetic-ontological theory, we can safely conclude that any victory and appropriation achieved with respect to the world, are effected via art's 'image'.

126 In effect, Reverdy would be the first to recognise that language itself, even much so-called 'poetic' language, is no guarantee of possession: the justesse of poeticity must be present and felt (cf. Chapter VI). Sartre, on the other hand, speaking more generally (L'Imaginaire, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, p. 161), argues that any act of imagination possesses magical power able to "faire apparaître l'objet auquel on pense, la chose qu'on désire, de façon qu'on puisse en prendre possession".

127 En Vrac, 161; cf. also Cette émotion appelée poésie, 66-8. We might mention also the thinking of philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, whose conception of world as lived experience and world as worded experience is clearly related to the Reverdyan notion of appropriation. The painter Jean Bazaine (Notes sur la peinture, Paris: Seuil, 1953, p. 112) argues that art always has involved possession, unification of creator and 'model' in the creation, just as Deguy implies that all use of language implies an activation of being. Reverdy would be more begrudging altogether.

128 Cf. 'La fonction poétique', Note éternelle du présent, 66-7, where Reverdy speaks of the integration of self and things, of the mutual bonding poetry affords. Cf. also En Vrac, 142. For Jean-Pierre Geay, in an uneven, though sympathetic study 'La quête du réel dans l'oeuvre poétique de Pierre Reverdy' (Revue d'esthétique, 2 (1970), 189-203), to suggest that Reverdy abandons his 'quest of the real' in Ferraille (where the personal quality of his poetry is deemed more overt), is to misunderstand quite inexcusably both Reverdy's aesthetics and his practice: this is a volume whose metaphoric intensity is marvellously indicative of a self-world bonding. Geay's feeling that it is only in Ferraille that reality reveals its aggressiveness may account for his misunderstanding.

129 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 142: "Qui n'accorde à l'homme, dans le monde, une infinie supériorité sur la fleur? Il faut pourtant cette immense supériorité de l'homme sur la fleur pour que cette dernière ait quelqu'un capable de l'apprécier, de l'aimer, de l'admirer".

130 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 134: the poet thus becomes the "foyer de l'univers" -- not just the centre of the universe in the sense of the poet's point of central interest (here, we rejoin the notions of centrality and self-centredness); but also in the sense of a domicile and shelter for things, for (potentially) all the things of the world, a locus wherein they can find true being and communion.

131 Note éternelle du présent, 54-5.

132 See the continuation of 'La nature aux abois' (ibid., 55) and also 'Le poète secret et le monde extérieur' (ibid., 129-131), for a declaration of the importance of self-world relationships as crucially ordering and differentiating factors of the inner world of art.

133 'La nature aux abois', ibid., 54. Joë Bousquet interestingly expresses a similar view when he argues that the phenomena of the sensible world are obliged to become, poetically, "les sommets de cristal de notre être intérieur" (Chantiers (Mar. 28), quoted in S. André et al., Joë Bousquet, Paris: Seghers).

134 En Vrac, 190-1. It is essentially this mutual giving and taking that M. Lecomte evokes when he asks: "Ses poèmes ne cherchent-ils pas à saisir l'univers? Et aussi la réalité ne s'empare-t-elle point de chaque zone de l'être à travers le poème?" ('Tension de l'image du monde chez Reverdy', Le Journal des poètes, 7 (1960), 6). Cf. Michel Deguy ('Pour Reverdy', preface to Sources du vent, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 14): "La métamorphose est peut-être ce lent devenir chose des hommes et devenir homme des choses".

135 The notion of filling is, in fact, imaginatively related to the motif of 'leavening', which entails a marvellous expansion of potential substance to fill previously unoccupied space, through the assumption of a form otherwise unattainable.

136 Cf. En Vrac, 227, where, in an albeit undelimited context, Reverdy observes: "Il y a ce mouvement de vie que notre esprit confère aux choses inertes et qui les fait participer si intimement, si chaudement aux démarches les plus secrètes de notre propre vie". Cf. Gabriel Marcel (op. cit., pp. 180-2) who argues eloquently that "wherever there is pure creation, having as such is transcended or etherialised within the creative act: the duality of possessor and possessed is lost in a living reality". Having thus gives way to being in a gesture dependent upon the 'ontic' power of love (cf. ibid.).

137 Cf. 'Le poète secret et le monde extérieur', Note éternelle du présent, 129 and Le Gant de crin, 52. And let us not forget that the poet's images are deemed precious precisely for the marvellous, unheard-of relationships they afford (cf. Chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse').

138 Le Livre de mon bord, 226. We have already commented on Reverdy's designation of the self as "foyer de l'univers". In 'La fonction poétique' (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 64), Reverdy points to the poet's control and domination of things via his particular verbal appropriation of them. Things thus become part of him, he is formed by these things: "Son monde est lui". Moreover, it is worthwhile pointing out that whereas Bachelard seems to approve of Bergson's argument that 'choosing' a thing is to 'be chosen' by it with a consequent negative loss of "la conscience vraiment première" (Etudes, Paris: Vrin, 1970, p. 30), Reverdy underlines always the exaltation, liberation and fulfilment, all positively connoted, involved in such a 'choice'. Reverdy would no doubt argue with them that the thing assumes us as we assume it, but his view of such an exchange,

is, as with Heidegger, highly positive. It should be noted, moreover, that Reverdy is dealing with secondary being, whereas Bergson is interested essentially in primary perception. Bachelard hovers between the two, tending to override the fact of verbal transmutation -- imagination on the 'primary level' is thus much the same as that finally revealed on the secondary level of creative expression. In the same study Bachelard supports Reverdy's notion -- but, again, in a broader context -- that the world depends on and is formed in, the subject, the perceiving self, "sur le site de l'imagination" (*Etudes*, p. 32; cf. *Le Livre de mon bord*, 117). Self may thus be deemed locus of the world in a primary and secondary sense, though, for Reverdy, the secondary level only affords a true having of the world and a true coming into being of self and world via and as each other. It is also useful to affirm at this point, that the notion of consubstantiality in no way conflicts with Reverdy's notion of liberation of the self from the world. What happens in poetry is at once a movement away from and over primary, enslaving reality and a joining together at the superior level of being thus arrived at. Freeing oneself from the world thus leads back to the world, but transmuted, on self's terms, in terms of self.

### Chapter III

#### Advance and Movement Towards

We shall now turn our attention to an exploration of what is for Reverdy the immensely appealing notion of advance and journeying or movement towards. We shall begin by briefly examining the commonly used motif of the road and proceed then to a broader discussion of the central notion of advance and journeying as it applies to the horizontal plane of Reverdy's imagination. Our discussion here will be deliberately curtailed, partly because a certain amount of attention has already been paid by other critics to this area of Reverdy's imagination and partly because the broad phenomenon of advance in the horizontal plane must receive further indirect coverage in our subsequent analysis of motifs of blockage and withdrawal. The first part of the present discussion will thus limit itself to an examination of two or three basic imaginative motifs whose importance has tended to be overlooked. This we shall follow by an elaboration of a number of very important related imaginative motifs -- listening, seeing, the hand, dream and the mind -- which serve to demonstrate that Reverdy's conception of advance and journeying is much more complex than perhaps suspected, and that the latter may take place in varying manners, via various means at once real and metaphoric. Our final discussion will shift attention to the crucial yet generally neglected vertical dimension of the imagination and will show that here too Reverdy may be powerfully fascinated and that the logic of advance and movement towards may thus be expressed with equal imaginative force and appropriateness in both horizontal and vertical planes.

# I. The Horizontal Plane

## Roads and Crossroads

Reverdy's imaginative world is full of references to roads, tracks and corridors, a variety of paths along which advance may be channelled in the horizontal plane. At the time of Reverdy's religious fervour in the mid-1920's, the direction and destination of the road being followed often seemed clearly determined and beyond confusion. "La route est pleine de soleil et de poteaux indicateurs qui scintillent à la lumière", Reverdy observes in Le Gant de crin. "Si le temps s'assombrit parfois et si la pluie nous cache le dôme lumineux de la ville lointaine, la route est ferme sous nos pieds ... On y peut avancer fermement, malgré le nombre de fondrières".<sup>1</sup> Even here we may sense that Reverdy is drawn to recognize the continuing, if intermittent impediments encountered along the 'divine way'. Moreover, in a slightly earlier note in the same volume, Reverdy is perhaps rather more frank when he speaks of the "chemin obscur, difficile, mais tout le long duquel on rencontre la présence frémissante de Dieu".<sup>2</sup> Here Reverdy succeeds in conveying at once the thrilling possibility of godly contact and the rather less sun-lit than anticipated nature of a path that seems to require struggle and persistence as an integral part of faith and vision. A man of vision undoubtedly admirably equipped for struggle, Reverdy was nevertheless to see his faith desert him in travelling this road. However, what is much more significant in the context of our present interests, is that the paths trodden by Reverdy, man or poet, are generally fraught with problems and that advance and journeying is deemed to be a long and rugged affair.<sup>3</sup> The way Reverdy represents to himself the road that leads to a realm of divine contact and accomplishment is therefore not fundamentally imaginatively distinguishable

from other roads travelled by the poet. All roads of being and doing are intrinsically rough and attainment of one's destination (godly, poetic or other) is uncertain. Many of Reverdy's earliest poems from Cale sèche and Poèmes en prose bear witness to this fact. Life itself flows down the horizontal path we travel, like the blood coursing in our veins.<sup>4</sup> To pursue such a path, regardless of its ruggedness, is the poet's only solution ("En dehors d'elle aucun salut possible et l'indifférence nous perd"),<sup>5</sup> although nothing positive can be guaranteed, given the enduring facts of hasard and risk. If, therefore, Reverdy is tempted at one time to extol the virtues and splendour of the firm and clearly sign-posted road to God, it is no doubt due to the short-lived strength of perfect vision and faith. It remains true to say, however, that Reverdy's general conception of the road as a channel of advance retains an essentially hard imaginative core which posits the struggle of all modes of existence, all going forth, all striving towards.

It would be quite wrong to understand the road or corridor as an image conjuring up the notion of a single track to be followed out of necessity and beyond choice. Although it is clear that the poet is situated in a given journey on a particular road, the fact remains that reaching and being on a particular road comes about, according to Reverdy's conception of things, only via a process of risky and uncertain selection of routes at their point of intersection. The crossroads or junction thus plays an important role in Reverdy's imagination of advance and journeying.<sup>6</sup> More than one direction opens up before the self, as Reverdy indicates in 'Lendemain de saison' with a certain amount of word-play that reveals, nevertheless, just to what extent travelling and advance are associated with the poet's most intimate

destiny and being:

Car il y a dans mon destin plus d'une ligne  
Plus de sens interdits dans le fer des journées  
Contre l'avidité qui ruine mes veines  
L'hésitation constante de mes sens <sup>7</sup>

Finding oneself positioned at a crossroads and being obliged to choose, knowingly or blindly, the direction to take, would thus seem to be inherent to the Reverdyan condition and constitutes one of its important distinguishing features, as well as being for the poet "toute la source de son tourment". <sup>8</sup> If departure and journeying inevitably engage the poet in a broad sweeping movement of advance towards death, then, shooting off everywhere to the side of this journey of doom are the multiple avenues of pursuit that constantly beckon, perhaps enigmatically, in accordance with or contrary to the poet's desires, offering the chance of satisfaction along with the risk of mere diversion or even dire torment. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, it is no simple coincidence that the endless intersections encountered and negotiated in Reverdyan journeying are firmly associated with images of the cross and crucifixion. <sup>10</sup> To experience "la course et ses tournants" <sup>11</sup> is constantly to impose upon oneself not only the rigours of journeying itself, but also the strain of being pulled in various conflicting directions at each crossroads. Here, "au coin des chances inconnues/Au carrefour grouillant des nombres", <sup>12</sup> contingency, probability and intuition tug the poet this way and that, forcing him to make significant existential decisions for which he assumes responsibility without being always capable of defending their emotional or aesthetic logic. The Reverdyan crossroads is thus a locus where interrogation and searching for "la bonne piste" impose immense stress and strain upon the traveller. <sup>13</sup> It is a symbol of that tension permeating Reverdy's work and one that provides perhaps the purest expression of risk's dual potential for positive or negative

outcome. Its recurrence, moreover, is a constant reminder that the poet's journeying -- all his being and doing -- is always menaced. Never distant is the repellent idea that the poet's advance is fraught with the forces of conflicting directionality and that journeying may be transformed into a series of labyrinthine meanderings without any real aboutissement, without any fulfilling issue.<sup>14</sup> If the crossroads posits, then, the possibility of an elating choice in the poet's advance, let us not overlook the fact that Reverdy is also aware of the counterpart of this imaginative logic, namely the relationship between crossroads and labyrinth, road and cul-de-sac.

The road thus provides an important metaphoric outlet for the general notion of advance in Reverdy's imaginative world and its tendency to 'intersect' with other routes or channels of advance figures precisely the complications of the whole process of journeying. We shall now ascertain in more specific detail the extent of Reverdy's fascination with the overall imaginative motif of advance and journeying, and determine the principal characteristics associated with it. There are three essential factors governing advance and journeying in Reverdy's work. The first bestows upon such activity the quality of an apparently deliberate, calculated and specifically orientated movement. The second loosens the functional strings of advance, robs it somewhat of its logic and direction and gives it a certain air of nomadic aimlessness. The third factor is that of time, the advance of time itself and the effect this may have upon the poet's own advance and journeying.

Intentionality and Nomadism

What we may affirm initially is that Reverdy clearly conceives of advance as being, at least partially and potentially, a positive, forth-right movement towards some point of attainment or beneficial contact.

At its worst, as with departure,<sup>15</sup> the advancing, walking movement may be thought of as an escape -- "la promenade est une fuite", the poem 'Tourbillons de la mémoire' tells us, for example<sup>16</sup> --, but even so it usually postulates a going not just from somewhere or something, but to somewhere or something else, for certain reasons, however negatively or vaguely expressed. At best advance posits goals, moves directly towards them along channels that are chosen, according to means that are seemingly controlled. This much is clear from many of Reverdy's critical essays and notes, particularly those that deal with the functioning of the mind in the process of creation or the attainment of religious or epistemological objectives.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, a good number of Reverdy's poems evoke, though less specifically, as might be expected, the notion of advance as search with intention, 'aiming' and positing of a moment and 'zone' of finding. Advance may thus take place "à la recherche du miracle" or with the aim of finding and harnessing "des images nouvelles", as two poems of Cale sèche declare;<sup>18</sup> or, as in the poem 'Reflux', the self may cross the threshold in a liberating gesture that aspires to contact, to a covering of the distance lying between self and other, restriction and fulfilment:

[...] quand la nuit rassemble ses haillons pendus aux basses branches, je sors, je me prépare, je suis pâle et plus tremblant que cette page où aucun mot du sort n'était encore inscrit. Toute la distance de vous à moi -- de la vie qui tressaille à la surface de ma main au sourire mortel de l'amour sur sa fin -- chancelle, déchirée. La distance parcourue d'une seule traite sans arrêt, dans les jours sans clarté et les nuits sans sommeil. Et, ce soir, je voudrais, d'un effort surhumain, secouer toute cette épaisseur de rouille -- cette rouille affamée qui déforme mon coeur et me ronge les mains.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this kind of evidence (which could certainly be multiplied) of a stunning advance and suppression of distance and impediment, it would be wrong to give the impression that Reverdy's poetry is full of images

of an advance precalculated in accordance with clearly focussed objectives. Objectives may be sighted or sensed, search may be initiated, but the precise mapping out of the itinerary required to attain objectives is not, finally, a basic characteristic of Reverdy's creative work, although, as we stress on a number of occasions in this study, Reverdy's aesthetic theory in particular is intimately bound up with notions of calculation, seizure and control as they relate to the poet's acts of journeying towards poetic/ontological attainment.<sup>20</sup>

No doubt connected with the above factors is the fact that the theme of advance is very often rather flatly articulated in Reverdy's poetry. In the poem 'Sans savoir où', for example, from La Balle au bond, a poem whose title seems already significantly pertinent, we read of the poet that "le coup de vent qui passa alors l'aurait bien fait tomber comme il courbait les arbres. Mais ses pieds tiennent aussi au sol. Il marche. Et dans le soir qui tombe, vers la montagne et les bois où il est plus épais, il avance."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in 'Toujours le même', from Pierres blanches, the poem opens: "Sera-t-il là comme toujours/Ce soir/La route enjambe la forêt/On avance";<sup>22</sup> and again, in an earlier poem from the same collection: "Il y a des lettres sur le mur/Et tout le monde qui regarde/Les étoiles pendent/Les becs de gaz tremblent/Le vent/Je marche/Et l'air entier passe devant".<sup>23</sup> In all these poems, as in many others, the notion of intentionality and direction is very weak. Journeying is occurring in a context, in the midst of certain impinging phenomena, yet does not stress either destination, possible contact or attainment. The self is depicted rather as merely being "en chemin", as Reverdy expresses it elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> engaged in a travelling motion that seems to lack indication of end, as of beginning. The self is, as it were, going through,<sup>25</sup> on the way, between two

points which remain unspecified, purely implicit. We are presented with an image of an advance in its purest and plainest state, a movement that is at once simply beyond departure and yet this side of end, arrival or attainment.

It is via this appreciation that we may best approach discussion of the second factor of advance, namely that of nomadism. We can already observe from the previous paragraph that such a notion is, somewhat surprisingly, never far away from Reverdy's ideas of advance as a more clearly purposeful activity. The frequently colourless and 'pure' presentation of advance as an activity that merely situates man between beginning and end, intention and accomplishment, without articulating the nature of the dialectic involved, may already impress as an evocation of a vaguely continuing and nomadic movement. However, Reverdy's poems often speak even more specifically, though still tersely and elliptically,<sup>26</sup> of the poet's and indeed man's nomadic wanderings or of what Reverdy calls his "vagabondage spatial".<sup>27</sup> The poet, the self of many poems, becomes a "nomade", a "vagabond", in that he ceaselessly journeys to fill, to fulfil, his life.<sup>28</sup> He tramps the places of the world, plodding along, experiencing each step of a journey that Reverdy himself may hold to be conducted "à l'aventure".<sup>29</sup> However, although such wanderings risk plunging the poet into the endless terrors of the labyrinth, they do not necessarily imply a totally aimless activity. Although he is perhaps liable to impulsive, spontaneous and unpredictable displacement, the nomad tends to adhere to broadly definable, though shifting patterns of movement, for his seemingly aimless meanderings conform in fact to certain fundamental needs, desires and aspirations. It is decidedly important, therefore, not to overlook the fact of an albeit vague and essentially implicit intentionality attached to Reverdyan nomadism,<sup>30</sup>

for it is clearly via such a fact that the notion of a fluid wandering through space is dialectically associated with the complementary notion of determined search, of journeying in which aim and destination are more firmly established factors. Certainly it must be understood that the Reverdyan motif of nomadism continues to create an impression of drifting, aleatory and undesigned activity,<sup>31</sup> and one that seems to be closely linked to the third factor in the question of advance, that of time. Certainly notions of intentionality and direction remain critically undeveloped with the employment of such a motif. To consider advance as 'nomadic' is surely to experience its tensions, its precariousness, the contingent, continuously becoming condition it imposes upon the poet. But the two factors of advance discussed are by no means incompatible. Seeking and going towards objectives is thus interlocked with a groping, wandering movement.<sup>32</sup> Sighting goals does not necessarily imply a simple, direct and foreseeable itinerary. Recognition of and response to desire can in this way occasion an advancing movement that, whilst initially postulating a point of attainment, does not prevent journeying from lapsing into meandering, nor bold and self-sure approach from sliding into tentative and chancy exploration.

#### Advance within Advance: A Race against Time

We shall look, finally, at the third factor informing Reverdy's conception of advance and journeying and observe in particular how it is related to our previous discussion of this conception. It is necessary, here, to distinguish between two notions of horizontality consistently fostered by the Reverdyan imagination. On the one hand, Reverdy is attracted, as we have seen, by the idea of a horizontal dimension within which journeying and advance, whether nomadic or more specifically calculated, may occur.<sup>33</sup> Yet the notion of horizontality,

like the road motif in fact, <sup>34</sup> may also point to a mode of advance considered largely negative in value: the advance of time, or of the poet in time. What we may call spatial horizontality, is, broadly speaking, positively connoted. Obstacles may be encountered, but struggle and continuing may occur in the context of ontological ends that are desired and even feasible. The spatial horizontality of the world is a zone of possible exploration and expansion, with respect both to the real, primary level of being and, more particularly, to that of secondary, antinatural being. On the other hand, what we may call temporal horizontality, possesses a strongly negative charge. The horizontal wave of time that carries the poet along, in, for example, the time-conscious poem 'Siècle', <sup>35</sup> is not reversible, remains beyond all form of human control and constantly reduces the negotiable 'space' the poet has. 'Horizontal et tout est dit' is the no doubt ironic title of a poem from the same collection as 'Siècle', Sources du vent, a poem in which Reverdy subtly expresses the idea of self, things, dreams and so on being swept away by time towards a point of finality which is intimated to be anything but pleasurable. <sup>36</sup>

The Reverdyan notion of horizontality thus lends itself to an expression of two forms of advance, one essentially 'spatial' (a spatiality that includes the imaginative spatiality of art), the other essentially 'temporal', in that it figures the poet's entrapment within time's irreversible movement towards death and nothingness. Spatial, creative and ontological advance and exploration involves a journeying that intends to attain goals. It is, as we shall demonstrate more fully in the context of our final considerations, <sup>37</sup> a journeying to which attaches a certain aura of circularity and repetition, in that both attainment and blockage demand of the nomad/searcher a return to a point of departure,

a renewal, a beginning again. Temporal advance and journeying allows for no such possibility: it is conceived of as a journeying in a straight line, a movement towards the (rather than an) end that is more than, indeed almost a denial of, journeying, if we consider journeying to involve return and renewal. In this context, "chaque pas que nous faisons est plus qu'un voyage/Nous n'avons pas besoin de nous presser", Reverdy tells us in a poem from Les Jockeys camouflés.<sup>38</sup> The tramping and searching undertaken by the poet, that strange admixture of drifting and intentional movements and gestures which composes his advance in the spatio-ontologico-creative dimension, finds itself caught also in the negatively connoted advance of time. Such gestures and movements thus constitute acts of advance within an advance, journeyings towards various ends within a journeying towards the end. Life starts with a departure from nothingness and proceeds to a resumption of that same nothingness. As Reverdy puts it in 'Main-morte',

Entre le départ et l'heure sans ressort  
La gymnastique passionnée du littoral qui se déplie<sup>39</sup>

Within the dimension of temporal horizontality, within the limits of an original, unique crossing of time's threshold and a final, lifeless slumping into timelessness, the poet struggles passionately to attach fulfilment to his being and doing. He does this by committing himself to a continuing series of nomadic/searching gestures that journey towards various desired ends. But, with every gesture of advance towards fulfilment of being, the poet journeys a step closer to "l'heure sans ressort". Thus is it that a tension is felt with increasing urgency by the poet as he senses the correspondingly increasing interference of the notion of temporal advance with that of spatio-ontologico-creative advance towards attainment. The fact of an absolute finality thus increasingly intrudes upon the fact or possibility of attainment, of

achieving one's ends, and the whole Reverdyan conception of advance and journeying becomes imbued with an anguishing paradox which the poet can ascertain, but not remedy.

## II. Some Special Means of Movement Towards

Before going on to discuss, in the concluding part of this chapter, the appeal to Reverdy of a number of poetic images of exploration and movement towards fulfilment in the vertical plane, it will be useful to concentrate attention upon what are for Reverdy certain privileged modes of advance, contact and attainment whose functioning is not specifically limited either to the horizontal or to the vertical dimension of the imagination. These special modes or channels of attainment are as follows: listening, seeing, the movement of the hand, the action of dreaming and the functioning of the mind. All are means that clearly demonstrate the metaphorical nature of the advancing, contacting, self-fulfilling movement in which the poet engages and of which they are all in themselves, equally potent, though varyingly characterised metaphors. All the means of 'advance' discussed work towards a resolution of the problems of distanciation and separation besetting the self and his relationships with the world's phenomena around him. All reveal a commitment to a continuous effort to convert nothingness into being, the minimal into the transcendent. Our concern in each case will be to demonstrate not only that this broadly parallel functionality indeed obtains, but also to bring out the extent to which each has its own individual characteristics and aesthetic/ontological viability.

### Listening

Listening for Reverdy implies, as we shall see, a good deal more than the simple process of opening the ear's sensory channel to the sounds around the self in an act of fleeting perception and possible

recording. But, at the same time, listening is, initially, and cannot completely avoid being such a process of primary engagement and perception. The poet, like all men, is exposed to the rumblings of the world and its muttering or roaring phenomena. Listening permits him to experience the world in one of its natural dimensions, in one of its natural modes of being, and in this way a hearing -- whose significance, to be sure, may remain in question -- may thus come about. Reverdy's poetry bears frequent traces of such a condition of existence, as the poem 'Le sang troublé' indicates:

On entend venir quelqu'un qui ne se montre pas  
 On entend parler  
 On entend rire et on entend pleurer  
 Une ombre pure  
 Les mots qu'on dit derrière le volet sont une menace <sup>40</sup>

Sound is everywhere, human and purely phenomenal. Hearing is therefore thrust upon the poet as an obligatory condition of primary being.

Le Voleur de Talan, too, offers endless examples of this immersion in the world perceived as a series of audible phenomena. "Une bête venait de remuer", we read, "On entendit un sabot gratter le pavé sous la paille/Puis un cri"; or, elsewhere: "Quelqu'un chante derrière les volets/On entend les pieds battre le sol/Et la chanson finie quelques éclats de rire". <sup>41</sup> Both these short passages occur at the beginning of 'sections' of Reverdy's novel and both depict the emergence of the world as sound, against a backcloth of silence -- a notion to which Reverdy shows himself to be sensitive on more than one occasion. <sup>42</sup>

Such listening and hearing verify and acclaim, to a certain degree, the world's being as sound and the poet's capacity for remaining available for and sensitive to this dimension of its being. Such listening is a listening to the comings and goings of sound, to the ebb and flow of phenomenal presence along the channels of the ear's special

locus of being. But, for Reverdy, listening is also much more. It is often specified, above all, as an activity directed towards sounds that, quite clearly, emanate from within man, rather than, directly, from without. Listening may thus be orientated towards, for example, the sounds of yesterday, towards those percepts that have lodged within the affective memory, awaiting some signal for their release.<sup>43</sup> Alternatively, it is the sounds of dreams Reverdy lends ear to;<sup>44</sup> or, even more pointedly, the listening becomes a listening to the self,<sup>45</sup> to the heart and the mind,<sup>46</sup> to the self's inner voice that speaks forth in the midst of silence and that, as Reverdy declares in his last, great poem Sable mouvant, projects its obsessive, illuminated signs upon the scroll of the poet's mind:

Cette voix sans timbre  
 Sans couleur  
 Sans aucune vibration  
 d'aucune sorte  
 Ces mots qui n'ont ni forme ni saveur  
 Comme les fruits les plus exquis  
 Sur une langue sans papilles

Et qui vient cependant  
 Inscrire en mon esprit  
 Les signes lumineux  
 Obsédants et précis  
 Comme les inscriptions sacrées  
 En langues mortes<sup>47</sup>

Natural reality as perceived via a listening is unquestionably crucial to the poet, but it remains, as does nature in the art/nature dialectic of Reverdy's aesthetics, a point of departure. "Mais le plus important", Reverdy maintains in En Vrac, after distinguishing initially between original or intrinsic phenomenal noise and sound produced in the human ear (a distinction that already points, moreover, to the fact that the world is a function of man), "ce n'est pas le bruit, ni même les sons que l'oreille crée en enregistrant les vibrations des ondes -- c'est la transformation de ces sons en sensations et en idées".<sup>48</sup> Any truly

worthy listening that the poet may engage in, is ultimately, for Reverdy, a listening to that inner voice of the self, to the voice that dictates such transformation, that produces new, diffracted sounds, that formulates meaning and relationships in accordance with man's intuitive, essentially creative vision and by means of words that leap into flickering reality upon the screen of his silence. Such listening is directed to within, it is part of the poet's profound inner being. And, for Reverdy, it is, perhaps not surprisingly, largely reminiscent of that other potential mode of being which appealed briefly but strongly to Reverdy and which, as he suggests in Le Gant de crin, demands that we give ourselves over to the voice of God that nags away within us if we but know how to lend an ear to its insistent tones: "Ecoutez dans l'ombre de votre corps ce murmure ininterrompu qui vous harcèle comme la voix des mendiants l'hiver dans l'ombre froide de la rue".<sup>49</sup> Listening to the poet's own inner voice is like listening to the voice of God within us. For Reverdy it engages the self in an act of giving an at once searching and welcoming audience to the elements of a new order, a new consciousness, a new reality and being. In both cases a transformation and transcendence of the natural order and its purely sensory data comes about. In both cases such transformation depends upon the self's availability and desire, his waiting in the silence and solitariness of himself for a hearing of the sounds, the terms, of such potential transcendence. Listening maintains the openness of the self's inner channels of advance that lead, potentially, to a hearing, to an attainment of spiritual fullness.

### Seeing

The act of looking and seeing is, for the Reverdyan imagination, like the acts of listening and touching, outstretching and seizing, of

particular ontological significance. The eye, like the ear and the hand, is what we may call a locus or channel of being, one that is at once partial, incomplete, and yet representative of the self's total being. The eye thus becomes, like the ear and, as we shall see, like the hand too, an at least partial metaphor for the poet's will to contact and to attain. It is an ontological/artistic means (and symbol) of the poet's progressing towards a solution of the problems of blockage and distanciation that, as we shall see, commonly beset Reverdy, both the man and the poet. We shall now briefly resume the principal distinctive characteristics of the Reverdyan act of seeing and we shall in this way find ourselves better able to appreciate the often poetically self-reflexive significance it develops in Reverdy's consciousness as an agent of advance and journeying.<sup>50</sup>

The eye's gesture of looking relates closely to Reverdy's understanding of the idea of advance to a point of attainment in that it involves essentially a dual process of search and receipt. On the one hand, the poetry of Reverdy shows the eye to be an agent of welcoming of the things of the world. As locus of being, the eye endeavours to remain open and vigilant and to this locus phenomena are seen to come. There is an arrival of phenomena within the zone of receipt of the eye and it is partly via such arrival that the poet's appropriation of the things of the world may come about. When, therefore, we read such typical, plainly and discreetly articulated verses as "Un navire indécis navigue vers mes yeux" or "Je file incognito/Et l'on voit venir la lumière",<sup>51</sup> it is important to realize that Reverdy is revealing, without ceremony, those very things that constitute the poet's being at a given moment, and the very innocence and inconspicuousness of this mode of constitution. Moreover, no dull passivity is implicit in letting

things come upon the self. Even if the eye permits arrival by that same openness and availability the ear possesses, its seeing is decidedly and equally active and outgoing. Its search does not merely allow a welcoming, but, as Reverdy's poetry repeatedly reminds us, demands a more active response to the endless spectacles of the world. The eye thus looks at things,<sup>52</sup> is attracted by them<sup>53</sup> or seeks them out, following them,<sup>54</sup> attempting to measure and assess their geometry, to fix or pinpoint them,<sup>55</sup> to stem their passing flow and conceptually, poetically dominate them.

It is to this latter point that we should give particular attention, for, not unexpectedly with a poet such as Reverdy, the act of seeing cannot be restricted to the sensory, primary dimension of experience. A fundamental distinction is made between seeing as a purely physical activity and seeing as an activity of the poet, a very special psycho-physical activity. For Reverdy, as for a Hugo or a Rimbaud,<sup>56</sup> the poet's seeing is of an exceptional kind, for he possesses the telling advantage "d'avoir des yeux plus loin que les vôtres, des yeux qui portent plus haut et plus loin que les vôtres".<sup>57</sup> The poet's sight is thus designated at times as telescopic, at other times his view is microscopic.<sup>58</sup> But whether deemed telescopic or microscopic, the effect is the same, namely to bring into clear focus, for the benefit of self and others, what would remain unseeable, invisible, without the poet's special vision. "Le poète doit voir les choses telles qu'elles sont", Reverdy explains in En Vrac, "et les montrer ensuite aux autres telles que, sans lui, ils ne les verraient pas".<sup>59</sup> Reverdyan seeing is thus succeeded by an act of showing, of 'making seen', though this act is not understood to involve a direct representation of what is physically evident to the eye.<sup>60</sup> The following passage from an early

note in Le Gant de crin makes this clear and points to the fact that the poet's showing or 'making seen' offers, rather, an imaginative presentation, a creative re-presentation that is unique and transcendent of a simple view of things: "Le poète ne doit pas perdre son rang de spectateur particulier et supérieur, subtil, pénétrant, imaginatif, et capable de relier toutes choses par des rapports qu'il est seul capable de leur découvrir et de faire voir".<sup>61</sup>

In the physical plane the eye, for Reverdy, "est le plus implacable des sens, celui qui saisit et domine le plus fermement".<sup>62</sup> Sensorily, therefore, the eye is held to grasp and dominate, just as the poet's special kind of vision is held to imaginatively and intuitively grasp things and their secret relationships. Moreover, from a certain point of view, this grasping and consequent having of things affects, indeed helps to create, the poet's very being. What one sees, Reverdy intimates in a note in Le Gant de crin, is to a considerable extent what one is.<sup>63</sup> To see a tree, a flower, a wing, is thus to be constituted in terms of such phenomena.<sup>64</sup> But the poet's seeing, like the constitution of his being, is a more subtle and complex affair. Reverdy, like Baudelaire whom he admired so much, is concerned with a seeing and discovery of secrets, of the intimate relationships between things -- that are between things because they are established, seen, created between things.<sup>65</sup> Reverdy may, therefore, observe things "d'un regard clair et sec",<sup>66</sup> cruelly even,<sup>67</sup> and this is certainly a vital aspect of the poet's special mode of seeing. But the image he begins with continues to come under scrutiny, continues to be observed, so that a finer, as it were extra-sensory or super-sensory vision may be achieved. It is this imaginatively transformational seeing that completes and particularly distinguishes Reverdy's understanding -- and realisation -- of

the act of seeing.<sup>68</sup> It is no doubt according to such a logic that a 'flatly' representational image of the world is rejected by Reverdy in favour of an imaginative view, a re-created vision of the world. And no doubt this accounts for the fact that Reverdy attaches so great a significance to the metaphor, to the poetic image, in which things are combined in the production of what Mallarmé called "un tiers élément fusible et clair".<sup>69</sup> To have things and to be in terms of such things is thus a far more exhilarating experience poetically, imaginatively, than it is on the primary level of sensory perception and registration. If, as Reverdy says, seeing affords a having and a being, then it is to be understood that its richness derives not just from the fact of the realised presence of things within the realm of the poet's true being, but, more importantly, from the fact of their interpenetration, their mode of relating, the newly and uniquely established poetic relationships that things enjoy as a result of the poet's creative vision of them.

It is both interesting and useful to verify, in conclusion, that the distinctions made above (firstly, between normal and poetic vision, and, secondly, within the latter category, between a seeing that starts on the outside and a seeing that is essentially internal, imaginatively transformational) are quite reminiscent of the persistent comments. Reverdy makes, usually in the context of religious preoccupations, on the nature of 'spiritual' seeing and being. What is principally required, according to Reverdy, in acceding to such seeing and being is a voluntary abandonment of "ses yeux de chair".<sup>70</sup> Spiritual life, Reverdy maintains, must endure and, indeed, welcome this loss "pour pouvoir contempler l'invisible".<sup>71</sup> Now whilst Reverdy may, at the apogee of his religious fervour, think of this invisible as an entity that is essentially God

Himself, it is clear that a rather similar movement away from natural seeing and being occurs in Reverdy's insistence upon the special order of seeing achieved via the poetic imagination. As Reverdy says in a late note in Le Gant de crin whose logic parallels with remarkable precision that applicable to the act of hearing, man's natural seeing tends to go outside, to take him away from and out of himself.<sup>72</sup> Man's great problem is that he experiences great difficulty both in bringing about initially that much needed looking within at himself and, also, in allowing that faculty of inner vision to develop once initiated.<sup>73</sup> With regard to what we might term 'religious spirituality', this looking inside and development of the power of inner sight seems to imply for Reverdy an almost catharist and mystical abandonment and, indeed, sacrifice of the natural world in order to contemplate God with an absolute purity of spirit. That such a gesture proved to be beyond Reverdy's powers of endurance and faith needs no further comment here. However, it is important to understand that, with regard to what we shall, in contrast, call 'imaginative spirituality', the poet's looking within and development of inner vision demands not so much a movement away from the natural world to an utterly removed realm of Mallarméan purity, but a carrying over of the data of 'primary vision' into a realm where transmutation may occur by virtue of imaginative, secondary and spiritual vision. Looking, within, for the poet, is not therefore a surrender of the world for the sake of spiritual, visionary accession to God, but, rather, a permitting to prosper within himself of an imaginative vision and creation of the world. Seeing, Reverdy tells us, is always in relation to the seer and his inherent power of vision.<sup>74</sup> What Reverdy himself seems to have finally discovered is that, however strong his power of spiritual contemplation of the divinely invisible may have been, it was not strong enough to combat either those strictly religious doubts

that besieged his faith or, equally importantly, his enduring, desperate love of a world on which his art so much depended.<sup>75</sup> Neither spiritual contemplation nor natural vision was to prove to be adequate to the needs and patterns of Reverdy's destiny. The imaginative and finally sub-transcendent vision of the poet, however, was to provide that elusive means of advance Reverdy required for the attainment of his dual ontological/artistic goal.<sup>76</sup> It was a mode of seeing that thrived upon the creative functioning of the eye and it provided a vision that, whilst in some ways inevitably falling short of the purely spiritual vision of the mystic or saint, succeeded in binding together man and world in that curious Reverdyan amalgam that is the realm of antinature. The act of seeing conceived of as this special mode of vision thus becomes the perfect metaphor for the creative process and, if its specific colouring and features maintain their individuality, its central logic finally blends with that already sketched out in the preceding chapter.

#### The Hand

Reverdy always remained convinced of the immense privilege enjoyed by the plastic artist who, "dans ce monde de débauche intellectuelle vaine, [...] continue de penser avec ses mains".<sup>77</sup> But, by the same token, he always sought to avoid a confusion of the realm of painting or sculpting with that of poetry. This, of course, by no means suggests that Reverdy fails to recognize the importance of the hand in writing, although he may paradoxically go as far as to forthrightly declare the writer's occupation profoundly non-manual in character.<sup>78</sup> The reason for this would seem to be related not just to the fact that poetic activity, intellectual and imaginative in character, relies upon a crucial and difficult relationship between the hand and the mind. After all, the plastic artist 'thinks' with his hands. But, in the

latter case, the relationship is much more direct. Conception finds immediate translation into plasticity, yet seems to by-pass the intellectualisation, albeit intuitive, inherent in poetic creation. In the case of writing, however, if an 'abondance de plume', a facility, is theoretically possible for Reverdy, it is, practically, quite absent from poetic creation specifically. There exists, rather, for the poet, in Reverdy's view, "un pénible divorce entre l'esprit et la main", <sup>79</sup> a divorce that does not so much imply utter separation, as an absence of direct, agreeable and voluntary communion between the two. The translation is not immediate, the hand does not lead, experiment, create of its own accord. It remains instrumental, a slow, oddly cumbersome tool of a mind often too quick and elusive for it.

This is not to suggest, it should again be stressed, that Reverdy dismisses the hand as unimportant. Considered as a psycho-physical phenomenon, Reverdy is so impressed with its relatively overlooked, innocent significance as to affirm: "La main, peut-être le plus complet résumé de l'homme, de sa personnalité totale [...]. La main résume l'homme psychique [...]. La main ne ment pas et d'ailleurs peu de gens y pensent". <sup>80</sup> And, strangely, man's calligraphy is, for Reverdy, testimony to the solidarity of mind and hand, and thus, as with its physiological appearance, highly indicative of human character. <sup>81</sup> But, as far as poetic creation is concerned, the hand cannot reveal its true potential, for the mind, Reverdy's at least, moves in such a way as to create the poem first, to gather its forces, perhaps even subconsciously in part, into a kind of primed verbal explosive -- at which point only does the mind request the hand's assistance, borrow its instrumentality in order, hopefully, to commit to paper a very essentially non-manual production. It is therefore all the more

interesting and perhaps even perplexing to observe that, in the poetry proper, the hand is integrated within an abundance of imaginative motifs which all tend to endow it with a significance and even a power somewhat unexpectedly great. Reverdy seems, in particular, to be attracted by the hand's capacity to stretch out and to touch and it seems to function in his poetry as a powerful and persistent image of an at once poetic and ontological gesture that goes out, grasping and quasi-prehensile, towards those ill-delimited realms of contact, seizure and attainment. In Reverdy's experience of the purely natural world, touching and handling of phenomena may provoke significant sensuous and emotional reactions. Reverdy always shows himself to be sensitive to the relative softness or firmness of things, for example. The handshake, for him, is a sure producer of emotion, although the quality of the fleeting contact it offers may vary greatly. But all such gestures of the hand can offer, finally and at best, nothing beyond a rapidly dissipated sensation of warmth and communion. The contact, the seizing or the having occasioned remain curiously hollow despite the possible sensuous or affective pleasure afforded.<sup>82</sup> Physically, naturally for Reverdy, the hand cannot realize profound contact or attainment, whether it be via the touching of a flower or a woman's cheek or even via the wording of the finest of poems, where its gesture is sadly subservient to the functioning of the poet's mind. Only metaphorically, poetically, within the poem, can the hand's potential be fully exploited, its ordinary capacity be transformed into an image of that poetic seizing and contact alone capable of bringing about a simultaneous ontological fullness. Only in the realm of poetry may the hand fully function, via what at first had oddly seemed to be its imperfectly suited metaphoricity, as a means of advance and real attainment.

As has been well demonstrated already in a study exclusively devoted to the role of the hand, the latter's presence penetrates Reverdy's poetry deeply and ubiquitously.<sup>83</sup> The outstretching gesture of the hand is, in particular, widely portrayed throughout his work and is especially interesting in that it often succeeds in evoking not merely the searching, grasping movement preceding contact, but also other notions such as the tension, the tenderness and the loving desire associated with the hand's reaching forth. The poet may thus stretch out his hand in search of contact with a friend,<sup>84</sup> with a stranger in distress<sup>85</sup> or with an unidentified vous that catches every man within its embrace:

Ma bouche ouverte à tous les vents  
 Lance partout des notes folles  
 Qui sortent je ne sais comment  
 Pour voler vers d'autres oreilles  
 Entendez je ne suis pas fou  
 Je ris au bas de l'escalier  
 Devant la porte grande ouverte  
 Dans le soleil éparpillé  
 Au mur parmi la vigne verte  
 Et mes bras sont tendus vers vous

C'est aujourd'hui que je vous aime<sup>86</sup>

On other occasions, hands direct their grasping movement away from night "vers la lumière",<sup>87</sup> or else away from imprisoning space "vers les paysages qui frémissent derrière la vitre cravachée par la pluie, bouchonnée par le vent, à travers la grille et les barreaux de feu qui gardent l'entrée du pays toujours promis et sans cesse refusé".<sup>88</sup>

But outstretching for Reverdy also produces a tension which his poetry reveals, indeed, in its general tonality as well as in the image of the proffered, but tautly flexed gesture of hands. Reaching out does not merely extend hands, but also repeatedly renders them "tendues", muscularly tense,<sup>89</sup> thus revealing the degree of straining involved in such an effort, the intensity of desire propelling the Reverdyan movement

towards contact and attainment. As the poem 'Les fenêtres nues de l'exil' suggests, however, the hand is also a symbol of delicacy, pitted against resisting forces:

Sous le peu qu'il avait à dire  
 Il a retenu le néant  
 Un dur hiver qui se dessine  
 Tendre la main  
 Et sur les portées du navire  
 Notes pures de l'agonie  
 L'amour la folie le délire  
 Vous comprenez que ce n'est rien <sup>90</sup>

The poem is a difficult one. Its sense defies precise delimitation and indeed may be said to thrive upon the ambiguities woven into the open-work of its syntax: are we to understand, for example, that the néant has been kept back (from us) or is this nothingness ironically all that has been salvaged from 'le peu qu'il avait à dire'; and is the emotionally intense nothingness (of dying, love, madness and delirium) that very same 'nothingness' that has been salvaged (for us), an emotional nothingness which -- without Reverdy saying so here, in a poem that remains, despite any positive interpretation we may attach to it, full of bitterness and fatigue -- has been amazingly transformed into the fragile aesthetic emotiveness of the written poem? These are difficulties which can perhaps only be resolved in the form of questions such as those we pose, but in their midst we are aware of what we may presume to be the continuing gesture of contact of the hand, a persistent outstretching that intimates simultaneously the softness and tenderness of the hand. Perhaps vulnerable to the winter's hardness, the hand remains tenderly loving, gently outgoing, still proffering itself in the face of this hardness and with the threat of a nothingness that would seem to be all around.

Outstretching is therefore a gesture that appeals greatly to the Reverdyan imagination. A mixture of tenderness and desire, tension and

effort, it anticipates and advances towards a coveted contact. But it is not the hand's only gesture, for the hand is frequently imagined not just in its capacity to journey and strive towards, but as an agent of actual contact. It may thus delve into and rummage amongst the phenomena within its reach, as the poet moves forth in the world. "On prend de l'air tout le long du chemin/On fouille ce qui passe à pleines mains".<sup>91</sup> The hand advances to a point of seizure of what moves by or threatens to flee in some way its thrusting grasp. Such movement may be shrouded with an inconspicuous innocence, as in the poem 'Tout dort', where the gesture might appear mundane, even banal if it were not for its metaphorical dimension: "Une main avance à travers l'ombre, le rayon, le papier sur la table. C'est pour prendre la lampe, l'arbre en cercle étendu, l'astre chaud qui s'évade".<sup>92</sup> On other occasions, the Reverdyan manual gesture is more vast, more sweepingly cosmic, as it were, a caressing of the contours of the world such as that witnessed in these verses from a Ferraille poem: "En promenant ma main de long en ~~large de~~ large de la terre/Ma main sur le pommeau massif de l'horizon/Sur les rives fragiles du courant/Contre la joue confuse du levant".<sup>93</sup> What such a handling or fondling of the earth achieves, Reverdy elsewhere expresses in terms of a firm seizing of things: "La main dure attrape le nuage/A l'angle des toits gris";<sup>94</sup> or, perhaps, as a gesture of the fingers enclosing the world within their secure grip and thus accomplishing the desired ontological/poetic possession: "Une main enveloppe la terre entre ses doigts".<sup>95</sup>

The hand presents itself, in this way, in Reverdy's work, as a somewhat surprisingly ideal image of the poet's possible advance towards the time of a holding and having of reality -- or, at least, as Reverdy says in Le Voleur de Talan, a form of reality.<sup>96</sup> That such a holding involves a creative act, an act of gathering and moulding to new shape

is already reasonably clear from a number of the above examples that point discreetly to this dimension of their metaphoricity. A poem such as 'Horizon', from the 1916 volume Quelques poèmes, explicitly establishes, however, a blood-ink relationship and underlines the fact that the hand, for Reverdy, is not just any symbol of seizing and having, but, despite his strong reservations with regard to the natural bond between hand and mind, a privileged and preferred agent of wording, of verbal transmutation of the world and the poet's emotional response to it. The poem opens with these lines:

Mon doigt saigne  
Je t'écris  
Avec

and continues:

Ma main rouge est un mot  
Un appel bref où palpite un sanglot <sup>97</sup>

The hand thus becomes a special part of the self to which the poet is obliged to 'entrust' things, as Reverdy puts it in a later poem entitled 'Tendresse'. <sup>98</sup> Ideally, this entrustment of special responsibility to the hand will occasion a gathering together of what may otherwise collapse in pieces, as we observe in the poem 'Plus d'atmosphère': "Dans le jardin l'arbre pourrait tomber/Une main rassemble les branches/Et les serre comme un bouquet". <sup>99</sup> And, not uncommonly, Reverdy may speak, similarly, now of the hand's moulding of form, of an illuminated shaping of "les formes de l'air"; <sup>100</sup> now of the arm's vigorous gesture of assembly and creation of a décor that is at once natural and antinatural, and whose components reveal a richly sensuous concreteness whilst managing to create a space "où les signaux sont plus loin que le monde". <sup>101</sup>

That such activity is the ideal and imaginatively privileged activity of hands that are 'functioning' well and freely is a point that needs little emphasis. The short collection of immediately post-war

poems entitled Bois vert underlines quite decisively such a fact by drawing attention to the dilemmas that may beset the 'Reverdyan hand' on occasion.<sup>102</sup> In these poems we read of "la détresse infinie qui me liait les mains"; of the hand's dilatory, lagging gesture; of the emptiness of hands and their parched and starving condition; of the defencelessness of hands that remain "sans abri".<sup>103</sup> Despite the fact that these poems remain bathed in an atmosphere of muted yet continuing determination, despite the fact that Reverdy may still tenuously couple together the image of gold and the notion of "la forme des mains",<sup>104</sup> Bois vert leaves a distinct overall impression of the diminished power of the hand. No longer does Reverdy feel and imagine that the hand can hold and seize with the same vigour expressed elsewhere. No longer is the same having, the same possession, brought about. Desire is worsened to hunger in this collection and the emptiness of the hand is associated, via the image of 'lost blood', with a nothingness that evokes not only creative barrenness, but the absolute nothingness of death's finality. The hand continues to be, perhaps, an image of potential seizing and having, but it is now imagined in something akin to its 'original', natural imperfection, reduced as it is, at this time of terrible dearth and loss, to remaining this side of attainment and accomplishment.

#### Dream ...

There are a number of early notes in Le Gant de crin which set out fairly uncompromisingly Reverdy's attitude towards the dream conceived of as a possible channel of advance and means of human attainment. In one such note, for example, the dream is described as "un tunnel qui passe sous la réalité. C'est un égout d'eau claire, mais c'est un égout".<sup>105</sup> Although Reverdy ascribes to the dream a certain quality of limpidity, his main contention is clearly of a disparaging nature and

echoes the rough language of the early poem 'Horizon' where "le rêve est un jambon/Lourd/Qui pend au plafond".<sup>106</sup> Moreover, Reverdy's appreciation of "le rêve du sommeil" remains, in fact, essentially unchanged.<sup>107</sup> As a channel of advance and journeying it tends to lead nowhere, as Reverdy suggests in Le Livre de mon bord. "Cul-de-sac du rêve", he declares, "au fond duquel vous envahit un tel dégoût, que l'on se retourne éperdu vers la réalité et qu'on lui trouve, quelle qu'elle soit, bonne mine, une chair ferme, une rude santé".<sup>108</sup> As this note serves partly to underline, Reverdy is often led to contrast dream and reality, and, in the context of a negative evaluation of the former's own phantasmagorical offerings, prefers the rough, firm substance of the latter. We shall now look rather more closely at the logic of this preference and then turn our attention to Reverdy's admiration for a special kind of dreaming, one especially reserved for the poet, where reality may be accommodated and, indeed, provide such a dream with that degree of tempering and hardening so vital to its composition.

In an interesting passage of En Vrac Reverdy distinguishes between the elsewhere little analysed notion of Rousseauesque rêverie and the dream proper. According to Reverdy's conception of rêverie, the mind continues to play an important, though non-creative and perhaps somewhat indolent role. "[La sensibilité] s'émeut rarement avec intensité", Reverdy announces.<sup>109</sup> In the case of the sleeper's dream, however, the reverse is true: "c'est la sensibilité presque seule qui est en jeu -- d'où cette liberté, ces décalages fantastiques, ce désordre exaltant et aussi la violence de l'émotion dans la joie du beau rêve comme dans l'angoisse du cauchemar".<sup>110</sup> It is clear from these observations pertaining to oneiric activity that Reverdy is by no means insensitive to the marvellous exoticism in which the dream unfolds its particular

(ir)reality. And yet such exoticism does not finally seduce Reverdy the creative poet. As, for example, his writings on the image reveal, Reverdy may well recognize the 'marvellous' and 'magical' dimension of the image's appeal,<sup>111</sup> but he refuses the excessively oppositional image, for its 'brutality' or fantastic quality denotes a snapping of the taut line covering the distance between the image's two poles.<sup>112</sup> Where the distance becomes too great, the image's desirably tense structure is overstrained, the relationship between the poles loses its justesse and the 'third' realm which is the image proper fades into the mere phantasmagorical. The image, like the poem itself, demands an appreciable, intuitable order. The dream may exalt and reveal an astonishing degree of 'imaginative' freedom, but such freedom is not at the disposal of the dreamer.<sup>113</sup> Just as the activity of the sensibility is deemed gratuitous, the dream's freedom is fraught with the problems of anarchy.<sup>114</sup> The freedom offered by the dream is not his, but belongs, as it were, to the dream itself. Man is dispossessed and impotent.<sup>115</sup> The being enjoyed in the dream is beyond the control and consideration of the mind: "On ne pense pas, en rêve", Reverdy argues in En Vrac, " -- on est. On est à la fois d'une façon incomplète, confuse et absolue".<sup>116</sup> In one respect the involvement of the dreamer is total and absolute. And yet such being is defective, its bizarre 'purity' is excessive and obstructs what is for Reverdy the crucial involvement of thought and will, the desire man has to deploy his own inner strength and powers so that they may experience more firmly and on a more equal footing the resistance of primary reality.

If, however, the avenue opened up by le rêve du sommeil appears cluttered with obstacles, Reverdy is able to recognize at an early stage of his poetic and intellectual development that the notions of dream and

poetry need not, indeed, from a certain point of view, must not, be kept apart. In Self-defence where we find collected a good number of important aesthetic considerations, we read:

Tous les rêveurs ne sont pas poètes, mais il y a des poètes qui sont des rêveurs. Le rêve est stérile chez ceux qui ne sont pas poètes. Le rêve du poète est fécond. Il tient lieu chez lui de ce qu'on appelle chez d'autres la pensée. Le rêve est donc une forme spéciale de la pensée. La pensée c'est l'esprit qui pénètre. Le rêve l'esprit qui se laisse pénétrer. Il est peut-être bon que l'esprit du poète se laisse pénétrer plus qu'il ne pénètre. 117

The poet's dream, in contrast with all other forms of dream, is fecund, fertile, productive. Refusing to remain locked within its own forces, it gives birth to something. Unlike the dream of sleep, it is characterized not by the anarchic play of the sensibility, but by a particular kind of activity of the mind. For the poet's dream is a special form of thought; it is the mind functioning in a particular mode of operation and showing itself to be every bit as much welcoming and admissive, as it is penetrating and apprehending. This is not quite the moment to indulge in a full analysis of Reverdy's conception of the process of creative thought, though we shall soon be able to provide such analysis. Let it suffice, here, to indicate that the poet's dream, whilst relying to some considerable degree upon an in-coming of substance, nevertheless exercises a mental control that is absent in pure oneiric activity. 118

What it is urgent to stress in the context of the basic contrast between pure oneiricism and poetic dreaming, is the fact that for Reverdy it is the latter that is the most 'real', the most authentic and the most difficult to 'execute' of the two. 119 "Le rêve jouit, aujourd'hui, d'une faveur étrange dans les lettres", Reverdy remarks in a note in Le Gant de crin, "[ mais ] combien y en a-t-il, parmi ceux qui le prônent, qui soient de vrais rêveurs? Bien peu, sans doute. Et tant mieux pour

eux".<sup>120</sup> To allow oneself to be appealed to by the stupefying reality of the dream is one thing. To be a 'real dreamer' is another and it is such a state that finally characterizes the true poet for Reverdy. Whilst no doubt addressed to certain of the surrealists of the epoch, remarks such as these, as can be sensed even from this short text, are by no means intended for those whose integrity he never ceased to admire. Reverdy's letters to Breton testify to this and it is in one of them that Reverdy strongly reaffirms the degree to which his own poetry has arisen from and continues to be governed by the subliminal activity of poetic dreaming as he understands it: "Je suis, plus que tout autre, je crois, un auteur inconscient. C'est moi qui, extrêmement jeune encore, au collège ou en étant à peine sorti, disais à mes camarades: 'Il n'y a de réel que le rêve.' Je ne vivais que par lui d'ailleurs. Et ce n'est que grâce à lui que j'ai pu sortir du silence beaucoup plus tard".<sup>121</sup> Such a dream as that evoked here is thus at the very root of poetic and existential endeavour. As pure 'hypothesis' it permits the aspiring poet a continuing in the face of an otherwise unmanageable world;<sup>122</sup> as praxis it enables silence to become poetic communication, nothing to become something. The poet's dream is thus a sine qua non of his poetry and, in consequence, "la vie du poète est un rêve perpétuel".<sup>123</sup>

But if we are now in a position to see something of how the poet dreams, where does such dreaming hope to lead, what does it seek to accomplish? To answer this, let us begin by allowing Reverdy to complete the thought articulated above. "Oui, la vie du poète est un rêve perpétuel", he argues before finally clarifying, " -- il rêve de réalité. Son rêve est une hypothèse de vie, comme l'hypothèse du savant est un rêve scientifique".<sup>124</sup> The note is particularly interesting inasmuch as it evokes, in typically cryptic fashion, the basic tenets of Reverdy's

aesthetic theory: the poet dreams of a reality that will correspond to his innermost existential needs. His dream hypothesises and aims to create another world or zone in which the conditions of life will be transformed. Moreover, the note points obliquely to the necessity of understanding the frequently dual implication of the word reality in Reverdy's writings. When Reverdy says, in his celebrated statement, that "le poète est, dans une position difficile et souvent périlleuse, à l'intersection de deux plans au tranchant cruellement acéré, celui du rêve et celui de la réalité", <sup>125</sup> the notion of reality may be felt to be firmly established as a crucial component of the nature/art dialectic: reality here is nature. But, at the same time, as Reverdy shows in the subsequent elaboration of his thought and as we have suggested already in our examination of his aesthetic theory, the poet's dream is not simplistically opposed to the reality of nature. On the contrary it seeks to come into contact with it at the deeper levels of its being; it seeks to touch "la réalité profonde" of primary reality <sup>126</sup> and then establish, in the work of art, another, secondary form of reality which, whilst moving away from primary reality, will have retained and transformed its most profoundly significant features. When Reverdy declares, therefore, "rêver, c'est fuir", <sup>127</sup> it is reasonable to conclude that all Reverdyan dreaming, whether poetic or oneiric, is an escape, a flight away from reality. But we must remember, too, that the poet's dream is one that first of all confronts, embraces and even plunders reality -- only then does it move away, with its spoils, to permit a full blossoming of the hypothetical. <sup>128</sup> Reality as nature is thus 'held' and 'touched' so that, as Reverdy puts it, the dream may be 'tempered' and become 'durable'. <sup>129</sup>

The poet's dream, the ideal Reverdyan dream, thus hopes, we may conclude, to achieve two almost superimposed ends. On the one hand, it strives to establish a transcendent realm or form of life, a 'reality' in keeping with the poet's vision and desire of something other than what is offered in primary experience. On the other hand, the poet shuns the pure phantasmagoria of a dream world completely beyond his grasp and control; his dream works rather, as it were, from and yet with reality, attempting to cope with its rough, resistant matter so that a fuller and more intimate self-world integration may ultimately occur. In the final analysis, the Reverdyan dream hopes to achieve a seemingly impossible and quite miraculous marriage of two forms of reality and it thus provides a channel whereby man may potentially attain a deeper and more meaningful contact with the primary reality with which he forever maintains an appreciative and yet anguished relationship.

#### ... Mind

We have already seen in the above discussion of the Reverdyan conception of dream that, in its ideally imagined form, the poet's dream is considered to be a special form of thought, a particular mode of functioning of the mind. Dream and mind are thus intimately related.<sup>129a</sup> However, Reverdy's appreciation of the operations of the mind is rather more developed than this stated relationship implies. The rather more detailed examination of Reverdy's conception of the mind's role and mode of functioning which is therefore undertaken, will involve, firstly, an establishment of the considerable significance attached to the mind in the context of art and being; and, secondly, a demonstration of what is for Reverdy the important fact that the mind's working vacillates between passivity and activity.

To begin with, the mind represents, in the eyes of Reverdy, a splendid means of journeying towards either specifically designated or vaguely intuited points of attainment. It is indeed perhaps the finest channel of advance available. "On va à tout par l'esprit", Reverdy continues to maintain as late as 1956, "et aussi bien à la matière".<sup>130</sup> Via the mind one may approach and even reach things. As Reverdy argues in his essay 'La plus longue présence' on Laurens, the mind offers perhaps "le plus court chemin de nous aux choses".<sup>131</sup> It is at once a privileged and vital mode of apprehension of the things of the world about us and, as Reverdy explains in somewhat Mallarméan style in the same essay, "[un moyen] d'échafauder d'ingénieux prétextes habiles à les remplacer".<sup>132</sup> This is not to suggest that the mind functions without difficulty with respect to primary reality which it seeks to dominate. In many poems and essays Reverdy gives voice to the mind's weakness before reality<sup>133</sup> or to the intensity of the struggle undergone in what he once called the mind's 'ulcerated revenge' on matter.<sup>134</sup> And elsewhere Reverdy shows that he always remains fully aware of the sub-transcendent quality of the mind's productions, of the fact that the mind is only "un reflet inconstant" of Mind or Spirit, and, as such, is condemned, despite what is otherwise viewed as its magnificent potential, to a finally limited, relative functional inferiority.<sup>135</sup>

That Reverdy should go so far in his 'criticism' of the power of the mind demonstrates his need for lucidity and his natural tendency to express himself with a certain mixture of irony, bitterness and cynicism. But it does not prevent Reverdy from repeatedly affirming the crucial role of the mind in art. It is the mind, for example, that permits the poetic image to surge forth as "une création pure",<sup>136</sup> for the mind alone is capable of grasping the relationships miraculously established between the

image's poles.<sup>137</sup> It is the mind, too, that furnishes "la matière obscure et abondante dont une partie clarifiée se condensera en mots qui composeront l'oeuvre".<sup>138</sup> Man perceives and takes initial cognizance of things via what Reverdy terms "l'intelligence". Man's sensibility is moved, set in motion, plunged into emotion at the time of taking cognizance. But, Reverdy strongly concludes, "il n'y a pas de réalité artistique sans esprit".<sup>139</sup> Whilst the mind clearly does not function in a vacuum, but profits rather from the percepts of man's basic consciousness and the sensations and emotions that, as it were, feed upon them,<sup>140</sup> its role is of paramount importance in the creative act. If to be without a heart is to be hollow;<sup>141</sup> if the heart is a symbol of warmth and potential sublimeness; if, therefore, poetry without heart is clearly inconceivable, Reverdy nevertheless unhesitatingly gives the pride of place in the poetic equation to the mind. It is the mind that makes the great artist and distinguishes him from those who are merely skilled or talented.<sup>142</sup>

From the above evidence we may already be tempted to deduce that, for Reverdy, the mind is frequently cast in the role of final judge and arbiter. The implication is that it sifts and selects data fed to it and there is no doubt that this idea of the controlling, disciplining gesture of the mind appeals considerably to Reverdy. "Il n'y a pas d'art sans discipline", he argues in Self-defence, "il n'y a pas d'art personnel sans discipline personnelle".<sup>143</sup> For him art is a "royaume [...] où la discipline de l'esprit est la seule qui compte".<sup>144</sup> Out of chaos -- a chaos that is inherent both to nature and to man's immediate involvement in nature -- the mind seeks to create an order.<sup>145</sup> Picasso is admired and recognized as a genius by Reverdy for the role that mental conception plays in his work.<sup>146</sup> His art, like that of Reverdy himself, is seen as a domain in which the mind operates a critical gathering that

runs contrary to the tendency towards dispersal and incoherence found in nature. In the midst of the colour and turbulence of sensation and emotion, the mind introduces a certain calm, a certain coolness,<sup>147</sup> and strives to establish an atmosphere in which a just equilibrium between the passionately felt and the rather more coldly intellectualised may be achieved in the service of art.<sup>148</sup>

It is important, however, to appreciate the degree to which Reverdy's conception of mind and thought refuses to limit itself to some narrowly encased definition. However strongly the idea of the mind's critically selective, actively grasping, and 'voluntary' mode of operation may appeal to Reverdy,<sup>149</sup> we must not overlook the fact that his aesthetics is equally imbued with notions of the mind's somewhat passively assimilating function and the role played by the arbitrary and the spontaneous in creative 'selection'. We have already referred to a generally neglected passage from Self-defence in which Reverdy finally remarks that "la pensée c'est l'esprit qui pénètre, le rêve l'esprit qui se laisse pénétrer. Il est peut-être bon que l'esprit du poète se laisse pénétrer plus qu'il ne pénètre".<sup>150</sup> From this we may make a number of observations. Firstly, the operation of the mind may be said to be based upon a two-way movement, out-going, penetrating and appropriating, it is true, but, equally, permissively admitting, receptively assimilating. Secondly, the two aspects of the mind's movement are dialectically joined and seem to function in a mutually complementary fashion. Thirdly, the functioning of the mind is a subject of analysis which Reverdy understands to be fraught with difficulty<sup>151</sup> -- hence, despite his seemingly trenchant style of articulation, the not unfamiliar and guarded 'perhaps' when it comes to determining whether the mind's activity in poetic creation is rather more assimilating than it is positively penetrating ( -- a

hesitation which in fact once more tends to reinforce the notion of their interlocking and complementary mode of functioning). In Le Livre de mon bord, in effect, Reverdy, speaking of the creation of the image, refers to "l'acquiescement immédiat et sans réserve de l'esprit".<sup>152</sup> There is an acquiescing of the mind, a movement at once passive and active, accepting and dominating in its approval. It is as if the mind intuitively agrees with and approves of what arrives upon its threshold in a spontaneous and magical fashion.<sup>153</sup> In a letter to André Breton who had questioned the possibility of the mind's seizing of the image's relationship in his 1924 Manifeste du surréalisme, Reverdy clarifies somewhat his conception of seizing by declaring: "Je n'ai jamais prétendu que les rapports perçus par l'esprit (quelle part de l'esprit? ni la raison ni la pensée) l'étaient consciemment".<sup>154</sup> It is for this reason, indeed, that Reverdy terms himself "un auteur inconscient".<sup>155</sup> He fully recognizes the arbitrary, irrational and absurd dimension of the image's constitution, together with the fact that the mind is obliged to carry out its disciplined approval in conditions of chance, speculation and unforeseeability.<sup>156</sup> What is happening, therefore, in all acts of artistic creation, it appears to Reverdy, is as follows: although the mind does not specifically summon, it may initiate a general volitional drive, a certain 'intentionality' directed towards the unformed artistic goal or construct; but the mind waits, waits for such a construct (image or any other figurative, imaginative element) to form itself, waits for the unforeseeable, anomalous creative entity to arrive -- because the crucial riches of chance bring themselves, they are not brought. It is at this point, unspecifiable though real, that the mind's attente may be converted into an activity which is, certainly, one of seizure and out-going domination, yet one that remains intuitive, beyond normal rationality, operating

at an essentially subconscious, 'unthinking' level.<sup>157</sup> Perception thus does occur at this point, as Reverdy's letter to Breton shows, but the mind is neither operating a mere a posteriori approval (the kind of approval a critic might give to art's structures, for example), nor functioning via an act of fully conscious apprehension.<sup>158</sup> Its seizing, however, we may state in conclusion, is definitely in accordance with criteria: those of justesse, of rightness, appropriateness. And it is precisely because the 'Reverdyan' mind has such criteria that it may intuitively reject or pass over potential, but contextually unacceptable artistic material, just as it may seize and accept what is contextually 'just' and right.<sup>159</sup> The fact of this potential rejection or 'refusal' to grant 'admission' to what offers itself, underlines, therefore, it need hardly be stressed, the whole Reverdyan notion of the mind's vital decision-making in the creative act and should be understood to dispel any impression of mental idleness or uncritical acceptance which might possibly come to mind when we read of what Reverdy holds to be the poet's fundamental passivity.<sup>160</sup> On the other hand it can now be seen that, for Reverdy, the mind offers a means of access to things that forces us to understand the notions of advance and journeying as involving not only the possibility of an active, out-going movement towards things, but also the necessity of 'passively' allowing a coming in of things upon the self, a movement of phenomena that is uncontrollable though broadly instigated by the poet's volition. Advance and journeying are characterised in this way by the kind of two-way movement we have described and are appreciated by Reverdy as involving any kind of self-engaging motion which passively and actively seeks to bring about contact and solve the poet's initial, primary problem of self-world separation.

### III. The Vertical Dimension

In an entry from Reverdy's last book of private notes, En Vrac, the poet observes that "il y a toujours eu, dans tous les arts, une double tentation à la bifurcation des pentes: la pente à gravir vers la hauteur sans air, l'espoir et la lumière (type Mallarmé) et la pente à descendre dans le gouffre obscur du sang, des sensations et de la chair (type Rimbaud). Et le même artiste peut être à la fois sollicité aussi impérieusement par les deux".<sup>161</sup> The observation is of capital importance and, of course, sets the stage for the investigations we shall now proceed to make into the character and significance of Reverdy's imagination of both the upper and lower spaces of the vertical plane. For, as the above journal entry suggests in typically oblique fashion, Reverdy himself is powerfully drawn, from his point of original, natural anchorage, in both directions of the vertical dimension. If, therefore, he is capable of declaring emphatically that "tout le bien ne me vient que d'en haut/La puissance et la joie/Rien de la terre",<sup>162</sup> he is also conscious of the poet's need to explore more viscerally, as it were, to penetrate below the surface of reality (as it affects both self and world), as this early text from Le Gant de crin amply demonstrates: "Le poète est un plongeur qui va chercher dans les plus intimes profondeurs de sa conscience les matériaux sublimes qui viendront se cristalliser quand sa main les portera au jour".<sup>163</sup> Both upper and lower extremities of space exercise, then, a powerful attraction upon the Reverdyan imagination, an attraction which no doubt reflects, to a certain degree at least, the antagonistic pulls made upon Reverdy by, on the one hand, intellection, spirituality and imagination, and, on the other, sensation and emotion.<sup>164</sup> However, throughout our examination of the principal imaginative motifs of the two essential spaces of the vertical plane, it will be important

not to overlook two factors. First, the generally implicit presence of a 'third' zone or space whose significance tends to be shrouded by the En Vrac observation quoted above. This 'third' space is, in fact, the earth or world itself, or rather the level of original, natural anchorage and initial functioning from which vertical movement in either direction may occur, but to which it implicitly remains in some significant way imaginatively related. Second, movement towards both the upper and lower spaces to which the poet is drawn, is yet another powerful mode of figuring that Reverdyan gesture of advance and journeying which concerns us throughout this part of our study. In short, both upward movements and downward movements are movements that correspond broadly, though in different ways, to the same overall notion of desirable movement towards needed (ontological/poetic) fulfilment and attainment.

#### The Vertical Dimension: Upper Space

In our examination of upper space in the vertical dimension of Reverdy's imagination, we shall first of all seek to characterize those phenomena whose attraction is particularly strong, namely the sky, the sun and the stars. We shall then proceed to survey those modes of movement that especially appeal to Reverdy's vertical imagination -- rising, soaring, jaillissement -- and that, in various ways, point to related aspects of Reverdy's general conception of the movement towards an attainment of significant and desired goals.

#### The Sky

In the earlier and middle periods of Reverdy's creative writing in particular, the sky constitutes a most powerful and obsessive figure of that zone of functioning and being to which Reverdy never quite ceases (and certainly until the Solesmes crisis, had barely hesitated) to aspire.<sup>165</sup> It is during these periods that the sky may most positively be held to be

"le ciel [qui] me soutient", <sup>166</sup> a sustaining, supportive force where the poet may seek nourishment and refreshment and where he may obtain that degree of purification seemingly unavailable elsewhere. "Le ciel où je lave mes yeux tous les matins", Reverdy avers in 'Horizon'; "le plaisir d'attendre le ciel -- cette baignoire du pauvre", he affirms in 'Rides de givre'. <sup>167</sup> Moreover, the sky commonly retains a meridian blueness and a gleaming limpidity that appeal to a poet born in Narbonne and that remain forever associated with a certain vague notion of ideality to which one might aspire ultimately to return (from the relative gloom of the north -- Paris and Solesmes). <sup>168</sup> Such a blueness, natural though it is, may assume, in turn, imaginatively, a certain angelic quality -- "Tout luit dans les mains bleues qui soutiennent le ciel -- les mains des anges", we read in a Flaques de verre poem --, so that sky becomes heaven and movement "vers le ciel" may tend at times to become imaginatively fused with movement "vers la foi". <sup>169</sup>

However, we should by no means be tempted to apply a simple equation such as sky = heaven, however appropriate it may well seem to be in certain contexts, to Reverdy's overall conception of the sky and movement towards it. As we have already had occasion to observe, it is sufficient to realise what is for Reverdy the imaginative proximity of the two 'solutions' of God and Art to the existential dilemma besetting the poet. <sup>170</sup> In fact, most pertinently, the foreword to Flaques de verre, in which volume the sky-heaven analogy appears quite strongly, reminds us that Reverdy's valuation of the sky is much broader and certainly evokes in an equally powerful fashion the notion of the realm of poetry itself. To aspire to, to be drawn and orientated towards the sky, is to feel and respond to the magnetic pull of poetry, every bit as much as it may connote Reverdy's 'vertical' religious attraction: "Et ce ciel,

tourmenté et changeant, qui se reflète sur les routes, à peine dessinées, de l'avenir, dans les flaques, ce ciel qui attire nos mains, ce ciel soyeux, caressé tant de fois comme une étoffe -- derrière les vitres brisées, la poésie, sans mots et sans idées, qui se découvre". <sup>171</sup> The sky may thus become equally a potent metaphor for poetry itself, for that special zone whose light attracts and stimulates the growth of the poet-tree, <sup>172</sup> that zone towards which the poet projects himself and the world, that zone which, whilst inevitably depending crucially upon the words of any individual poem, may be also said to float, significantly, "entre les lignes" and thus exist somehow "sans mots et sans idées", linking and supporting the individual structures of the poem rather than being specifically and definitely imprisoned within them. <sup>173</sup> For Reverdy, then, the sky may be all this, a marvellous phenomenon which it is pleasurable to wait for, stimulating to move towards and gratifying finally to caress. Moreover, we should note in conclusion that, whilst it is a zone whose blueness and translucence may be particularly attractive, the sky may in fact be "tourmenté et changeant". What perhaps permits it to hold so effectively its imaginative allurements, is the fact that it perfectly represents a place of openness and at least recurrent potential where the poet may engage in a form of dialogue and contact otherwise denied him in his purely immanent, terrestrial encounters. As Reverdy remarks in Le Livre de mon bord, assembled and published, of course, long after the religious crisis, "la terre est une tête au visage invisible et fermé. Le ciel est un visage, toujours ouvert, qui rit ou qui se fâche, mais en quoi l'homme trouve toujours à qui parler". <sup>174</sup> With whatever symbolism we may care loosely to connote the sky, therefore, the latter most certainly continues to be characterized as a figure of possibility, an image of that other space that offers

something, however minimal -- something unavailable where one is, 'naturally'. "Prends tout ce qui te tombe du ciel", Reverdy proposes in a late note from En Vrac, "et de ce qui n'en tombera pas, tu te passeras d'autant mieux".<sup>175</sup> The earlier tone of a rather fierce and radiant aspiration may have moderated between 1916 and 1956, but the sky, that marvellous upper and other space, still retains a certain fragile, magical promise, one perhaps otherwise absent from the poet's existence.

### The Sun

The already privileged space of the sky is populated by two other phenomena -- the sun and stars -- to which we must give particular attention because of the special role they play in Reverdy's imaginative scheme of things. Like the sky, only more focally, they stand against the forces of night and blackness, and attract Reverdy's imagination, to a certain degree at least, because of their lucent, lambent qualities. We shall speak of the Reverdyan sun first.

In 'La fin du soir', from Sources du vent, Reverdy evokes his vision of the evening sun's light flickering between the leaves of trees lining an avenue:

Soleil  
Merveille  
C'est une danseuse irréelle  
Sur le bout des arbres du boulevard<sup>176</sup>

Reverdy thus presents the sun as a phenomenon that is special by reason of its marvellousness.<sup>177</sup> It is, in effect, marvellous in a mundane, quotidian, but still important sense: it is a wonderful, resplendent thing that makes the poet rejoice. But, in addition, it is marvellous in a more profoundly aesthetic sense evident in the above verses: the sun becomes a figure of stupendous, prodigious and therefore unnatural, unreal movement. In this latter sense, the sun is an image of so much

that poetry itself represents, a figure of poetic figuration itself, in fact. In some respects this is not surprising -- every image is a figure not only of particular relationships, but also of the mode of establishing such relationships, namely imagination or figuration -- , but it is of particular note that the sky, the sun and, as we shall see, the star, all images of upper space, are specifically associated with poetry and its surreal, transcendent, 'other-world' mode of functioning. We should not, however, allow the sun's everyday, purely sensuous wondrousness to be occulted. No doubt it is quite significantly from this 'level' of solar marvellousness that the poet's imaginative use of the sun draws its particular aptness and strength. Certainly, it is very frequently by this very 'real' and 'cosmic' functionality of the sun that Reverdy's imagination is much attracted in its gestures of poetic exploitation and elaboration.

Many of Reverdy's poems and other texts speak of the soothing, caressing capacity of the sun.<sup>178</sup> Upon first arrival in Paris on 3rd October, 1910, for example, Reverdy is gripped by the desire to "retourner chez moi au merveilleux soleil d'automne qui, la veille encore, me caressait de ses rayons".<sup>179</sup> The poet is clearly sensitive to the very real sensation of pleasurable and extraordinary contact that is possible between the sun and himself. This is evident in an En Vrac journal entry where we read of the sensuous refreshment the sun may afford, "le soleil [qui] ruisselait sur mon corps, un de ces miraculeux soleils de février déjà pleins de printemps".<sup>180</sup> It is evident too in a poem such as 'Rides du temps',<sup>181</sup> where the poet tells of the magnetic attraction and sustaining force of the sun in its relationship with man ("Le soleil est un aimant/Qui nous soutient" -- it thus resembles the sky in another important respect) and where he finally expresses, this time with a certain

sensuality, the notion of a fundamental biological response of man to the sun's fully emerging magnetism ("La pluie ne tombe plus/Ferme ton parapluie/Que je voie tes jambes/S'épanouir au soleil"). The Reverdyan sun thus has the capacity to stimulate maturation and growth, to promote a desired blossoming of man as of all living phenomena of the world. It offers a kiss of life, the possibility of a miraculous and joyous creation to all that can respond to its gift of life and love. "La plante s'ouvre et reçoit le soleil sur les lèvres/Le miel/Tout devient gai", we read in 'Période hors-texte'.<sup>182</sup> To extinguish the sun, then, as Reverdy's boxer-poet finally does in La Peau de l'homme, could only derive its logic from an explosive desire to avenge oneself upon the world and its hostile and cruel inhabitants, to refuse them and it the life and love they tend to withdraw from the poet.<sup>183</sup> It remains a fierce and spectacular gesture of frustration and despair, however, for although the poet has grown to vast cosmic proportions and is, presumably, capable of living without the world and the sun, the gesture would seem to ensure, nevertheless, a final and devastating rupture of human communication, a destruction of all potential mutual love and contact.<sup>184</sup> What remains certain is that if Reverdy has chosen to extinguish the sun in particular, to wreak havoc in anguish, it is precisely because the sun represents so forcefully in his imagination that nucleus of life-giving energy, that marvellous conveyor of being, without which the poet's enemies cannot hope to survive. The extent to which the sun continues, with the sky and its stars, to constitute a focal image of some intensely aspired to point of luminous attainment, is amply and most beautifully illustrated by the closing lines of 'Hommes de main Hommes de peine' in the post-Second World War collection Bois vert:

Il y avait au front de tous les hommes une lumière  
 Une étoile vivante au creux de chaque nuit  
 Un astre camouflé au fond du lourd ciel d'encre  
 Quel vol de main saura rallumer cette lampe  
 Repolir l'étoile et le ciel  
 Desserrer l'étai de ma tempe  
 Et rouvrir dans mon coeur une porte au soleil 185

If ever the compelling imaginative force of any phenomenon was evident in any poem, surely that of the star, the sky and the sun is so here. Throughout Reverdy's work, in fact, there can be no doubt that the sun remains powerfully evocative of all that Reverdy's nostalgia and imaginative aspirations tend perpetually towards and whose marvellous attainment they crave.

### Stars

The importance, to Reverdy, of the star as an imaginative force is, of course, easily demonstrated from the verses of the Bois vert poem given above. It is a precious, gleaming entity whose proper functioning is synonymous with life itself. It is, in particular, this preciousness of the star that Reverdy so delightfully emphasizes in the conclusion to the second part of his conte 'Au bord de l'ombre', entitled 'Le marchand d'étoiles':

je me suis fait marchand d'étoiles.

J'ai profité de ma taille plus haute que nature et de la longueur vraiment extraordinaire de mes bras.

La nuit, je dors ou je regarde passer les gens normaux au bord de l'ombre. Puis je vais les [= les étoiles] surprendre pendant le jour quand elles dorment. Il y en a qui sont enchevêtrées dans les plus hauts nuages, d'autres très chaudes et plus agiles qui glissent en me brûlant les doigts. Je les vends toutes vivantes aux poètes riches qui les emportent encore tièdes sous leur toit. 186

Whether one is an 'affluent' poet able to purchase one's stars from such an astonishing and specialised merchant or a poorer one presumably required to assume the gigantic proportions and emulate the amazing feats

of capture of the 'marchand d'étoiles' himself, the essential point of significance -- apart from the light, yet finely appropriate fancifulness of the passage -- is that the star is greatly valued largely because of the immense difficulty of its acquisition.<sup>187</sup> It is thus a special object of attention, prized for its strangely fragile and delicate concentration of light, a phenomenon to whose possession and emulation the poet aspires, so that, "quand le poète s'allume il peut être comme un reflet d'étoile dans le buisson".<sup>188</sup> His aim and hope is that he may at least vaguely, palely rival the astral brilliance he so instinctively values.

Many of Reverdy's texts show the poet watching for the waxing of the star, admiring its radiance or noting its waning. "Une nouvelle étoile allait paraître/Là-haut", Reverdy may observe, keen to spot "la première allumée dans le ciel". Or he may speak of "un astre [qui] rayonne", point to "le clignement des étoiles/Les signes/Par-dessus les toits", or declare that "sur le point de mourir, la dernière étoile regarde encore de son oeil à demi fermé".<sup>189</sup> The poet's gaze seems constantly "levé vers les étoiles", directed towards a verification of their birth and death, their degree of vitality, almost as if such factors depended upon his own capacity for poetic illumination. And, in fact, there would seem to be little doubt that, for Reverdy, the special light of the star is esteemed precisely because it is analogous, and even superior in an exemplary way, to the poet's own light, the light he seeks to cause to radiate from his poetry. In this perspective, the poet's grasping after and seizure of the star, as expressed, for example, in 'Le marchand d'étoiles' or in 'Pêcheurs d'étoiles' (which terminates "c'est peut-être dans ce filet de mots ce soir que se prendra/Cet astre lumineux sur le vaisseau qui va"),<sup>190</sup> is a delicate figure of poetic

seizing and attainment itself, offering as it does a perfect image of the poet's act of possession of a precious, yet evasive light from an other world.

We shall now concentrate our examination on the character and significance of certain imaginative motifs pertaining specifically to the notion of upward movement as a means of achievement and fulfilment. Our discussion will be divided into two parts, the first treating what may be held to be Reverdy's conception of a more deliberate and painstaking ascensional movement, the second dealing with ascension as a more spectacularly energetic manifestation of the poet's will to attain.

#### Rising and Climbing

Reverdy reveals on numerous occasions, both in his poetry and his prose, the reasons for his being so attracted by, and his attempting, in consequence, to rise towards, upper space. The mind or spirit, crucial component of man and poet as it is, "cherche sa véritable atmosphère en haut. Il ne veut ni s'amoindrir ni s'abaisser. [...] Il a été créé pour s'élever".<sup>191</sup> To permit and promote such a self-elevation is therefore to permit the attainment and exploration of a special upper space of oneself. To raise oneself up or to reach this upper space within oneself, is, as the poem 'Voyage' suggests, to allow oneself a superior vision and to attain to a 'tighter' and more felicitous spiritual functioning with a concomitant reduction of the heart's restricting influence: "En s'élevant il fait plus froid/On y voit mieux/L'esprit se serre/Le coeur se terre".<sup>192</sup> The Reverdyan logic of self-elevation is, indeed, multi-faceted: it may lead to truth, to the sky, to God in heaven, to fine vision and judgment, to "l'arête sanglante de la conquête", to that dangerous but coveted pinnacle of achievement to which the poet aspires so much.<sup>193</sup> But, always, it incorporates within itself the

concept of what Reverdy once called "un saut vers un meilleur emblème", a movement towards an improved (aesthetic and/or ethical) space or locus of being.<sup>194</sup> Ascension is thus construed by Reverdy as betterment, self-betterment, a mode of self-creation which it is the poet's duty to stimulate and allow to flourish. In a letter written in his sixties, for example, Reverdy firmly proclaims the poet's "devoir de sculpter soi-même sa propre vie, d'en élever le faite assez haut dans la lumière pour qu'elle s'en trouve justifiée".<sup>195</sup> If, therefore, a falling is, ultimately, imaginatively feasible -- as undoubtedly it is<sup>196</sup> --, for Reverdy it is clearly preferable to "tomber de plus haut".<sup>197</sup> For, at least, one will have 'done one's best', as Reverdy puts it in 'Détresse du sort',<sup>198</sup> one will have raised oneself up as high as possible towards a contact with the finer forms of oneself, and one will have learned to distinguish between the superior, what is truly worthy of attainment, and the humdrum, the trivial. "Il y a tout de même un avantage à revenir d'un but placé trop haut", Reverdy declares in Le Livre de mon bord, "c'est qu'on attache moins d'importance à ceux que l'on doit se contenter de poursuivre plus bas".<sup>199</sup>

The self-elevation or ascension the poet thus desires, for the best of reasons, is, however, unquestionably understood to be generally far from easy to accomplish. This fact is clearly mirrored by the frequent allusions in Reverdy's writings to rising as an act entailing effort, an act of arduous ascent. It is no doubt for reason of this particular conception of ascent that Reverdy speaks so commonly of "la rue qui monte", "le chemin qui monte", of an uphill, effort-laden task of attainment via a path perhaps beset with difficulty and intense strain<sup>200</sup> -- "ce sentier pavé de nacre", as Reverdy puts it in his Flaques de verre poem 'Vitesse des mots', "bordé de lanières d'algues, de buissons de corail qui commence

par une enseigne lumineuse où dansent des étoiles et qui monte, à travers les angoisses du coeur perfide, jusqu'au silence éternel qui parcourt l'étendue au-dessus des foudres et des menaces vaines de l'orage". <sup>201</sup>

As the following and closing line of the poem would seem to suggest ("La prière du soir le calme de la plaine"), the words being offered and ascending along this obstacle-ridden path are those of a 'prayer'. But, given the imaginative overlapping in Reverdy of the ethic and the aesthetic, the 'religious' or purely spiritual act and the creative act, such ascension as this, of prayer, should not be automatically read, it must again be noted, as a simple allusion to Reverdy's spiritual activity of the 1925-6 period. <sup>202</sup> In his poetry, after all, Reverdy is never an exponent of the simple, anecdotal discourse. In the poem 'Vitesse des mots', as always, he is, in the final analysis, writing a poem, a poem which is as much concerned with being a poem (and therefore with itself, its purely imaginative, figurative stuff), as it is with any experience, however impressive, that may have inspired it. This applies to Le Voleur de Talan, for example, or La Peau de l'homme, the second part of which, 'Le sonneur du couchant', whilst 'relating' the triumphant and magnificently capricious revenge of the almost crucified boxer-poet, is preceded by the following epigraph: "Le champ du signe. Le signe de la croix. Au croisement des routes, le chemin qui monte". <sup>203</sup> What it is important, at all events, to retain, is that in Reverdy's imagination of both spiritual and creative gestures of advance, the notion of rising or climbing is in fact well and most appropriately represented by the image of an arduous calvary. <sup>204</sup> "Il faut un terrible effort pour monter", Reverdy explains in a note in Le Gant de crin; "le chemin de la vérité est une pente", he declares in Risques et périls; and in Le Livre de mon bord we read his almost Pongian announcement that "la vie est une chose

grave" and that in consequence "il faut gravir".<sup>205</sup> Reverdyan ascension thus tends to demand effort, for it entails difficulty, whether the ascensional effort leads to some divine realisation or to creation of an artistic order. In the first instance, God, in Reverdy's view, will not come down to us, it is man's task to raise himself up in order to manifest his presence and toil before Him.<sup>206</sup> In the second case, too, although individual fragments of a poem may seem to come to the poet 'on their own wings' and although, in particular, "l'image semble venir miraculeusement d'en haut", effortlessly, it would appear<sup>207</sup> -- , nevertheless, Reverdy firmly maintains (and, indeed, almost prescribes) that "le poème doit se dresser, péniblement, d'en bas".<sup>208</sup> True creation, like true spirituality, demands very often an effort of ascension, an acceptance of difficulty and the will to overcome, to surmount.

#### Élan and Jaillissement

In assessing Reverdy's conception of upward vertical movement, it is very important to observe that, concomitantly with, and indeed despite, the powerful appeal to Reverdy's imagination of an act of somewhat dogged, laborious rising or climbing, the poet is singularly attracted by the paradoxical notion of a spontaneous, gushing movement which allows him to gain access to upper space in a less foreseeable and altogether more explosive fashion. Reverdyan élan is a sensation of a surging forth, of an essentially impulsive, instinctive or intuitive movement that is difficult to restrain. As the poem 'Souffle d'ouest' discreetly intimates, the poet's surging forth, like the movement of time or the wind, heeds no gesture of calming or curbing.<sup>209</sup> For the élan he experiences is, in fact, essentially related to what Reverdy thinks of as an existential or 'ontic' surging, part of "cet élan qui nous fait vivre".<sup>210</sup> Such a

movement works impetuously against the consciousness of death, attempting to establish on the contrary a condition of being that corresponds to the deeply felt, but obscure intuitions of the poet's élan. Reverdy thus understands the movement as one leading to some other level or "sphère de la vie", where happiness, freedom and light may become miraculously available. <sup>211</sup> In this regard, of course, the aims and interests of élan and ascensional effort merge, their difference residing in their apparently opposing, but perhaps, rather, complementary means of attainment. <sup>212</sup> It is important once again, moreover, to note that, whilst the Reverdyan élan may be construed as being directed towards an upper sphere of spiritual fulfilment, Reverdy's texts almost always avoid specifying the precise nature of the end space to which this élan will give him access. There is, in fact, no doubt that all ascensional movement is directed to an ideal zone which is, as we have seen, now spiritually connoted in a religious sense, now spiritually connoted in an artistic sense. It is of particular interest to note, in the latter regard, a passage from that truly fantastic conte 'La Maison hantée', which weaves together, throughout, threads of discreetly articulated religious and creative discourses. The passage at issue points conclusively to the fact that, if the imaginative motif of élan has at times a rather spiritual or religious ring to it, it may also powerfully evoke the nature of the poet's creative movement: "Mais quand les signes violets de la douleur apparaissent sur la peau comme les bulles qui montent prendre l'air des profondeurs fétides de la vase, quand les yeux, chavirés, coulent à pic en changeant de couleur et quand les hurlements furieux des soufflets de la peur crèvent les murs, il devient parfaitement impossible de mettre un frein à l'élan fougueux de cette phrase". <sup>213</sup>

The creative élan, the élan of the poet engaged in his very act of

transmutational writing, may thus shed the aura of painful, arduous self-elevation from below that Reverdy often attaches to ascension; instead, the creative élan becomes a wild, furious upsurge of hazardous, barely controllable energy that admits no delaying, no braking.

There are two other related images by means of which Reverdy expresses with particular force and aptness his conception of the wildly ebullient and explosive energy of poetic élan. The first is that of the meteor or comet, the second that of jaillissement. In En Vrac Reverdy confesses: "J'ai si souvent rêvé de météores".<sup>214</sup> Although the style is elliptical and the precise referential value is thus obscured, it is fair to say that Reverdy is reaffirming his life-time fascination with the kind of Rimbaldian meteoric explosiveness that was able to rocket a young man, in a seeming matter of moments, to an astonishing peak of self-awareness and poetic exploration. Such a movement which erupts irrepressibly from dark inner recess to resplendent apogee -- without the Valéryan process of slow maturation and the unpleasing prospect of old age's poetic impotence -- always appealed very strongly to Reverdy's imagination.<sup>215</sup> The trajectory of such creative explosiveness is, for Reverdy, true and sure, like that of the comet: "La comète ne tombe pas/ La Ligne droite continue/A elle-même parallèle".<sup>216</sup> The trail it blazes is one of light, a light that tears unstoppably into the forces of night and blackness, a brilliant image of the poet's repeated creative and liberating upsurge out of the midst of the void, the silence and the nothingness that besiege him. "La comète scie dans la nuit", Reverdy declares in a poem from Le Chant des morts, "Un chemin de fer de lumière/ Un de plus chaque jour/Un de plus à toute heure".<sup>217</sup>

Like the comet or meteor, jaillissement constitutes a powerful and vivid figure of the amazingly dynamic ascension whose energy so

attracts Reverdy's imagination. Of especial interest, too, is the fact that all the contexts in which Reverdy treats or employs the motif of jaillissement pertain quite unambiguously to the creative, poetic act. The formation of the image, for example, already observed to be outside the realm of completely deliberate effort, is described as being "éclatante, étonnante à sa première apparition, à son premier jaillissement".<sup>218</sup> Although the mind 'seizes' the image's relationships, the latter are by no means fully consciously controlled and ordered, hence the brilliant, explosive surprise its upward movement of spurning self-revelation entails.<sup>219</sup> Moreover, we should again stress that, although for Reverdy the poem's overall creation may at times be held to involve a slow, rather more struggling elevation, other texts reveal once again that at least some of poetry's sources give rise to jaillissement or sudden, immediate upward release of creative energy. This is the impression created in the opening note from En Vrac to which we have already referred and where poems are said to resemble "les gouttes d'eau jaillies, au choc, de la rivière";<sup>220</sup> or, again, in Risques et périls, where in 'La poésie reine du vide et l'art mordu', Reverdy tells us of the young man "[qui] traîne quelque temps dans les chambres tapissées de rizières mouvantes, de végétations souples et où jaillissent des sources claires et généreuses de véritable poésie".<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, in his important and vigorous 1924 book, Pablo Picasso, Reverdy wastes no time in establishing just precisely wherein resides the artistic genius with which he considers Picasso so magnificently endowed. "Le propre du génie", he declares, "est [...] la création dans ce qu'elle a de plus absolu, de plus pur -- le jaillissement".<sup>222</sup> Attempting to further characterize the elusive quality of genius and thinking perhaps not so much of the prolific Picasso, but rather of poets such as Rimbaud and Lautréamont whom he so admires,

he notes subsequently that "le génie, lui, est impétueux et imprévu, il ne connaît pas la patience [...] Il est de purs génies qui ont beaucoup créé et peu produit." <sup>223</sup> And, by way of final elaboration of the point, Reverdy concludes that, with respect to art, "la part du génie est ce qu'il y a de jaillissement spontané, en dehors de toute transposition, ce qui venant du plus profond de la conscience, échappe à l'analyse". <sup>224</sup> Such statements render quite clear the importance of the element of spontaneity, unpredictability and uncontrollability associated with the gushing, explosive emergence of poetic (or painterly) substance. Any 'transposition' that occurs is of a purely intuitive and subliminal character.

None of this means, in fact, that the logic of jaillissement denies, rejects or lies in utter conflict either with the logic of mental discipline and control (which we have seen Reverdy prize greatly) or with the logic of effort and labour (whose value and appeal we have already affirmed in the context of ascensional movement and which Reverdy, even stresses later with respect to Picasso's creative strategy). <sup>225</sup> Rather do we need to appreciate that the two forces are complementary in various regards. Effort, for example, seems in Reverdy's eyes to lay a basis for the sensational in-coming substance of jaillissement which would seem to involve, in fact, a kind of magnificent compression of mental functioning and control into an incredibly instantaneous process of purely intuitive creative activity. What emerges with breathtaking urgency into the light is moulded and formed according to a mental process which, for being spontaneous and beyond the range of readily analysable control, remains for the artist nonetheless appreciably appropriate to his profoundly but perhaps obscurely sensed creative needs. Reverdy himself speaks on one occasion of his habit of writing his poems according

to this process of jaillissement, writing his poems 'straight off', at the moment of their unforeseeable and seemingly uncontrolled spurting forth, with rarely any attempt to 'touch up'.<sup>226</sup> This is, of course, the very kind of movement of élan that we have seen Reverdy associate with the composition of his text in Risques et périls. If it seems to be well removed from effort, this does not mean that labour and preparation do not lie deep below the locus of its final explosive emergence. If jaillissement itself, the form and substance it brings, are not to be foreseen, nor are to permit the luxury of fully conscious manipulation, this does not mean for Reverdy that genius is blind and undisciplined in its creative upsurge. The poetic jaillissement of genius rejects both a priori and a posteriori control. Its 'control' is wedded to its uncontrollability, its 'order' to its 'adventure'.<sup>227</sup> What it offers is a superb example of surging and explosive raw creative energy being astonishingly shaped by means that are purely intuitive, beyond all analysis, but whose product is immediately appreciable in its justesse, in its precise appropriateness.<sup>228</sup>

#### The Vertical Dimension: Lower Space

We shall now seek to elaborate the particular significance and appeal of the second half of Reverdy's En Vrac statement in which, after speaking of the attraction of a Mallarméan upper space, he evokes the poet's possible Rimbaudian fascination with "la pente à descendre dans le gouffre obscur du sang, des sensations et de la chair".<sup>229</sup> Our discussion will begin with a brief examination of Reverdy's strongly positive connotation of lower space or depths -- as we shall see in a later chapter, lower space as a space into which one falls may become thoroughly negative in its colouring, though for this to occur Reverdy essentially re-imagines the context and the motifs associated with such space. We shall note in

particular his attraction to two motifs relevant to this 'level' of the vertical dimension of the imagination: roots and the mine. We shall then proceed to examine fully Reverdy's obsession with the activity of mining or subterranean exploitation, noting somewhat parenthetically its relation to other associated motifs.

### The Depths of Being

When Reverdy's imagination turns from upper to lower space and to the prospect of exploring and deriving benefit from this lower space, it is important to appreciate that the exploration he contemplates and imagines is one of an inner depth. It is thus not a movement that seeks fundamentally to penetrate beneath the surface of external reality -- Reverdy, of course, may bring about such a penetration, he may become one of those "exploiteurs des filons doux de la matière", but this interests him only inasmuch as it involves a filtering of matter through him, a penetration to the deepest recesses of the self in order to appreciate and exploit reality's accumulations within the 'lower space' of the self.<sup>230</sup> The space the poet seeks to reach most essentially then, is that of "les plus intimes profondeurs de sa conscience", that of "les parties les plus profondes de [s]on être".<sup>231</sup> It is there the poet may oddly establish the most essential of contacts and relationships with reality or matter, for it is there, too, that he hopes to satisfy his overriding concern and gain access to "le mystère de son être intérieur, [pour] connaître son pouvoir et sa force".<sup>232</sup> This deeply recessed realm of the poet's consciousness is, as we have seen already from the En Vrac entry,<sup>233</sup> clearly associated in Reverdy's consciousness with the poet's total biological, sensory and affective condition. What the poet hopes to find, to know and creatively to profit from, are the very structures of his own sensibility. But because the substance is of an 'intimate'

and 'deep-lying' nature, "c'est ce qui est le plus difficile à trouver et encore plus difficile à exploiter".<sup>234</sup> The poet is in effect looking, within himself, for an odd mixture of the basic or fundamental and the sublime or marvellous: for him, in a very real sense, "au fond il y a une merveille".<sup>235</sup>

The search for such a mixture, varyingly held by Reverdy, as we shall soon see more fully, to consist of an act of fathoming, diving (and fishing) or mining, and difficult as it is, is therefore precisely the kind of search that in so many respects typifies "l'acte profondément poétique [qui] consiste [...] à plonger, le plus avant et le plus aventureusement possible, dans le miroir des gouffres pour scruter ses propres bas-fonds".<sup>236</sup> The deep space into which the poet's subterranean/submarine quest plunges him, dark and risky as it indeed is, nevertheless offers the poet the chance to glimpse a rare mirror-image of himself. Here, below -- as in the horizontal plane it would be behind or beyond -- , the poet may accede to what usually remains repressed, concealed in murky confusion, constantly threatened as it is by the viscous substance that lurks just beneath the quickly clouded over surface of the 'mirror'.<sup>237</sup> The image of the mine which greatly appeals to Reverdy and whose full significance and application will only become truly evident with our examination of the act of mining, can immediately be seen to relate imaginatively to Reverdy's conception of lower space elaborated to this point. In particular, the mine is, for Reverdy, and when it can be found by the poet in the first place, the locus of precious and base metals that are embedded in the dark mass of relatively worthless substances that abounds everywhere. While offering, therefore, the chance of a wonderful richness, the mine does not constitute in itself the act of mining or bringing to the surface of its 'fundamental' and yet marvellous

hoard. Effort, whether laboriously or magically, intuitively expended, is required, so that the visions are not lost, so that the salvaged metals may gleam in the light.<sup>238</sup> The Reverdyan image of roots, on the other hand, conveys at once the impression of a lower operational space within man and that of a 'means' of bringing to the surface of what it is that roots contact in their deep underground groping. But, just as the mine is threatened by a viscosity, so too are roots obliged to struggle with substance in its frightening mucilaginous state:<sup>239</sup> "Pour aller chercher au fond de la vase/Le secret émouvant du sang de mon malheur/Il faut plonger la main aux racines du coeur".<sup>240</sup> As these verses from 'Le coeur tournant' suggest, however, if roots are a means of access to the poet's recessed lower biological/affective zone, they are so for Reverdy only in the limited sense that they provide a channel or way of acceding to the precious substance of this zone. It is the poet's hand that offers an active means of seizure, not the roots themselves. Here, in fact, they seem to constitute almost in themselves the poet's valued lower space, although elsewhere Reverdy lays stress upon the essentially Valéryan notion of roots as a source of marvellous substance and ultimate majestic growth and strength.<sup>241</sup> "Quand un arbre majestueux est violemment animé par le vent", Reverdy says in Le Gant de crin, alluding to the fundamentally surrealist concerns of many poets of his time, "peu de gens pensent à la vigueur et à l'étendue de ses racines. Aujourd'hui toutes les préoccupations des poètes sont orientées vers les racines".<sup>242</sup> The poet's roots, then, are a source of something necessary, powerful and exceptional.<sup>243</sup> But, in Reverdy's eyes, whilst it is possible that things may occasionally well up, spurt up from such depths according to the imaginative logic of jaillissement, the process may also be slower, more 'Valéryan', and may even demand a

firm stimulus, a strong 'descensional' gesture of the hand or the mind.

### Exploitation of Depths

Reverdy's imagination is drawn to two particular motifs that both express the notion of a downward, searching movement that only attains true fulfilment at the moment of completion of a returning, upward movement. This latter movement is crucially important in that it allows the substance obtained below to be displayed in a fine light otherwise denied it. The first of these two privileged motifs is that of fishing and diving, to which subaqueous gestures is linked that of fathoming of inner depths. "Le poète est poussé à créer par le besoin constant et obsédant de sonder le mystère de son être intérieur", Reverdy proclaims in Le Gant de crin.<sup>244</sup> It is "dans les parties les plus profondes de [s]on être/[qu'il] jette la sonde qui traîne aux fonds marins", we are told in the Plein Verre poem 'Main-morte' -- and if, as a result of such fathoming, "aucune pierre ne s'élève/Aucun souffle ne vient caresser la lumière", this in no way alters the urgency or the aesthetic/ontological significance of such an activity.<sup>245</sup> The poet's perhaps most fundamental act, as we have seen, is one of diving.<sup>246</sup> For Reverdy it is a necessary act -- "il faut que tu plonges, cher poète"<sup>247</sup> -- , though almost certainly sullyng and muddying. Moreover, its subaqueous movement is explicitly associated on a number of occasions with that of subterranean exploitation which, similarly, aims to secure possession of obscurely situated riches. This is so, for example, in the poem 'Main-morte' mentioned above, where the act of fathoming is fused with the poet's frustrated effort to exploit the mine of his memory in order to attain to a buried temporal layer of his being.<sup>248</sup> It is the case, too, in the poem 'Vivre tard', where poets are characterised, on the one hand, as "forçats désabusés des mines de l'aurore" and "exploiteurs des

filons doux de la matière", and, on the other, as "rameurs de l'absolu" and "pêcheurs de perles ou de corail".<sup>249</sup> Undoubtedly the image of mining is by far the most recurrent of those mentioned in Reverdy's work. But it is clear that the motif of diving and fishing may have on occasion an individual power and an imaginatively coincident appeal every bit as great as those of the more commonly appearing image of mining.<sup>250</sup>

Mere location of the poet's inner mine is only a minimal and preliminary gesture in Reverdy's eyes. "Le poète doit être jugé sur la mine", Reverdy remarks, tongue in cheek, in an entry in Le Livre de mon bord, adding " -- celle qu'il a pu exploiter".<sup>251</sup> The poet's mine, whatever its locus and contents, must be rendered "une mine en exploitation".<sup>252</sup> It is not just a question of discovering one's mine, of reaching the rich veins of gold lying deep within oneself. Such discovery, whilst in itself difficult, as we have seen Reverdy remark already,<sup>253</sup> "n'est pas [...] l'effort le plus grand, -- c'est plutôt le plaisir".<sup>254</sup> But, unless this discovery is to remain disappointingly barren or of purely esoteric significance, it must be transformed into an act of discovery that involves, and is in fact truly synonymous with, exploitation. "Son propre fonds", Reverdy specifies, "on ne le découvre d'ailleurs qu'en l'exploitant".<sup>255</sup> The gold that lies within the poet's richest and deepest veins can, for Reverdy, only be truly appreciated at the time of and as a result of its active exploitation by the prospecting poet. Moreover, this act of discovery as exploitation demands a greater effort than that expended in the poet's original descensional and locating movement, an effort often held to involve some degree of patience, both in the short and long terms of one's creative endeavour.<sup>256</sup> The reason for this, of course, is simply Reverdy's conception of the purpose of exploitation as a bringing to the surface --

and indeed beyond it to the upper space of the mind <sup>257</sup> -- of the 'gold' that is excavated from its repressed or buried locus. In speaking, for example, of "la mine du rêve", Reverdy explains that it is necessary to go deep into one's mine "pour trouver les plus belles pépites [qu'il faut] remonter au jour sous forme de lingots, sous forme de bijoux". <sup>258</sup> Subterranean substance seems, to the Reverdyan imagination, more fully appreciable in upper space. It is there, for example, that the rich potential of the poet's dream may be fecundated and realised. And it would seem also that only there may a proper distinction take place between dorure and or, between gilding and gold. Gold's surface glitter -- as imaginatively appealing, we may note, as the resplendent light of the sun -- may be evaluated and probed more completely, its solid, sub-surface reality and worth better appreciated and displayed, only when it is exposed to 'daylight'. <sup>259</sup> Only then can the poet assess whether it is gold he has excavated or some cheap, quickly tarnished gilt gewgaw, lacking "la vraie matière de la réalité". <sup>260</sup>

It is, moreover, very important to note finally that the Reverdyan act of exploitation connotes no vulgar, commercial marketing, no dilution of the quality of the poet's gold, but on the contrary an offering of its full and essentially original magnificence. Reverdy explains in Le Gant de crin:

Il ne s'agit pas d'exploiter une émotion initiale et de la délayer, mais, au contraire, de réaliser dans l'oeuvre un faisceau d'émotions natives directement issues du fonds intime du poète et de livrer à l'esprit du lecteur cette force concentrée capable de provoquer en lui une émotion forte et d'alimenter une riche efflorescence de sentiments esthétiques.

Le poète ne monnaye pas son or, il le livre natif. <sup>261</sup>

We can observe from our reading of this passage that a certain tension exists between Reverdy's notions of 'direct realisation' on the one hand,

and transmutation on the other. We might even be tempted to think they contain an element of contradiction. But, in effect, everything points to Reverdy's continuing, firm conception of a poetic necessity to do something with the 'raw' substance thus extracted (whether it be from the poet's 'dream' or from other veins of his deeply recessed mine). The poetic mining of the dream must entail for Reverdy an exploitation that is intuitively based upon aesthetic criteria. The dream's poetic exploitation thus involves its domination, its subjugation. <sup>262</sup>

Reverdy always places special stress upon the poetic energy involved in raising and orientating original matter, upon the poetic act of moulding and refining, and upon the ultimate aesthetic value of raw substance.

The kind of extraction Reverdy seeks is one that comes about in view of what, in the same cluster of notes in Le Gant de crin, he terms "la sublime transformation". <sup>263</sup> The poet's concern, as the long note quoted above suggests, is that poetic extraction and transformation avoid diminishing in any way the original splendour of the poet's gold, seeking rather to enhance it in its new setting. Just as time and related 'external' considerations must not be allowed to affect the poet's rate of extraction, so must there be no trace of dilution or reduction of quality, whether it be via a forging of poetic currency or a cheap minting for rapid, indiscriminating consumption. <sup>264</sup>

#### The Vertical Plane: Tension and Reconciliation

In conclusion to this part of our study we may say that Reverdy's imagination is powerfully and equally attracted to both upper and lower spaces of the vertical dimension. There are certain poems in which we might argue the prevalence of the effect of one imaginative extreme as opposed to the other. A poem such as 'Départ', from Les Ardoises du toit or 'En ce temps-là le charbon ...', from La Lucarne ovale, <sup>265</sup> may thus

seem to belong to that category of "très substantielle et cristalline poésie", as Reverdy describes Raïssa Maritain's work: "on y est constamment sur les sommets de neige éclatante et de lumineuse chaleur".<sup>266</sup>

But as Reverdy remarks in the same letter to the same poetess, "en général la poésie trouve l'ampleur de son domaine en creusant bas", rather than "en poussant une pointe infiniment aiguë vers les hauteurs".<sup>267</sup>

And in so much of Reverdy's work, and more and more powerfully in that of his middle and later periods -- Flaques de verre and Ferraille provide two superb examples -- , one may be tempted to argue the presence of this descensional urge and logic.<sup>268</sup>

In our view, however -- and it should be clearly understood that this can only be a matter of viewpoint -- , whilst a given poem may be said to have a greater or lesser share of either that crystalline poetic purity, that heady poetic spirituality which a poet such as Mallarmé pushes to the dizzying point of an almost hygienic intellectuality, or alternatively that sensory, affective heaviness reeking of the dark earthy recesses of the sensibility -- whilst such individual propensities may be felt by the reader, then, we should argue that Reverdy's poetry always offers evidence of a strong degree of tense reconciliation of these two opposing pulls and orientations. If Reverdy is, then, as he himself suggests he is, drawn with equal force towards a Rimbaldian and a Mallarméan option, if the Rimbaldian and Mallarméan spaces and movements delimit the two poles of poetic development and imaginative obsession between which Reverdy is caught, we should strongly argue that his poetry demonstrates clearly and constantly that his particular salvation is gained precisely between these two poles of functioning, in their functional marriage, in a wedding of crystallinity and blood, mind and sensibility, height and depth. It is for this reason that, on the one hand, Reverdy does not allow his poetry to remain

embedded in the obscure nether regions of sensation and emotion, phantasmagoria and dream, preferring rather to dredge, fish, mine and exploit such regions, to prepare the way for an ascensional movement -- an effort-laden raising up into the transcendental light above of "l'or brut", <sup>269</sup> or perhaps, a sudden jaillissement from deep-lying sources. It is for this reason also that, on the other hand, Reverdy does not permit his poetry to be drawn up to too rarefied an atmosphere, to risk a dangerously pure immateriality beyond contact with the sinewy robustness of primary reality and the poet's sensible enmeshment with it. It is no doubt in this perspective and in order to express this strongly felt need for a tautly articulated reconciliation of the attraction and logic of both upper and lower spaces, that Reverdy declares in a late note in En Vrac: "Ce n'est pas le poète qui doit d'inspiration se soulever de terre et flotter, ce n'est pas sa fonction de quitter la terre pour aller cueillir des étoiles; il ne les atteindrait jamais. Son rôle est de faire des étoiles avec tout ce qui passe à sa portée". <sup>270</sup> Such a statement should not be thought to contradict the imaginative thrust of those texts already examined in which Reverdy shows his fascination with the motif of the star and the need to grasp after its brilliance; but it does propose a slight, though important refinement of optic which firmly underlines the Reverdyan link between the imaginative logics of upper and lower space, namely that any rising towards some ultimate lofty illumination must be achieved with the substance found below. It is essentially this same finely equilibrated notion, but seen this time from the reverse perspective, upon which Reverdy insists in the closing note of Le Livre de mon bord. "C'est dans cette nuit de labyrinthe et de dédale", he explains, "dans cette atmosphère de sous-sol et de cave [...] que j'ai trouvé ma mer, mon ciel d'azur, mon espace sans frein et ma nuit étoilée". <sup>271</sup>

Notes to Chapter III

- 1     Le Gant de crin, 149.
- 2     Ibid., 143.
- 3     Cf. 'Civil' (Plupart du temps, 35), where Reverdy speaks of "la longue route rugueuse".
- 4     Cf. 'N'essayez pas' (Main d'oeuvre, 25), where Reverdy speaks of "la rue où court la vie comme le sang aux veines".
- 5     'Civil', Plupart du temps, 35.
- 6     The poem 'Au-Delà', from Sources du vent (Main d'oeuvre, 102-3), provides a good example. The closing lines are:  
  

Les yeux glissent  
       vers un autre endroit  
 Au carrefour des six routes  
       L'arrêt de nos pas  
 On irait plus loin sans doute  
       Mais on n'ose pas
- See also ibid., 111 and 74; Plupart du temps, 371; Flaques de verre, 53.
- 7     Main d'oeuvre, 348-9. See also 'Le visiteur étranger' (ibid., 309) and 'Sur les routes de fer et de lumière' (Plupart du temps, 290).
- 8     En Vrac, 104.
- 9     Conversion itself, for example, is ultimately described by Reverdy himself as a "voie de garage" in Le Livre de mon bord (p. 175). Cf. ibid., 85.
- 10    See, for example, 'Pour mourir' (Main d'oeuvre, 74); Risques et périls, 158; La Peau de l'homme, 195.
- 11    'Terrain lourd', Plupart du temps, 381.
- 12    'Sous-sol', Main d'oeuvre, 431.
- 13    The idea of interrogation at crossroads is expressed in 'Jour éclatant' where Reverdy speaks of "l'arbre du carrefour [qui] se penche et interroge" -- we should not forget that the tree is often strongly associated with, indeed almost symbolic of, the poet himself (cf. Guiney, La Poésie de Pierre Reverdy, p. 106). The words "la bonne piste" form the title of a Flaques de verre poem (Flaques de verre, 75).
- 14    Brassaï shows himself alert to such matters in his essay 'Reverdy dans son labyrinthe' (PR:MF, pp. 159-68) and Bachelard too sees in the Reverdyan fascination with impediment and oppression a sign confirming his general thesis that the labyrinth is always something of a dimension angoissée (La Terre et les rêveries du repos, Paris: Corti, 1948, pp. 211 and 218).

15 Departure is a notion to whose charms Reverdy, like so many poets before him and perhaps particularly those (like Reverdy) under the spell of Baudelaire, shows himself to be most sensitive. Reverdy's poetry, however, does not seize upon the notion of departure as a guiding, quasi-allegorical motif. Even in the early collections Cale sèche and Poèmes en prose where the motif is at times strongly voiced, it is, rather, embedded in a tightly woven thematic fabric. It might be noted also that the Reverdyan motif of departure not only points to the poet's need to cross the threshold from the poetically known to the newly intuited in poetry (cf. 'Impatience', 'Tentative' and 'Sujets' from Cale sèche, for example), but may assume a certain self-reflexive air, as in the poem 'Sur le seuil' (Plupart du temps, 183) which would seem to draw attention to the poet's crossing of the creative threshold into the poem proper (which then becomes in itself a realm of advance and journeying).

16 Main d'oeuvre, 468.

17 See supra, Chapter II, n. 122 and n. 124 and infra, this Chapter, 'Dream' and 'Mind'.

18 'Obscurité' and 'Tentative' (Main d'oeuvre, 510 and 494, respectively).

19 Ibid., 342.

20 See especially infra, this Chapter, 'Mind'.

21 Main d'oeuvre, 61.

22 Ibid., 322.

23 'La rue qui chante', ibid., 292.

24 'Matin', ibid., 217.

25 In the poem 'Toujours l'amour', from Sources du vent (ibid., 207), we find these telling lines:

A travers la campagne hachée  
A travers les sommeils tranchés  
A travers l'eau et les ornières  
les pelouses des cimetières  
A travers toi  
Au bout du monde  
Le monde couru pas à pas

26 That is to say, without that deliberate thematic highlighting given the motif by poets such as Perse or Cendrars.

27 In the pointedly titled poem 'Déroute', ibid., 329.

28 See Plupart du temps, 201 ('Nomade' is the title) and 'Mon coeur de verre', Main d'oeuvre, 490, respectively.

29 Flaques de verre, 43. See also, for example Plupart du temps, 260 and Main d'oeuvre, 383 and, in particular, the poem 'Voyages sans fin' (ibid., 175). Jacques Dupin is somewhat similarly drawn to tell of his 'interminable tramping' "pour altérer quelque chose de pur" ('La soif', L'Embrasure, précédé de Gravier, p. 47).

30 The movement described by Rimbaud in 'Le bateau ivre' seems altogether more uncontrolled, but in fact remains (not unlike Reverdy's conception of nomadic movement) related to his celebrated prescription of "un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens". Order, albeit of the most vaguely delimited kind, is thus wedded to pure adventure.

31 Cf. Sable mouvant, 49, where Reverdy speaks of a movement "à la dérive", perhaps taking him here, perhaps there, perhaps elsewhere.

32 It is again useful to compare this with Reverdy's conception of the interrelated functioning of dream and mind (see infra, this chapter, 'Some Special Means of Movement Towards') and his appreciation of the process of the image's formation (Chapter VI).

33 Cf. La Peau de l'homme, 39, where Reverdy speaks of "cette ligne horizontale qui coïncide avec le plan le plus stable de la terre", a spatial horizontality which man explores, really and metaphorically.

34 Cf. again, for example, 'N'essayez pas' (Main d'oeuvre, 25), where Reverdy speaks of "la rue où court la vie comme le sang aux veines".

35 Ibid., 128. The poem begins with these two lines:

Je suis le plus près de celui qui parle  
La vague qui me porte est horizontale

36 See ibid., 154. The irony derives from the idea of an equivalence between horizontality and being laid out, flat, dead. However, the poem may also be thought, like many of Reverdy's poems, simultaneously self-reflexive, pointing to its own composition: the idea of having said everything by the end of the poem's own horizontal flow.

37 See Chapter VI and our Conclusion.

38 'Autres jockeys, alcooliques', Plupart du temps, 260.

39 Main d'oeuvre, 390.

40 Plupart du temps, 88.

41 See Le Voleur de Talan, 7 and 43, respectively.

42 See 'Violon' (Au soleil du plafond, 82-3) and 'Et maintenant' (Main d'oeuvre, 533), for example. Of course, the process reflects precisely that other emergence of the world: that of poetry, words, upon a blank page or mind.

43 See, for example, 'Période hors-texte', La Peau de l'homme, 143.

44 See 'Le dialogue secret', ibid., 191, for example.

45 See, for example, 'Après le rêve' (Main d'oeuvre, 146), 'Comme chaque soir' (ibid., 480), and 'Crépuscule' (Plupart du temps, 53), where we read that "nous écoutions tout ce qui n'était pas autre part qu'en nous-mêmes".

46 See, for example, 'Et maintenant' (Main d'oeuvre, 531), where we are told that "l'amour ni la raison ne montent à l'oreille", the listening continues, but the hearing is relatively barren.

47 Sable mouvant, 29-30. It is worth pointing out Heidegger's notion of listening to the voice of Being which is then creatively echoed back "as a gesture of thankful co-responding [when it] addresses and claims [man] as its very own" (J. L. Mehta, The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p. 64).

48 En Vrac, 35.

49 Le Gant de crin, 138. Cf. ibid., 164 and 137. Brunner (op. cit., pp. 17-19) is also aware of the 'temptations' of the voice of God, but dismisses it without analysis and offers no discussion at all of the major points we present.

50 Throughout this section, cf. our essay 'Eyes and Seeing in the Poetry of Pierre Reverdy', in Roger Cardinal, ed., Sensibility and Creation (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 57-71. Brunner is also drawn to discuss the question of le regard, but concentrates largely upon it as a sign from without. He suggests, moreover, without justification, that the poet's own regard is never matched, met by that of the other; and he neglects entirely Reverdy's pronouncements on the poet's special visionary gifts, arguing on the contrary that "le poète [Reverdy] n'a pas une vision très nette de son univers" (op. cit., p. 23) -- if such deficiency may occur, to articulate things so categorically is surely to misrepresent much of Reverdy's strongly worded pronouncements on the relationship between poet and world.

51 'Filet d'astres' and 'Sur les dix doigts' (Plupart du temps, 295 and 83), respectively.

52 See, for example, 'Tentative' where Reverdy speaks of "la vie à regarder en face" (Main d'oeuvre, 494) or 'Comme on change' where we read that "il regardait le ciel le mur la terre et l'eau" (ibid., 105).

53 See, for example, 'Mon coeur de verre' where Reverdy proclaims "bientôt le soir viendra/Un oeil à la fenêtre/Tout le mystère humain se posera" (ibid., 490) or 'Ceci commence par' (ibid., 189-90) which concludes with these lines:

Le bout de l'aile blanche attire l'oeil  
Il y a ce corps qui brille  
Et tous les mouvements  
Tout ce qui lutte  
à tort et à travers  
Sur la terre immobile et ivre morte  
tout l'hiver

54 See, for example, 'Regard' (Plupart du temps, 251): "Mon oeil suivait ainsi/la ligne des ornières" or 'Les musiciens' (ibid., 323): "L'oeil passe du trottoir à l'instrument qui joue, qui roule, à la voiture qui traverse la nuit".

55 See, for example, 'Nuit et jour' (ibid., 338) where Reverdy tells us of "les yeux fixant le cours limpide des nuages" or 'Les traits du ciel' (Main d'oeuvre, 90) where the 'traveller' moves along, "l'oeil fixé sur la route/Où les pas sont inscrits".

56 Many critics have referred to Reverdy as "un visuel" and some, like Guiney term him "un voyant", thus underlining the Rimbaldian heritage that Reverdy himself stressed in an interview in 1956 with Paul Guth for Le Figaro littéraire: "Je l'ai utilisé comme les peintres qui vont au musée". It is no doubt this visionary, Rimbaldian quality of Reverdy's poetry that leads André du Bouchet to speak of "ce ton de certitude inconnu en français depuis Rimbaud" ('Envergure de Reverdy', loc. cit., 315).

57 'L'imperméable', La Peau de l'homme, 104.

58 See Risques et périls, 198 and Le Livre de mon bord, 166, respectively.

59 En Vrac, 84.

60 Of necessity our argument links up at this point with the earlier discussion of 'The World as Theatre', in Chapter I.

61 Le Gant de crin, 38.

62 En Vrac, 23.

63 Le Gant de crin, 123.

64 This is, of course, a notion dear to certain modern philosophers and one which places particular emphasis upon the capacity of the senses to possess, to have their objects of attention in something of their ontic depth and in a way that, correspondingly, gives being to the sensing self.

65 Cf. ibid., 38 again.

66 Sable Mouvant, 14.

67 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 166.

68 Cf. En Vrac, 161: "Un caillou n'est qu'un caillou, mais par l'opération magique il devient un coeur et un coeur devient un caillou ... Et c'est toute la poésie du monde, dans l'esprit de l'homme et son coeur, ce qui lui entre par l'oeil et l'oreille immédiatement transformé selon l'état de son humeur, l'équilibre de ses viscères et le mouvement de son sang".

69 For an appreciation of the extent to which the image constitutes a 'third realm', situated between the poles of its constituent elements, see infra, Chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse'.

70 Le Gant de crin, 157.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 172.

73 This faculty Reverdy not only had, in Aragon's view, but had to an astonishing degree. In commenting in Littérature (Mar. 19) on Reverdy's Période hors-texte and Les Jockeys camouflés, he proclaims: "il sait écarquiller les paupières au moment où les autres perdent conscience. Sa lucidité à de pareilles profondeurs m'effraie" (p. 22). As always in speaking of Reverdy, Aragon is both warm and perceptive. Reverdy's notebooks testify, moreover, to his constantly felt need to sharpen the faculty of inner vision. "Le poète se regarde vivre et s'écoute penser", he declares in Le Gant de crin (p. 48), where he also observes: "Si les glaces de verre sont flatteuses pour toi, supprime-les. Ne te regarde pas en dehors mais en dedans, il y a là un sombre miroir sans complaisance" (p. 79).

74 See Le Livre de mon bord, 117.

75 With respect to this love of the world, see Chapters II and IV ('From Disengagement to Engagement').

76 The term 'sub-transcendent' is intended to evoke the qualities attached to what is caught between immanence and transcendence, always straining from the former to the latter, yet securely anchored by the former. Cf. Chapter II, 'The Question of Being'.

77 En Vrac, 23.

78 See Le Livre de mon bord, 108.

79 Ibid., 52.

80 En Vrac, 22-3.

81 Cf. ibid., 23.

82 Reverdy maintained always that the onle true locus of profound contact was the creative work, not the man. Cf. Chapter II, 'The Question of Being'.

83 Cf. Jean-Pierre Attal, 'Sens et valeur du mot main dans l'oeuvre poétique de Pierre Reverdy', Critique, 179 (Apr. 62), 306-29.

84 See 'Période hors-texte', La Peau de l'homme, 145, for example.

85 See the poem 'Allégresse' (Plupart du temps, 135), for example, where Reverdy speaks of a kind of Proustian encounter, uplifting despite its fleetingness. See also infra, Chapter VI, 'From Thematic Tension to a Truly Poetic Equilibrium'.

86 'Pour le moment', Plupart du temps, 112-13.

- 87 'L'angoisse', Main d'oeuvre, 62.
- 88 'Maison hantée', Risques et périls, 132.
- 89 See, for example, the poems 'Echos sans forme' and 'Angoisse' (Main d'oeuvre, 32 and 62), and cf. 'Plus d'atmosphère' (Plupart du temps, 284), where the adjective tendu is finally added to the original version of the poem, suggesting thereby Reverdy's special sensitivity to the notion of tautness. It could be shown, moreover, that the very tautness of this proffering is imaginatively related to the questions of tension examined in Chapter VI.
- 90 Main d'oeuvre, 405.
- 91 'Ceux que je vois', ibid., 319.
- 92 Plupart du temps, 330.
- 93 'Arc-en-ciel', Main d'oeuvre, 382.
- 94 'Mille murmures dans le rang', ibid., 83.
- 95 Ibid., 17.
- 96 Le Voleur de Talan, 85.
- 97 Plupart du temps, 71-2.
- 98 "Ce que j'ai confié à la prudence de mes mains", we read (Main d'oeuvre, 333). This entrustment comes about, in Jean-Pierre Attal's eyes, because "la main partage avec la pensée le pouvoir de créer, bien plus, elle est la pensée faite chair" (op. cit., 327).
- 99 Plupart du temps, 284.
- 100 Main d'oeuvre, 308.
- 101 'De la pierre à l'eau', Main d'oeuvre, 142.
- 102 Reverdy did not in fact publish anything for many years after the start of the second world war. The period 1940-44 thus constituted a second creative crisis for him, after the almost complete poetic silence between 1930 and 1937.
- 103 See, respectively, 'Hommes de main Hommes de peine', 'Grande veilleuse', 'Dans ce désert' and 'Et maintenant' (ibid., 518, 526, 530 and 532).
- 104 'Et maintenant', ibid., 532. See also infra, this chapter, 'The Vertical Dimension: Lower Space', for a better appreciation of the image of gold.
- 105 Le Gant de crin, 23.
- 106 Plupart du temps, 71.

107 En Vrac, 108.

108 Le Livre de mon bord, 176.

109 En Vrac, 108. Georges Jean, in his book La Poésie (Paris: Seuil, 1966), links this idea of a rêverie involving "cette paresse féconde, cette vigilance, cette disponibilité à toutes les sollicitations des sens" (p. 57) to Bachelard's notions of la rêverie du monde and Reverdy is recorded by Péret (PR:MF, 40) as having told him that "pour écrire, je lis d'abord des ouvrages [de Féval ou de Balzac] qui mettent dans l'état de rêve indispensable, pour moi, à l'éclosion du poème".

110 En Vrac, 108. Cf. Le Gant de crin, 21.

111 See, for example, En Vrac, 152. See also Chapter VI, 'The Image: A matter of Justesse'.

112 See Le Gant de crin, 31.

113 See ibid., 21. Freud, in his book On Dreams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1952), points out that "'No' seems not to exist so far as dreams are concerned", referring to their incredible capacity to juxtapose, superimpose and telescope. What bothers Reverdy is that such freedom is somehow gratuitous, almost, ironically, detached from him.

114 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 222.

115 See En Vrac, 159 and cf. Le Gant de crin, 21: "Le rêve est un isolement". Not only, in fact, does the dream isolate from possible communication with others, but, worse in Reverdy's eyes, it isolates man from himself, from the full deployment of his faculties, dispossessing him, rendering him impotent.

116 En Vrac, 159. See also Le Gant de crin, 16, where Reverdy points out that the dream's use of 'images' is underdeveloped and uncontrolled: man needs thought, and thought needs words, to contact, dominate and feel the resistance of matter.

117 Self Defence, in Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 105-6. Brunner (op. cit., p. 47) also quotes this passage, but fails to exploit in any way Reverdy's own crucial distinction between le rêve du sommeil and le rêve du poète. Stressing the negative dimension of dream, however, he shrewdly associates it with Reverdy's 'Baudelairean' experience of ivresse (ibid., p. 49).

118 For further discussion of the question of receptivity versus mental control, see infra, 'Mind'.

119 See Le Gant de crin, 17, where we read that "le rêve du poète, c'est l'immense filet aux mailles innombrables qui drague sans espoir les eaux profondes à la recherche d'un problématique trésor".

120 Ibid., 20.

121 Etudes Littéraires, 3 (Apr. 70), 112-13.

122 See the following paragraph for a better appreciation of this notion of 'hypothesis'.

123 Le Livre de mon bord, 251.

124 Ibid.

125 Le Gant de crin, 18.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid., 22.

128 Cf. En Vrac, 123.

129 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 74: "Mon rêve est dur et dure. Il a subi la trempe de la dure réalité".

129a In 'Le rêveur parmi les murailles' originally published in La Révolution surréaliste, 1 (Dec. 24), Reverdy states, speaking of dream and mind, that "l'un et l'autre cependant ont leurs caractéristiques; on ne peut pas les confondre si on ne peut radicalement les séparer" (Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 209).

130 En Vrac, 51.

131 Note éternelle du présent, 132.

132 Ibid. Pierre Schneider goes so far as to declare that "nul en notre temps ne s'est pareillement attaché à éveiller la force de l'esprit dans la faiblesse de la chair" ('Le gré du vent', PR:MF, 246), but without qualifying the notion of mind (implicitly working against all forms of matter).

133 See, for example, 'La poésie reine du vide et l'art mordu', Risques et périls, 21.

134 See 'Triangle', Flaques de verre, 115.

135 See 'La poésie reine du vide et l'art mordu', Risques et périls, 24.

136 Le Gant de crin, 30.

137 See, for example, Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 75 and Le Gant de crin, 32.

138 Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 58.

139 Ibid., 105.

140 Cf. En Vrac, 185.

141 See ibid., 178, where we read: "Coeur et creux. Le coeur est un organe creux. Mais un homme sans coeur est creux, comme un arbre creux n'a pas de coeur".

142 See ibid., 176: "En art, le métier de la main fait l'artiste habile, le métier de l'esprit fait le grand artiste".

143 Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 121.

144 'L'Esthétique et l'esprit', ibid., 178.

145 The closing line of the very early poem 'Traits et figures' is of interest in this context: "Dans ma tête des lignes, rien que des lignes; si je pouvais y mettre un peu d'ordre seulement" (Plupart du temps, 21).

146 See 'Pablo Picasso', Note éternelle du présent, 198.

147 See even the title of the Flaques de verre poem 'Le froid de l'air sur l'esprit et sur le visage' (p. 67). Cf. the closing passage of Reverdy's essay on Picasso, 'Solidarity of the genius and the dwarf' (Note éternelle du présent, 243).

148 Roger Caillois, in Les Impostures de la poésie (Paris: Gallimard, 1945, p. 52), echoes the need to establish an equilibrium between the trouvailles of 'inspiration' and the lucidity of the mind's action. "Quel crédit lui consentir sans danger?" he asks, speaking of poetic 'inspiration'.

149 In 'La fonction poétique', (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 65) we read, for example, that imagination involves "un acte d'attention volontaire". Kenneth Rexroth is much too insistent upon the "conscious, deliberate" gesture of Reverdy, whose "restructuring of experience is [thus] purposive, not dreamlike" (Preface to Pierre Reverdy, Selected Poems, New York: New Directions, 1969, vi-vii).

150 Nord-Sud, Self-Defence, 106. Greene (The Poetic Theory of Pierre Reverdy, p. 38) also quotes this passage from Self-Defence, but surprisingly underplays its significance, as had Brunner (cf. supra, n. 117).

151 Cf. for example, En Vrac, 118 where Reverdy argues that "la science en sait encore beaucoup moins sur l'esprit qu'elle n'en sait sur la matière". Perhaps the mind's domain will one day be forced, he suggests, but for the moment "il garde son secret".

152 Le Livre de mon bord, 93.

153 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 32-3, Le Livre de mon bord, 156 and En Vrac, 5. Cf. also René Guy Cadou ('Pierre Reverdy ou la statue intérieure', Les Lettres, 7 (20.5.46), p. 256) who maintains that "l'art de Reverdy [...] est avant tout un art d'intuition". The kind of intuition envisaged here would seem to involve not just that sensible intuition or apprehension of the world's phenomena that Kant opposed to thought's conceptual 'understanding' of such 'intuitions' (i.e. noumena), but a process that is distinctly mental, spiritual (even 'conceptual' in Reverdy's terminology: such a term was applied specifically to 'cubist' art), whilst not logically reasoned -- spiritually and aesthetically appreciable, rather than intellectually posited and verifiable. Cf. W. Eckoff, ed., Kant's Inaugural Dissertation of 1770, New York: Ams Press, 1970, p. 50; and J. Bennett, Kant's Dialectic, C.U.P., 1974, pp. 16;18.

154 Etudes Littéraires, 3 (Apr. 70), 112-13.

155 Ibid., 113.

156 Cf., for example, Note éternelle du présent, 10, where Reverdy speaks of "la spéculation subtile et hasardeuse de l'esprit".

157 This unspecifiable point is not to be thought of as the moment when the poet's dream ceases and an act of written 'recording' begins. This latter moment, it would seem, also involves a transfer into an even more fully (but still not completely) conscious and controlled activity (cf. En Vrac, 128-9). The point we (and Reverdy) are concerned with here, rather, precedes writing and any precise verbal formulation. It is a moment when pre-verbal relationships would seem to be intuited by the mind, a moment whose seizures and intuitive possessions are then later 'sealed' in an act of verbalization (which may involve further struggle, conversion, transposition).

158 In his first Manifesto André Breton questions the possibility that the mind may seize in full consciousness at the moment of their formation the relationships posited by the image. Pierre Caminade (Image et métaphore, Paris: Bordas, 1970, pp. 26-33) deals fairly extensively with the Breton-Reverdy 'debate' and shows, with Alquié, that Breton ultimately uses phrasing almost identical to that of Reverdy's original definition to speak of the mind's seizing capacity in the image formation process. Moreover, Pierre Reverdy clearly never considered the mind to be engaging in a fully rational process of evaluation and verification of the irrational -- the notions of chance, intuition, etc., that permeate his aesthetics, must be taken to indicate a certain closeness of thinking that neither poet fully appreciated (until, presumably, Reverdy's already partly quoted letter to Breton in 1924: "Au premier coup d'oeil sur votre émouvante préface [du Manifeste du surréalisme], je vois -- je m'y attendais -- que rien ne nous sépare radicalement. Je n'ai même jamais prétendu que les rapports perçus par l'esprit (quelle part de l'esprit? ni la raison ni la pensée) l'étaient consciemment. Je ne suis pas -- et vous me l'avez brutalement reproché -- un penseur. Je suis, plus que tout autre, je crois, un auteur inconscient" (Etudes littéraires, III (Apr. 70), 112-13). Caminade suggests that the final difference separating the conceptions of the two poets resides in the stress placed by Breton upon the arbitrary, by Reverdy upon the notion of justesse. Despite our stress in Chapter VI this is not entirely true, for, as we hope to show there, Reverdy's conception of the image warmly and lucidly embraces both factors and his thinking remains incomplete with the omission of either.

159 See 'L'Esthétique et l'esprit', Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 180, where Reverdy speaks of the intuitive action of "l'esprit [qui] accepte ou refuse ce qui advient. Ce qui est naturel reste, ce qui ne l'est pas disparaît et l'oeuvre s'établit normale et forte". The word naturel on this occasion has no usual connotation, but merely means 'contextually appropriate'.

160 See Le Livre de mon bord, 131: "Le romancier, le prosateur en général, est actif, le poète est passif". The reason for this appellation, it would appear, is that "pour le poète, le champ est circonscrit à son unique passion, à la pulsation de sa vie intérieure".

161 En Vrac, 28.

162 Le Voleur de Talan, 21.

163 Le Gant de crin, 43.

164 We shall not attempt to impose a simplistic symbolism upon Reverdy's 'vertical imagination', however. Within the poetry in particular, the vertical motifs do not usually attract this symbolism and function in fact much more dynamically and with much greater imaginative independence than such an interpretation (even though it may be partially attributed to Reverdy) would allow.

165 This is not, of course, to suggest that Reverdy had never been beset with doubt, whether it be with regard to poetry, religion or whatever. Doubt and questioning are present, along with a muted, discreetly expressed anguish, from the beginning. What we wish simply to suggest, however, is that before Solesmes the imaginative balance tends noticeably to swing in favour of an upper aspiration, whereas, afterwards, and notably in the post-Ferraille period, the sky loses its balance of imaginative attraction, not totally, but significantly.

166 'Horizon', Plupart du temps, 71.

167 Ibid., 71 and Flaques de verre, 44, respectively.

168 Cf. 'Course' (Plupart du temps, 239); 'Le côté bleu du ciel' (ibid., 283); and 'Tout s'envole' (Flaques de verre, 100), for example.

169 Titles of two Flaques de verre poems (pp. 34 and 41).

170 The Solesmes crisis was, in fact, by no means solely 'religious' in nature, but deeply, pervasively spiritual and ontological. It is no coincidence that Reverdy also suffered severe creative anguish during and subsequent to this same period. Anthony Rizzuto points to the sky/heaven association in his analysis of 'The Expressive Word' in Style and Theme in Reverdy's Les Ardoises du toit (Univ. of Alabama Press, 1971), but is inclined to overstate the religious inspiration of such vocabulary, as also, in a recent essay, of Reverdy's metaphors in Ferraille (Kentucky Romance Quarterly, 3 (1975), 321-34).

171 'Parmi les choses sans valeur ... ', Flaques de verre, 6.

172 See, for example, 'Ciel étoilé' (Plupart du temps, 209), where we are told in the opening line of "un arbre orienté vers le ciel". Mortimer Guiney, in particular, has argued with some justification the poet-tree (and word-bird) equivalence in Reverdy's work (La Poésie de Pierre Reverdy, pp. 105-6).

173 For both the above quotations, see again 'Parmi les choses sans valeur ... ', Flaques de verre, 6.

174 Le Livre de mon bord, 40. Cf. 'Réclame' (Plupart du temps, 171), for the sky's openness and attraction. The poem begins:

187 It is probable that Reverdy is also poking fun, with a not uncommon touch of mischievous irony, at those 'poets' who tend to borrow, buy or steal a little too frequently from those 'poorer', but real poets who, in this optic, become more clearly and essentially represented by the 'marchand d'étoiles' and his rare capacity of seizure. Le Voleur de Talan and other early texts also reveal Reverdy's concern at that time to distinguish between the true and the false poet, and indicate his amusing and sometimes amused interest in Max Jacob's obsession with the idea of the inviolable privacy of his poems. Many painters Reverdy knew at the time of his arrival in Paris were also in the habit of turning their canvasses to the wall when visitors arrived.

188 En Vrac, 123.

189 See 'Trace de pas' (Main d'oeuvre, 107), 'Le temps passe' (ibid., 58), 'Moi-même' (Plupart du temps, 297), 'Le côté bleu du ciel' (ibid., 283) and 'Autre éclairage' (Main d'oeuvre, 64), respectively. Cf. 'Cristal' (Flaques de verre, 58), 'Sans savoir où' (Main d'oeuvre, 61) and 'Filet d'astres' (Plupart du temps, 296) for other striking examples.

190 Main d'oeuvre, 16.

191 Le Gant de crin, 40.

192 Main d'oeuvre, 250.

193 See, respectively, 'La poésie reine du vide et l'art mordu', Risques et périls, 25; Le Gant de crin, 144; ibid., 125; and 'Une seule vague', Main d'oeuvre, 388.

194 'Révolte d'amiraux', ibid., 208.

195 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 32.

196 Cf. infra, Chapter V, for an elaboration of this and other related motifs.

197 'Horizontal et tout est dit', Main d'oeuvre, 154.

198 See ibid., 18, the closing verses.

199 Le Livre de mon bord, 185.

200 See, respectively, 'Pour demain' (Plupart du temps, 345) or 'L'imperméable' (La Peau de l'homme, 103); and 'La Peau de l'homme' (ibid., 41).

201 Flaques de verre, 120.

202 It might be noted that all the poems of Flaques de verre (1929) were published firstly in review, from 1919 (two years before Reverdy's remarkably sudden conversion) to 1928 (at least two years after his loss of faith). If, at all events, the poems of this volume bear any traces of Reverdy's religious crisis, they remain, as always in his poetry, subliminal, ambiguous, 'pure'. (For details of Reverdy's 'religious' history, see Stanislas Fumet, 'Entretiens du Polyèdre', Etudes, 328 (1968), 374-6.)

203 La Peau de l'homme, 41.

204 It is perhaps worth mentioning, in parentheses, that Reverdy's years spent trudging uphill to 12 rue Cortot, right by the Sacré Coeur, will in all probability have helped to form and consolidate this particular imaginative structure.

205 See, respectively, Le Gant de Crin, 105; Risques et périls, 24; and Le Livre de mon bord, 168.

206 See, for example, Le Gant de crin, 144: "On attend toujours une manifestation du ciel sur la terre. Alors qu'il s'agit pour nous de monter, non [pour Dieu] de descendre".

207 En Vrac, 5.

208 Ibid. My emphasis.

209 Main d'oeuvre, 11-12.

210 Le Livre de mon bord, 26. Cf. En Vrac, 52.

211 Le Livre de mon bord, 20.

212 In a Le Livre de mon bord note Reverdy juxtaposes the two notions of élan and effort, listing them as the two basic modes of attainment of the "sphère de la vie que je voudrais atteindre" (Le Livre de mon bord, 20). In the poem 'En attendant', too, although noting the present absence of ascensional means of attainment, Reverdy handles the two notions together, this time showing their close complementariness: "Aucun essor/Aucun effort/Pour détacher l'esprit de cette ritournelle" (Plupart du temps, 285).

213 Risques et périls, 204. My emphasis.

214 En Vrac, 97.

215 The latter notion is mentioned interestingly at the conclusion to Reverdy's tribute to Rimbaud, 'Le premier pas qui aide', first published in 1954 in Les Nouvelles Littéraires (see Cette émotion appelée poésie, 155-61); and, in an interview with Jean Duché (Le Figaro Littéraire, 111 (1948), 3), Reverdy openly avows: "J'ai toujours rêvé des météores. Rimbaud, Lautréamont, voilà ce que j'aurais voulu être".

216 'Trace de pas', Main d'oeuvre, 107.

217 'Danse de terre', ibid., 445.

218 En Vrac, 5.

219 See infra, Chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse', for an elaboration of Reverdy's conception of the image's formation.

220 En Vrac, 4-5.

221 Risques et périls, 11.

222 Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 186.

223 Ibid.

224 Ibid., 187. Of those other poets who are appealed to by the idea of creation as an irresistible upsurging of mental activity, we might mention in particular Claudel 'L'esprit et l'eau', (Cinq grandes odes) and Michaux, for whom "this 'montée verticale et explosive' in which inspiration and execution are one, is the capital experience towards which he would have all other experience tend", as Malcolm Bowie argues (op. cit., p. 11).

225 Cf. Reverdy's 1952 essay on Picasso, 'Un oeil de lumière et de nuit' (Note éternelle du présent, 212), where he asks: "Mais qui aurait pu, dans cette lutte interminable et sans répit, avoir montré plus de persévérance, d'audace et de courage?" Cf. also this chapter, n. 212.

226 See, for example, Le Livre de mon bord, 174 and 206. However, Reverdy often derived pleasure from going back much later to his original texts and re-working them to a greater or lesser degree. Greene argues rightly that, in this respect, Reverdy's aesthetics contrasts with Valéry's, but he underestimates the notions of effort and slow maturation to which Reverdy, like Valéry, is also sensitive (cf. op. cit., p. 66).

227 To borrow and somewhat reapply Apollinaire's words in 'La jolie rousse', Calligrammes.

228 Cf. Chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse'.

229 En Vrac, 28.

230 See 'Vivre tard', Main d'oeuvre, 425.

231 See, respectively, Le Gant de crin, 43 and 'Main-morte', Main d'oeuvre, 391.

232 Le Gant de crin, 39.

233 See En Vrac, 28.

234 Ibid., 219.

235 'Couvre-feu', Plupart du temps, 230. As we point out later, however, holes, traps and chasms do not draw Reverdy's enthused enquiry, even if they may obsess: the lower space that does lure him is in this way oddly related to and yet qualitatively different from the lower spaces that are all images of the void and that offer nothingness, death, finality (cf. Chapter V).

236 Le Livre de mon bord, 253-4.

237 Cf. En Vrac, 231, where Reverdy declares: "Cher poète, narines de fleuriste et bottes d'égoutier; car il faut que tu plonges, cher poète. Mais pas plus bas que la nappe de fange qui fait miroiter la chaussée". The term égoutier recalls, interestingly, Reverdy's early

pronouncements on the dream in Le Gant de crin; and, of course, this fact, allied to the notion of the release of what is repressed or concealed, links this whole imaginative logic to the ideas of the surrealists and Freud. Reverdy's special modulation of these ideas is already essentially known (cf. supra, 'Dream'), but is implicit also in his final 'argument' concerning 'Exploitation of Depths'.

238 A good number of the early entries in Le Gant de crin concerning the dream refer to the latter as a mine (see pp. 23-4 especially). See also Le Livre de mon bord, 204 and En Vrac, 219, for example.

239 See infra, Chapter V, for a full discussion of the question of viscosity.

240 Main d'oeuvre, 327. Bachelard also cites Reverdy, without discussion, as a poet sensitive to subterranean exploration and indeed 'global' possession by means of roots (cf. La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p. 295).

241 See especially 'Palme', from Charmes.

242 Le Gant de crin, 138.

243 Cf. 'Il a la tête pleine d'or' (Main d'oeuvre, 401), where Reverdy proclaims, rather more generally but in the context of war, his faith in man's roots: "Il ne faut pas désespérer des racines de l'homme/Aux muscles de caoutchouc".

244 Le Gant de crin, 39.

245 See Main d'oeuvre, 391 for these quotations from 'Main-morte'.

246 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 253.

247 En Vrac, 231.

248 See Main d'oeuvre, 391. Cf. also 'L'imperméable' (La Peau de l'homme, 111), where memory's digging action leads to an increase in world's and self's space.

249 Main d'oeuvre, 425.

250 Other examples of the fishing image may be observed in 'Main-morte' (again) where Reverdy speaks of "les mots silencieux qui tendent leur filet" (ibid., 392); in 'Longue portée' (ibid., 433); and in 'Chacun sa part' (Plupart du temps, 44).

251 Le Livre de mon bord, 204.

252 Le Gant de crin, 24. Brunner (op. cit., pp. 30-32) also discusses the Reverdyan fascination with the image of the mine and "la quête en profondeur", but concludes that it is a fascination fated to remain unproductive. Certainly, as he argues, truth tends to recede endlessly beyond reach into the 'depths'. But then the poet as poet is not in search of ultimate truth, but artistic 'truth' (cf. the conclusion to

our discussion 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse', Chapter VI) and Brunner's argument once more neglects much important material that we include here (which demonstrates that artistic exploitation is possible) and does not distinguish between the exploitable depths and the depths (hole, void, etc.) which are an image of slippage towards nothingness (cf. infra, Chapter V).

253 See En Vrac, 219.

254 Le Gant de crin, 23.

255 En Vrac, 219.

256 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 23; and 'L'originalité de Gargallo' (Note éternelle du présent, 108), where Gargallo's patient 'mining' activity is evoked.

257 See, for example, the poem 'Reflux': "Ce soir je voudrais dépenser tout l'or de ma mémoire [...] Il faut remonter du plus bas de la mine, de la terre épaissie par l'humus du malheur, reprendre l'air dans les recoins les plus obscurs de la poitrine, pousser vers les hauteurs -- où la glace étincelle de tous les feux croisés de l'incendie -- où la neige ruisselle, le caractère dur, dans les tempêtes sans tendresse de l'égoïsme et les décisions tranchantes de l'esprit" (Main d'oeuvre, 343; my emphasis).

258 Le Gant de crin, 23. In his essay 'Psychanalyse et littérature' (La Poésie et ses environs, Paris: Gallimard, 1973), Clancier relates the poet's exploitation of his inner depths to the psychoanalytical gesture and stresses, pertinently, that both depend upon two stages, "le temps de la plongée et celui de la remontée vers le jour" (p. 41).

259 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 43, where Reverdy talks of the diver "qui va chercher dans les plus intimes profondeurs de la conscience les matériaux sublimes qui viendront se cristalliser quand sa main les portera au jour". My emphasis.

260 See ibid., 24 for this basic argument.

261 Ibid., 40.

262 Cf. ibid., 24: the dream must be "soumis" to become truly "une mine en exploitation".

263 Ibid., 38.

264 Cf. ibid., 40; and ibid., 34-5, where Reverdy opposes l'or sonnant and la fausse monnaie.

265 Plupart du temps, 185 and 77, respectively.

266 Raïssa Maritain, Poèmes et essais, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968.

267 Ibid.

268 See, for example, 'Messager de la tyrannie' (Flaques de verre, 8-9) and 'Lendemain de saison' (Main d'oeuvre, 348).

269 Le Gant de crin, 35.

270 En Vrac, 214.

271 Le Livre de mon bord, 256.

## Chapter IV

### The Frustrations of Advance

We shall now turn our attention to an examination of certain motifs and notions that, broadly speaking, are negatively connoted in Reverdy's imagination and whose force and effect are found to be directed against the general movement towards attainment, contact and fulfilment that we have been dealing with to this point. In this survey we shall be obliged to limit our analysis to certain selected motifs and images that are not only recurrent but particularly representative and illustrative. To offer a complete compilation and detailed analysis of all motifs relevant to our general notional heading would of course, be impractical and in any case, risk a tiresome redundancy. Even in its present curtailed form our study cannot avoid a certain overlapping, which is, of course, directly due to the proliferation of analogous imaginative motifs in Reverdy's work itself.<sup>1</sup> It should be said in addition that, whilst negative motifs such as those we shall now seek to examine outweigh by far, quantitatively speaking, motifs of attainment and fulfilment found in the poetry of Reverdy, our concern throughout this study is not to reflect that quantitative imbalance, but to show, wherever appropriate, how other 'smaller' imaginative structures may provide a qualitative counterbalance to such forces and place them in a total perspective. Only in that way will the powerful negative forces of the imagination be seen to be bound up in that just equilibrium that, in fact, other less conspicuous imaginative motifs (including the whole imaginative structure of Reverdy's aesthetic theory that lies precisely outside his poetry) demand and will finally be seen to impose. This should be clearly understood here and remembered throughout the remaining

chapters.<sup>2</sup> Our main and immediate concern must now be to present a selectively detailed review of the various notions of withdrawal of world and self that work against advance and achievement. If to this point, we have been concerned, directly or implicitly, with a movement from nothingness, via certain channels of advance, towards the attainment, the possession, the creation of something, then this chapter will demonstrate that Reverdy's imagination may be equally obsessed with the possibility and the reality of a reversal of such a movement.<sup>3</sup> Attainment is not an automatic, natural outcome of advance. Frustrations may occur, the attainment of 'something', of desired goals, may be inhibited, the general process of advance may become overcomplicated, defective, vitiated. If, then, astonishingly, Reverdy is ultimately capable of articulating a transcendent logic of withdrawal, and if, as we shall see in our next chapter, advance may lead despite everything to some attainment of objectives, advance may equally, indeed far more commonly, be confronted with serious inhibitions and frustrations, and, as we shall also see in our next chapter, may distressingly offer an 'attainment' that is no more than a hollow fullness, the reaching of an end that is reduction to nothingness.

# I. Hostility and Indifference

## Self and Others

There are many poems and passages in Reverdy's prose writings that speak of the varying degrees of aggression manifested by others towards the central protagonist/self/poet of Reverdy's creative universe. Such aggression may vary, even within the confines of a small collection such as Poèmes en Prose, from the shameful and cold purposing of a supposed friend in 'Un autre accueil', to the brutal and abrupt questioning of a policeman in 'Civil'.<sup>4</sup> Laughter, in particular, in this collection as

often elsewhere, becomes a tool of aggression to which Reverdy is especially sensitive. It may denote an incomprehension born of a mixture of gratuitous hostility and utter indifference, as in 'Les vides du printemps',<sup>5</sup> or, as in 'Belle étoile', a smug satisfaction with the fact of a having and a possibility which contrast with the poet's dispossession and confusion: "J'aurai peut-être perdu la clé, et tout le monde rit autour de moi et chacun me montre une clé énorme pendue à son cou/Je suis le seul à ne rien avoir pour entrer quelque part. Ils ont tous disparu et les portes closes laissent la rue plus triste. Personne. Je frapperai partout./Des injures jaillissent des fenêtres et je m'éloigne".<sup>6</sup> Such laughter has lost all trace of joyful freshness and wholesome vigour,<sup>7</sup> articulating in capsule form Reverdy's essentially Stendhalian appreciation of the psychology of laughter as one of base offensiveness and cowardice.<sup>8</sup> Most fundamentally what laughter brings about is an emphasis of the difference or distance between laughter and laughed-at. It thus becomes a powerful weapon in the arsenal of human aggression that denies contact between self and other and works to establish, rather than a climate of similarity and compassion, one of cruel competition and noxious self-interest.

The town or city in Reverdy's work is another particularly noteworthy image of the often vitiated relationships that may obtain between self and others. The Reverdyan city is essentially a place of death and degradation. It grows and produces, but its growth is inhuman and skeletal, its production utilitarian and non-creative.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is the place wherein the crowd or mob gathers and prospers -- the crowd whose mentality seems so despised by the recluse of Solesmes.<sup>10</sup> The city, whose filth and disfigurements are evoked regularly in, for example, the short tales of La Peau de l'homme, seems to be the natural haunt of that

amorphous, animal-like mass that fills the streets (like dogs) with its gestures of greed, vanity, menace and violence.<sup>11</sup> Other men seem, in this way, to be largely grouped together, tarred with the same brush and thus destined to isolate the poet from them. If a 'happy few' may be seen to maintain outside this amorphous conglomeration, their individual power and attraction,<sup>12</sup> the fact remains that any impression of self-other dichotomy is severely aggravated by Reverdy's sense of an almost formal division of the world into individual and crowd, defender and aggressors -- which is indeed precisely the perspective in which Picasso had to function from the first day his genius manifested itself.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the self or poet/crowd dichotomy may be accentuated not just in terms of the aggressiveness of others in the face of their perception of the poet's misfortune or difference. The poet may also feel lost in the crowd, surrounded by potential contact and understanding, yet unable to catch the desired attention of others. Instead of suffering from being observed, the poet is exposed to the pain of indifference and obscurity.<sup>14</sup> In the midst of others, there is, ironically, the presence of nobody. Where contact, however imperfect, however fierce,<sup>15</sup> had previously occurred, now there is no contact or, at best perhaps, an encounter of "froids silences" or "regards détournés".<sup>16</sup> The other remains untouched by the poet's gesture of need and love which goes unnoticed or uncomprehended. No possibility of communion is suspected by the other in the one case as in the other, for, it would seem, whether it is indifference or aggression that is at work, the other's self-interest prevails.<sup>17</sup> Such a negatively connoted self-centredness<sup>18</sup> manifests itself either in virtual oblivion of the poet or else in the instinctive and ugly need to nullify or condemn the latter's 'heroic' gesture in order to bathe in a purely illusory superiority. In

consequence, the poet remains stranded. Nobody comes and nothing occurs to alleviate the feelings of abandonment and alienation imposed upon him.<sup>19</sup> Non-contact, like negative contact, serves to stress a basic spiritual division between the mass of people and the poetic protagonist. Indifference and hostility open wounds and mark the two extremes of defective and vitiated self-other relationships.

### The Objective World

To survive in the midst of this human environment is a difficult task, as Reverdy commonly reminds us. "Quelle constitution robuste il faut avoir", Reverdy remarks in 'L'imperméable', "passer à travers/ne pas y voir/ne pas entendre/l'épiderme joue le rôle le plus ingrat".<sup>20</sup> Inherently sensitive, one's skin needs to harden in order to inure itself to the cruelty, violence and constant menace that, in effect, come not only from the human world, but also from the objective, phenomenal world around us. The landscapes Reverdy 'describes' in his poetry and prose bristle with overt or latent danger and hostility. Along the roadside, "des fleurs vénéneuses se dressent", Reverdy may inform us:<sup>21</sup> or else he may give a typically empty and sinister character<sup>22</sup> to a space whose everyday familiarity usually endows it with a simple cosiness:

Un jardin sans oiseaux  
 Un jardin sans bruit  
 Vous allez cueillir des fleurs noires  
 Les feuilles ne sont jamais vertes  
 Toutes les épines sont rouges  
 Et vos mains sont ensanglantées<sup>23</sup>

The spaces Reverdy evokes in his creative writing are thus often not simply risky and potentially hazardous zones, but, instead, their negative potential may be translated into an outright, inhuman torturing that plagues and obsesses the all but despairing poet. These spaces, however, it should perhaps be stressed at this point, are spaces which, whilst 'reflecting' an initial, primary self-world experience that is largely

negative in character, go beyond evocation of the phenomenal world's hostility, to a restructuring of the motifs of such hostility which permits both their continued existence and a marvellous transcendence of them. If we shall, in the immediate term, be concerned to demonstrate Reverdy's appreciation of the hostility or indifference of the world, we shall ultimately proceed to an examination of the central point of this slight digression. <sup>24</sup>

Reverdy is fully aware that, strictly speaking, "[on n'a] pas de raison d'aimer ni de haïr les masses mal rangées de la nature". The phenomenal world is merely there, absurdly and indifferently there. <sup>24a</sup> Although living, its presence seems in some regards, inert, providing a flatly unemotive framework within which to exist. But, although such a logic may abstractly obtain, practical self-world experience condemns man to struggle with a world before which man himself cannot remain unmoved and with which he maintains a curiously anguished love relationship. In a letter to Jean Rousselot written in 1951, Reverdy comments that only during his "enfance indiciblement animale, toute vouée à la sensibilité et à la sensualité", was nature felt not to be inhospitable. He continues:

Une fois l'âge de l'intelligence venu - un peu plus tard, peut-être, chez moi que chez les autres, -- la nature, dont je ne me suis différencié que très tard, que j'ai tant aimée, au point de n'avoir pas pu tirer mon temps loin de la terre et de ses diverses parures, la nature m'est apparue comme quelque chose d'hostile, d'inhumain, de terriblement angoissant, en lutte contre l'homme -- alors que c'est l'homme qui a commencé. <sup>25</sup>

The phenomenal world thus becomes a source of anguish, with the advent of a certain increased consciousness of the self as distinct from the world, as separate from nature. Nature is then felt and thought to be hostile. Originally, any fundamental self-world opposition was obscured. Self

and world were spiritually integrated rather than disparate entities. But, with the age of reason, comes a logic of differentiation, a logic not sought, it would seem, but instinctively generated within the self. It is a logic that divides nature into human and non-human categories, one that cannot avoid the anguish of such division. Nature is now experienced as different and "étranger", <sup>26</sup> its primary separateness is curiously felt to be indicative of an indifference or cruelty which amount to the same thing and yet which, in no way inherent to nature, stem rather from the poet's peculiarly masochistic consciousness. The phenomenal world, "indifférent et cruel" as it is, <sup>27</sup> is cruel, therefore, essentially because it is indifferent, because it is somewhat unmanageably inert. Because it cannot embrace man in some direct fashion, it is held to be recalcitrant and withdrawing, its 'aggression' curiously emanating from its 'retreat'.

Many of Reverdy's poems point to the felt hostility or indifference of the world. They may do so with a certain overttness, as in the poem 'Le coeur écartelé', from Ferraille, where the entire cosmos, in its spatial and temporal dimensions, conspires to terrorize and torture the poet to the point where self-destruction seems to be the only salvation from the slow death being meted out:

Il se ménage tellement  
 Il a si peur des couvertures  
 Les couvertures bleues du ciel  
 Et les oreillers de nuages  
 Il est si mal couvert par sa foi  
 Il craint tant les pas de travers  
 Et les rues taillées dans la glace  
 Il est trop petit pour l'hiver  
 Il a tellement peur du froid  
 Il est transparent dans sa glace  
 Il est si vague qu'il se perd  
 Le temps le roule sous ses vagues  
 Parfois son sang coule à l'envers  
 Et ses larmes tachent le linge  
 Sa main cueille les arbres verts  
 Et les bouquets d'algues des plages

Sa foi est un buisson d'épines  
 Ses mains saignent contre son coeur  
 Ses yeux ont perdu la lumière  
 Et ses pieds traînent sur la mer  
 Comme les bras morts des pieuvres  
 Il est perdu dans l'univers  
 Il se heurte contre les villes  
 Contre lui-même et ses travers  
 Priez donc pour que le seigneur  
 Efface jusqu'au souvenir 28  
 De lui-même dans sa mémoire

Elsewhere, a discretion more typical of the earlier collections is in evidence,<sup>29</sup> as in Reverdy's depiction in 'La vie dure', of an old man's exposure and resistance to the changing elemental conditions of a world that arouses fear and forces man into a submissive withdrawal:

Il est tapi dans l'ombre et dans le froid pendant l'hiver. Quand le vent souffle il agite une petite flamme au bout des doigts et fait des signes entre les arbres. C'est un vieil homme; il l'a toujours été sans doute et le mauvais temps ne le fait pas mourir. Il descend dans la plaine quand le soir tombe; car le jour il se tient à mi-hauteur de la colline caché dans quelque bois d'où jamais on ne l'a vu sortir. Sa petite lumière tremble comme une étoile à l'horizon aussitôt que la nuit commence. Le soleil et le bruit lui font peur; il se cache en attendant les jours plus courts et silencieux d'automne, sous le ciel bas, dans l'atmosphère grise et douce où il peut trotter, le dos courbé, sans qu'on l'entende. C'est un vieil homme d'hiver qui ne meurt pas. 30

Given the limitations we have imposed upon ourselves in this discussion, we shall now restrict our attention to the question at issue to a more concentrated examination of one particularly preoccupying image of the world's aggression, namely that of the thorn.

#### The Thorn

Reverdy's work, from the earliest stages of its development, shows a distinct sensitivity to the sensation of pain and torture brought about by the sharp, piercing thrust of things.<sup>31</sup> Arrows, darts, drills, as well as thorns, are thus typical weapons of a phenomenal arsenal whose use against the delicate and exposed surfaces of the poet becomes more and

more pronounced in the later, post-Solesmes collections.<sup>32</sup> The thorn is, of all these tools of torture, merely the most 'privileged', the others all possessing the same ability to inflict pain and injury, to penetrate the poet's 'skins' with a most damaging and violent degree of incision. The heart and the mind are particularly vulnerable to the jabbing of thorns: the forehead may be "troué par les épines", the heart "rempli d'épines", the very roads along which the heart and mind advance in pursuit of their ends may be lined with thorns and other tokens of the world's hostility ("Par toutes les épines qui sillonnent les routes du coeur et de la pensée, chemins coupés de meurtrissures, de rives d'eau, de colliers de larmes et de signes, tracés par la haine et le ressentiment des bêtes, je ne me reconnais pas dans ces pages au miroir méfiant de la source.").<sup>33</sup> Even if a scarring over of the damaged tissue occurs, we can see from a poem such as the latter one, that the injury and disfiguration inflicted may be so devastating as to prevent self-recognition. The self-world encounter as mediated by the image of the thorn may thus tend towards the crucifixion of the poet,<sup>34</sup> towards a cataclysmic destruction of the self.<sup>35</sup>

Yet it is important to stress that, most fundamentally, Reverdy is not concerned, as a poet, with a direct evocation of the hostility and cruelty of the phenomenal world. He does not, of course, for a moment pretend to suggest that there has been a primary experience of the thorn's digging into the flesh of the brow, or of the heart or brain being pierced by thorns. Rather, Reverdy borrows the known and no doubt sensuously experienced 'phenomenality' of the thorn -- along with its acquired religious connotations --, so that the thorn may aid in concretely representing the anguish of a self-world encounter become rift (as also the anguish of the poet's struggle to secure a reintegration of

self and world via poetry itself). But, again to demonstrate such anguish in the face of such hostility, is not the poet's principal purpose. What he above all strives to do, is to convert anguish (and, indeed, all primary emotion) into a new substance able to procure an aesthetic emotion. What the poet offers, then, is not merely the evidence of anguish due to the world's aggression, but, simultaneously, magically, a fresh re-structured, imaginative and transcendent vision of such experience, of the elements of such aggression. The thorn, like similar images of piercing, is thus simultaneously an element of anguish and an element of transcendence of such anguish.

A few examples are in order. When, in his superb poem 'Les graines de la liberté', Reverdy writes of "le calme des rides sanglantes et violacées par le froid matinal, les brûlures du vent déchiré aux épines des cataclysmes, quand les troupeaux de coeurs gonflés rentrent trop tard", <sup>36</sup> the poem makes no pretence to evoke such a world as real, as réel<sup>1</sup>, to present as verifiable the phenomena and events it offers. Instead, the poem creates its own phenomenal world, a world which is imagined, metaphoric and yet 'just' (as Reverdy would put it <sup>37</sup>), because composed of the residual though transformed elements of the poet's primary experience of the world. The anguish is retained, things keep their largely hostile character and yet anguish and hostility are dominated, subdued, via the poet's imaginative, figurative re-ordering of their elements. Similarly, when, in Sable mouvant, Reverdy declares

Je m'étais engagé beaucoup trop loin déjà  
 Dans les méandres de ce sinistre labyrinthe  
 Plein de broussailles et d'épines  
 D'arêtes de poissons  
 De débris de cantines  
 D'écailles de chansons  
 De fabuleux décombres  
 Et plus que tout  
 Au delà des cloisons  
 Après le tremblement de terre  
 Pour pouvoir espérer de retirer mon épingle du jeu  
 Ce n'était pas un jeu <sup>38</sup>

Reverdy is not only able and concerned to present a picture of a world whose devastated condition does not prevent it from posing a continuing threat to the life that still roams amongst its rubble and debris. The debris of this world, like the world itself, are also shrouded in an aura of fable and marvel. The initial lines of this passage may allow us to imagine we are in a world that is more or less directly evoked, but this impression is soon dispelled by the delicately self-reflexive images of "écaillés de chansons/De fabuleux décombres", which suggest also that the ruined, painful world is equally the imaginative, poetic universe. Such images demand a reappraisal of what has gone before. They jog our memory, point subtly to the fact that we are within the realm of the poem, of a series of figures that, whilst allowing the facts of primary experience to linger residually in the poem, simultaneously promote the blossoming of a new order of perception of such facts ( -- here, as often elsewhere, the metaphoricity contains a self-reflexive element that points to the felt 'thorniness' and ruined state of the poet's poetic world).

The final evidence we shall offer to underline our argument is from 'Le coeur soudain':

Dans mon coeur ma peau mes entrailles  
 Les marques honteuses de mes rêves  
 L'ampoule du soleil que cette épine crève  
 L'épine c'est mon rêve aigu plein de lueurs  
 Plein de crimes inassouvis aux confins de la peur  
 De meurtres impunis à la face du monde  
 Et si durement expiés sous l'oeil trop cruel qui me sonde 39

There are again, essentially two points to bear in mind. First, in this poem the thorn is not specifically associated with the world. It is, rather, part of the self, the poet's dream, a violent, illuminating dream that is felt to be at once frustrated and yet murderously guilty. But, although the thorn is now manipulated by the self, it is also directed towards the self. It is upon the poet's heart and entrails that its

stigmata are to be observed, so that, in effect, the thorn remains a figure of that painful laceration that may occur during the poet's contact with the world (be it at a purely primary level or in his efforts of poetic domination). The very desire and dreaming of the poet, inevitably concerned as they are with phenomenal reality, become means of a self-torture which is, in itself, merely a reflection of the basic fact of nature's hostility or indifference, of the recalcitrance of a world felt to be alien and apart. But, once more, as a counterbalance to the poem's capacity to reflect the emotion of such primary (and creation-related) experience, the poem proffers itself as an aesthetic and figurative construct, as an imaginative feat of redeployment and 'magic utilisation' of primary data.<sup>40</sup> In this way, the thorn, like other images or motifs of an overtly negative order, becomes a thing of beauty, an element of transcendence. It ceases to be simply a sense-object, it sheds to a sufficient degree its purely phenomenal evocativeness, in order to become an image, one figure in a mosaic of figures - yet a figure whose aesthetic power stems, oddly, as much from its remaining sufficiently rooted in phenomenality and primary emotion, as from its antinatural removal from the latter.

## II. Images of Withdrawal, Blockage and Imprisonment

The poetry of Pierre Reverdy is crammed with a variety of images that figure, in broad terms, both the withdrawal of the world from the poet and, conversely, the poet's withdrawal from the world. We shall now proceed to survey the first of these two modes of withdrawal and obstruction and shall concentrate our attention essentially upon certain selected images such as discolouring, evaporation, dispersal, blockage and imprisonment.

The elusive and fugitive nature of reality is forever present in Reverdy's thinking. In a letter to Rousselot, he speaks of his poetry as bearing witness to "cette difficulté à appréhender le réel [...] qui se dérobe à l'étreinte". And, indeed, Reverdy's poetry speaks eloquently, repeatedly and with a multi-faceted suggestiveness, of such phenomenal elusiveness. "Tout ce qu'on voit/Tout ce qu'on croit/C'est ce qui part", Reverdy announces in 'Pointe'.<sup>41</sup> Poems such as 'Jour transparent' and 'De la pierre à l'eau' seize upon the facts of changing light and time's ebbing to deftly convey a series of images whose inspirational nucleus is the notion of retreat.<sup>42</sup> Other poems speak of the 'fleeing' horizon, of the trauma of "le pilote angoissé qui voit se dérober la flamme devant lui",<sup>43</sup> or else evoke the fading of footsteps, the disappearance of the world and the uneasy companionship of the remaining wind and the poet.<sup>44</sup> The world, its things and its inhabitants, thus reveal a distressing inclination to turn away from the poet, to shun his approach in what Reverdy sometimes depicts as an offensive gesture of 'cold-shouldering'. "Tout s'écarte et montre le dos", we are told in 'Et là';<sup>45</sup> and, elsewhere, the same conclusion is reached, this time associating crude laughter with an already coarse withdrawal: "Tout fuit pas à pas/Et tourne le dos/Comme pour mieux rire".<sup>46</sup> The poet is thus repeatedly refused access, thrown back upon himself, a wanderer led on<sup>47</sup> only to be thrust back in the face of the world's obstructive withdrawal before all attempt, natural or antinatural, to apprehend it.<sup>48</sup>

### Discolouration

The image of discolouration is firmly situated in the overall context of the world's withdrawal of the self. 'Fétiche', the opening poem of Reverdy's first collection, Poèmes en prose, soberly articulates a vision of shabbiness, loss and supplication which is only just compensated

by the slender presence of notions of minimal possibility and tenuous continuing: <sup>49</sup>

Petite poupée, marionnette porte-bonheur, elle se débat à ma fenêtre, au gré du vent. La pluie a mouillé sa robe, sa figure et ses mains qui déteignent. Elle a même perdu une jambe. Mais sa bague reste, et, avec elle, son pouvoir. L'hiver elle frappe à la vitre de son petit pied chaussé de bleu et danse, danse de joie, de froid pour réchauffer son coeur, son coeur de bois porte-bonheur. La nuit, elle lève ses bras suppliants vers les étoiles.

Discolouring here is just part of a broader impression of deprivation and withdrawal which Reverdy projects, non-symbolically, via the economical directness of an imaginative phenomenality. The fading or loss of colour may be ascribed to the effects of rain, as is the case in 'Fétiche' or that superb, though anguished poem 'Quelque part', which combines so many of those imaginative motifs so far examined -- discolouration, desert, thorn, crucifixion, crossroads -- and which demonstrates that their logical 'existential' outcome will ultimately be, if we set apart that astonishing miracle of art's plenitude (here so evident), the blankness of death and silence. <sup>50</sup> At other times, discolouring results from the suddenly destructive light of the sun; <sup>51</sup> or else it is the night that, with its withdrawal of light, brings about a suppression of colour associated now with extinction, now with disintegration. <sup>52</sup> On still other occasions, discolouration is linked to dryness and scarcity of growth, to the loss of mirth, to the disappearance of love, to the ebbing of life itself. <sup>53</sup> And, finally, just as words, those fine filters of the world, may cease to be able to seize the phenomenality they aim to embrace and transcend, so may the mind's ink lose its colour, its life-giving blood, and such anaemia herald the advent of death:

Les pieds rivés au sol  
 La main tordue à l'ancre  
 Et l'encre de l'esprit  
 Résine sans couleur  
 Sur la pente du front  
 Que ride ton sourire  
 Au fond des yeux sans ciel  
 Préface de la mort <sup>54</sup>

The discolouring of the world, it would seem then, now threatens a parallel discolouring of art. The sapping of the vigour of the one leads to a commensurate waning of strength in the other. It is undoubtedly a malady that Reverdy had always felt likely to pose a menace to his life as to his art, and his poetry may perhaps be said to bear witness to such a menace not only via the recurrent motif of discolouration, but also in the somewhat colourless textures and tonalities of the verbal 'mindscape' his poetry may at times create.

#### Evaporation

Another subtle and important image of the world's withdrawal from the self is that of evaporation. When we read in the poem 'Le flot berceur', that "les maisons disparaissent/Les arbres s'évaporent", <sup>55</sup> we must appreciate that the evaporation occurring is part of a general disappearance of phenomena due to change in light and heat, which, whilst provoking the advent of 'new' phenomena and experience, also contributes to the fact of the world's instability and elusiveness. If change means appearance and birth, it also spells disappearance and death and the motif of evaporation should most certainly be seen in the light of such themes, which are, moreover, highly recurrent in Reverdy's poetry. <sup>56</sup> The following lines, too, from the poem 'En attendant', help to characterise Reverdy's conception of the motif of evaporation:

Au passage émouvant d'une aile  
 Tout s'évapore et sèche  
 Et même l'illusion qui rendait l'aube moins amère <sup>57</sup>

The poem like most of those from the collection La Guitare endormie, was revised by Reverdy for the 1945 edition of Plupart du temps.<sup>58</sup> Whilst difficult and typically elliptic, the poem offers certain firm purchases on its meaning. In particular, the last of the lines quoted, which was added for the 1945 edition, gives an especial clarification and, indeed, confirmation, of the fact that evaporation is essentially a negatively connoted image. With the (albeit moving) flight of a wing, with the touch of time upon the delicate movement of the world's events, disappearance comes about, a drying-up process sets in, one that draws out the fresh succulence from things, as from the poet's vision of things. Ironically, the evaporation occurring here might be meant to evoke, equally, the drying of the poet's ink on the page and, simultaneously and with Reverdy's great, lucid sense of paradox, the drying up of the poet's illusion about the world, that is to say, the evaporation of his poetic illusion, the reduction of the poem of completed creation to a question of mere illusoriness. As the bubble is created, the poet himself pricks it.<sup>59</sup> A later poem, 'Le temps qui bat', offers a similar instance of the complex articulation of the two levels of discourse:

Au fond de la poitrine qui se soulève encore  
 Entre les cils tremblants la rosée du coeur brûlante s'évapore  
 Tous les soucis dans les rides du front se dissimulent  
 Et dans les lignes de la main  
 Tous les périls de l'avenir tragique s'accumulent  
 Sous la voile et le vent flétris par la chaleur  
 Quelques mots à dessein dits tout bas aux rameurs  
 L'oeil se fixe à la pointe  
 Le geste à l'horizon  
 Tout marche dans le sens précis de la raison  
 Le masque du levant tombe du côté droit  
 Le manteau sombre glisse  
 Au tourbillon farouche du détroit  
 La forêt replie ses lames surs leurs gonds  
 Le jour sort tout entier de derrière ce paravent  
 La tête guide tout  
 Oriente la foule  
 [...]
 Tout s'illumine et meurt  
 La terre est renversée  
 Peut-être à la même heure  
 La tête traversée<sup>60</sup>

On the one hand, the poem depicts the drama of the world's diurnal rhythm -- or, more precisely, the 'negative' aspects of such a rhythm. Evaporation is merely one fragment, albeit an important one, of such a drama of loss, disappearance and death. Moreover, intricately bound up with such a dramatic phenomenal exodus, is the inner turmoil that can beset the heart, mind and hand of the poet. And yet, on the other hand, in the midst of this immense swirl and with a customary rich self-reflexive allusiveness, Reverdy manages to suggest the fact of poetic creation, of the poem's inner orientation, structuring and final illumination. Cares may thus conceal themselves in the wrinkles and furrows of the mind, future tragedy may gather in the hand's lines, the refreshing moisture that might have cooled the passions of the heart may become searing hot to the point of its evaporation -- but in all this mass of fleshy, worldly problems, the poet's 'head' guides and orients according to its own special reason, transcending the anguish that the flood of images partly conveys, by directing their flow into the poem's world and towards its final and cumulative flash of illumination.

As the later collections of poetry show, Reverdy is increasingly drawn to the imaginative projection of creative and existential difficulties in terms of motifs that relate to the notion of evaporation. The images of dryness, thirst and the desert, in particular, begin to proliferate. Just as the world may withdraw by virtue of its ability to elude the grasp of words,<sup>61</sup> so, as for example in 'A l'aube le veilleur', may the excessive dryness of words reflect an evaporation of that inner substance of the self which is developed via his contact -- which must be a warming and a lighting, rather than a burning -- with "la flamme qui danse au fond de l'univers".<sup>62</sup> Evaporation, dryness and withering lead, in the Reverdyan imagination, to thirst and fire, both of which, in turn,

are imaginatively linked to notions of lack, death and nothingness.

There is no need to demonstrate extensively such associations which conform to an immediately appreciable common logic. A short discussion of the following closing passage from the Ferraille poem 'A travers les signes' will suffice to elucidate some of the essential points:

Mais je tourne autour du néant. L'air qui gonfle  
l'espace entier me désespère. Je ne ferai plus  
rien ce soir. Peut-être arriverai-je à temps pour  
ne pas manquer de lumière. La fatigue m'attaque à  
ce nouveau tournant. Je ne pense plus à rien ni  
devant ni derrière. La soif brûle au fond de mes  
reins, mes mains sont plus faibles que la poussière.  
Ce n'est plus le souci d'aimer qui me soutient, ce  
n'est pas le bruit de la mer qui remplacera ma  
prière. Mais la poitrine en feu, la mort à mi-  
chemin je me couche, à peine épuisé, les lèvres sur  
les bords glacés de la nuit noire. <sup>63</sup>

What the poet's burning thirst and desire are confronted with is the blank face of absence and nothingness. The world, natural and antinatural at once, is elusive, refuses the weakening grasp of the poet, who, as Reverdy elsewhere puts it, is left aimlessly tramping "la piste sèche du bonheur" without prospect of attainment. <sup>64</sup> Succulence and moisture have disappeared, "[il n'y a] pas de source ce soir/Pas de fruits sous les feuilles", as Reverdy writes in his famous poem 'Et maintenant'. <sup>65</sup>

The poet, in such instances, is without a source, resourceless, abandoned to his own parched impoverishment "dans ce désert". <sup>66</sup> He thirsts after a substance and refreshment he no longer feels able to find. The world's spring of humected substantiality is deemed "tarie", <sup>67</sup> the outstretching love that seeks refreshment is left to wilt and dry, the world itself seeming to be stripped of all that might satisfy desire, its profound, tantalising substance evaporated off, so that its base outer crust remains alone, a withered simulacrum of its former fullness. <sup>68</sup>

Wind: A Question of Dispersal

Another image of phenomenal withdrawal and uncontrollability of which we shall speak here is that of the wind. A powerful agent of dispersal and confusion itself, the wind seems to represent all that is hostile and elusive in nature generally. Its energy is as enduring as it is 'brutal' and 'tormenting'.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, its activity, whilst predictable, with regard to its 'record-breaking', unflagging efforts,<sup>70</sup> remains quite erratic and unpredictable in the specific application of such efforts -- precisely because it is an agent of dispersal and its capacity for disorder is intrinsic, innate. The poet may pit his own energies against the wind's, but it seems at times that the powers of chaos, confusion and destruction are always capable of matching the poet's increased effort and of thus maintaining what might be seen as the distance between desire and goal:

Plus je crie plus le vent est fort  
 La porte se ferme  
 Emporte la fourrure et les plumes  
 Et le papier qui vole  
 Je cours sur la route après les feuilles  
 Qui s'envolent<sup>71</sup>

The poet, in fact, strives to achieve some kind of ordering or gathering, but is obliged to progress only "au gré du vent".<sup>72</sup> He aspires to a special kind of doing which will lead to the establishment of something.<sup>73</sup> But the wind, particularly in its most extreme forms of the storm and the whirlwind, directs its energies towards an undoing, a disintegration and confusion of all modes of meaningful assembly (memorisation, thought, imagination, creation) -- towards what would be, in effect, a kind of restoration of original, inhuman anarchy and nothingness, a reign of terror and torment over a realm swept clear of everything that the poet had defiantly laboured to construct.<sup>74</sup>

Because the wind is an agent of dispersal, it constitutes equally and quite naturally an agent of change or metamorphosis. Indeed, it may be said to embody the very principle of movement and dynamism, though its effects are negatively connoted and in conflict with the poet's own capacity for dynamic change and metamorphic poetic creation. From a certain point of view, the wind acts, as it were, on behalf of time in its gestures of devastating transformation. It brings things -- and words -- it blows them along, obliges them to gallop along "au sens du tourbillon".<sup>75</sup> But, unlike the poet, it does so with no purpose or reason,<sup>76</sup> so that, whilst man may attempt to snare its unwitting offerings in his traps and nets, the movement of the wind, violently unaccommodating, sweeps things -- and words -- on, into nothingness, into the void and undifferentiated turmoil from which they have mysteriously arisen. "Le vent violent emporte tout", "Tout est effacé par le vent".<sup>77</sup> The metamorphic movement imposed by the wind is from dust to dust, from nothingness to nothingness, with, against it, just the bare chance of a minimal something caught in the fragile nets or defective traps set out by the poet.

L'âpre vent du dégel  
 Le soupir du printemps qui hérissent les feuilles  
 Donne la chair de poule au ventre des prairies  
 Cœur étoilé de tant d'ardeur démente  
 Front de proue acharné aux accès de la vie  
 Les boucles se défont au gré de la tourmente  
 Jamais dans le miroir la flamme ne s'endort  
 Aucun reflet ne dure quand le feu s'est éteint  
 Les paroles brisées qui se délivrent de ta bouche  
 Ces mots qui courent en rafale dans le vide  
 A peine le temps de les dire  
 Aucun piège ne les retient<sup>78</sup>

As soon as things -- or words -- appear, they begin to withdraw. For Reverdy, they come, like man's memories, in a whirlwind blown along in ragged confusion.<sup>79</sup> The poet's problem is manifold. His power of seizure and retention is limited, time works against him in his effort to synchronize in-coming and out-going movements before it is too late, before

what has been blown within his grasp eludes it. The image of time thus reminds the poet that he lives with, and constantly fights creatively against, instability and transience.<sup>80</sup> He is forced to function whilst remaining wedged into a continually changing space of minimal and fugitive possibility, on each side of which lies a different form of nothingness -- that of the merely anticipated and desired and that of the regretted, the dispersed and the withdrawn. On the other hand, as Reverdy himself maintains in a note in En Vrac, were the sky never bedevilled by the violence of storm and wind, then perhaps man's fears would never have urged him to espouse his various religions.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Reverdy's only enduring faith, his faith in art, in antinature, and fragile as it sometimes is, comes in response to nature's chaos, to the anguishing condition of the world's hostility and withdrawal so powerfully represented by that figure of dispersal, confusion and destruction that is the wind.

#### The Wall: Thickness and Infinity

A powerful image of the frustration which may greet the poet's advancing movement is that of the wall. We may observe from the outset and with strong assurance that the blockage offered by the wall preoccupies the poet both with regard to its thickness and its lateral extensibility. "C'est derrière le mur le plus épais que tout se passe", Reverdy tells us in 'Cortège'.<sup>82</sup> And elsewhere he speaks of "l'épaisseur murée de la matière" or of "l'étouffante épaisseur d'un mur" that stretches "de mon coeur jusqu'au fond du monde".<sup>83</sup> Even if some initial penetration were possible, going through such compactness and solidification is generally felt to be out of the question. The tantalising substance lies out of reach,<sup>84</sup> appreciated largely in terms of the dense barrier that decrees its absence or, at most, its purely desired presence. Furthermore, to move along the surface of blockage with the aim of attaining a previously

unspotted opening, seems to meet with equal frustration. Blockage not only possesses depth, but also width. It extends laterally and, it would appear, endlessly. To explore the lateral extent of the wall's blockage is to discover that one is moving "le long du mur sans fin",<sup>85</sup> and that this "situation d'un homme devant un mur infini /sans aucune affiche" is in some significant measure the poet's primary existential condition.<sup>87</sup> The blockage offered by the infinitely extensible wall is, in fact, one that confronts the senses, the heart and the mind and it is a phenomenon invading and vitiating the relationships between self and world, self and others, self and (other-)self.<sup>88</sup> Thickness and infinity thus reflect the general pervasiveness of the poet's sensation of blockage and closure: blockage is infinite because it is found everywhere, in all domains of experience and endeavour<sup>89</sup> -- as well as being infinitely renewable, regenerated continuously in time as in space, the blockage of a "mur sans cesse rebelle à mes efforts".<sup>90</sup>

There are, in addition, a few other factors associated with Reverdy's notion of the wall that deserve mention. It will be seen that they generally underline the two main characteristics already surveyed and do nothing to lessen the impression created of the intensification of the fact of obstruction. The problem posed by the wall that is both impenetrably thick and infinitely extensible (in time and space) is, in effect, compounded by its hostile or indifferent inscrutability. The wall, "cet immense mur qu'on avait placé devant moi pour me nuire",<sup>91</sup> remains unsignposted, uninformative,<sup>92</sup> an enigmatic wall "[qui] garde son sérieux",<sup>93</sup> an impasse "sans pitié ni merci".<sup>94</sup> The wall thus poses an enigma that as we have seen will not yield to the poet's effort, its baffling and pervasive blankness fostering confusion and stagnation.<sup>95</sup> Even the solution that occasionally seems heralded by the discovery of doors, is apt to prove

purely chimerical when it is observed that, "les portes sont fermées à l'envers".<sup>96</sup> The only way, it would seem, to gain access through to the other side, to what is behind the blockage, is to find oneself magically transported into the realm where access is already attained, where one can open the door from the inside. Implicit in such a situation, moreover, is the idea that solution is not obtained solely as a result of continued effort and struggle, patience and waiting. Much needed as they are and importantly appealing as they are to the Reverdyan imagination,<sup>97</sup> their impetus alone may not necessarily lead to the desired and consciously attained overcoming of blockage. Art's transcendent access may be realised by what is felt to be a magical, spontaneous and irrational 'coming', via a surprising, unexpected 'coming' that suddenly, absurdly, places the poet on the other side of blockage, thus effecting an advance that had hardly been anticipated.<sup>98</sup> Such is the mysterious potentiality of art -- and, indeed for a time, of faith -- that the barrier may be astonishingly traversed and contact established despite those forbidding characteristics it possesses. However, throughout Reverdy's work, an anguished consciousness of obstacle persists, the thickness and infinity of impediment prevail imaginatively, the solution is generally held to be unavailable. As we shall now briefly show, distance and separation may not be characterised by the solidity of the wall, but they retain its obstructive efficacy; and the poet's feelings of imprisonment and exile do not dwindle as the years pass and the fact of a proven creative attainment seemingly asserts itself.

#### Distance and Imprisonment

The motif of distanciation or separation figures essentially the same obstruction we have just observed and reflects also not only the fact of the withdrawal of the world, but also to a degree that withdrawal of

the self to which we shall shortly give our attention. Reverdy's poems signal repeatedly the difficulty experienced by the poet in reconciling self with world, poet with any object of his attention and desire. Distance between the two, whether emotional, spiritual, physical or whatever, is commonly deemed to be virtually unbridgeable, unnegotiable. Often the poet feels the need not just to bear witness to the fact that distance is temporarily obstructive and frustrating, to the fact that "tout est loin", <sup>99</sup> that a waiting continues in the midst of absence and despite distance ("Pas de goutte de pluie/Pas une feuille d'arbre/Ni l'ombre d'un habit/J'attends/La gare est loin"). <sup>100</sup> Instead, distance is often seen as excessive, perhaps definitively beyond the remedy of continued gesturing and effort. "Tout se tient trop loin"; "Tout est trop loin pour la main prisonnière/le filon d'or/et la lumière". <sup>101</sup>

The restriction experienced by the poet, imposed upon him by his natural condition and the character of the place where he finds himself -- this restriction combines with distance to eliminate the possibility of gaining access to the locus or pays he advances towards and the marvels of gold and light which are within this locus. <sup>102</sup> What might have been manageable as a small rift, may thus widen into a gaping chasm, a zone of separation which the poet considers himself powerless to bridge. "Figure du dernier temps un abîme me sépare de toi", we read in a late poem from Plupart du temps, <sup>103</sup> where Reverdy seems acutely aware of the encumbrance of "la sombre distance", of the terrifying probability, articulated from the earliest moment, that distance is forever maintained, allowing a race to continue in which the pursuer is inevitably outstripped, regardless of the path pursued. "Et je cours derrière toi sans jamais t'atteindre", Reverdy admits in a poem from La Lucarne ovale. <sup>104</sup> And, in Risques et périls we read: "Quelle que soit la direction qu'on ait prise le chemin

nous éloigne toujours".<sup>105</sup>

The greatest irony of the poet's disturbing experience of distance resides no doubt in the fact that the world in which he finds himself, whilst containing the potential objects of his desire, fosters precisely the poet's feelings of separation from them. In this way the world becomes a locus that has lost its aura of spaciousness and infinite, yet immediate availability. The earth is transformed into a prison "où l'on tourne sans fin",<sup>106</sup> a cage in whose confines the poet is ever aware of pacing like a trapped animal.<sup>107</sup> As Reverdy himself says, man emerges from the innocence of integration and freedom of contact of his early childhood to an awareness of his deepening enslavement,<sup>108</sup> and he is, with increasing distress, thrust up against the limits, the barriers, the evasive and recalcitrant character of the world's phenomenality. What the poet seeks to embrace is there, but it dangles tantalisingly before him in the form of a dreamed liberty, with the ghostly, shadowy outline of merely theoretical possibility. The original liberty of movement and contact he craves is refused him and, wherever the poet now travels within the given world, he trails with him his 'chains' and his "boulet de forçat".<sup>109</sup> The horizon encircling him, shifting and changing as it may be, encloses him within a moving circular prison. The poet may only see and experience a segment of it at a given time, but he knows that it is a figure of his total spherical imprisonment, of the fact that he is trapped within his centrality,<sup>110</sup> dangerously distanced from the things and inhabitants of a world that withdraws before his repeated gestures of contact. It should be finally noted, too, that, even in the optic of art and poetry providing attainment and thus closing the various gaps originally besetting the poet, the latter returns, immediately after the act of creative accession, to the experience of distance and imprisonment, nothingness and desire, that

preceded his creative cancellation of objective blockage and distance and which now lies before the poet once again. Despite art, then, distance constantly, repeatedly, reasserts itself for Reverdy. The world withdraws after its seizure, resumes its separateness, reposes its threat and its challenge. To learn this lesson, as Reverdy does, is, moreover, to realise the essential fact that if advance and attainment are to come about, they must come about within the context of a certain continuing restriction. As we shall show fully in our imminent discussion of Reverdy's conception of the self's withdrawal from the world, to catapult oneself out of the orbit of the world's circular prison is to fling oneself into an impossible escape that only results in the wingless poet being "rejeté par terre".<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the poet's means of access -- the eye, the hand, the mind and so on -- may also be viewed precisely as factors intimately bound up with his continuing imprisonment, because they cannot, and indeed must not, free themselves from the self that is thus always partly rooted to the earth. The poet's means of access are in fact paradoxically locked up within the confines of the imprisoned poet seeking escape and liberation: he cannot therefore put them to a truly super-transcendent use, for they are bound to his own restricted condition. Disengagement may be feasible, as we shall see, but it will have to be of a special order, one that takes into account the oddly clinging relationship of world to self and self to world.

### III. Withdrawal of the Self

Many of Reverdy's poems express feelings of hesitation and doubt as the self or poet is about to set forth upon his journey towards something, towards some varyingly understood point of attainment.<sup>112</sup> There is a fearful anticipation of danger and risk that, as we have more recently seen, is fully justified in the light of the world's actual and profoundly

disquieting uncontrollability -- its forthright aggressiveness combined with its tendency to obstruct or recede before the poet's grasp. In the midst of the world's alternation between a time of unnerving bombardment and a time of insidious retreat, the poet's exposure never ceases to be felt, both in terms of a nakedness and with respect to a vulnerability that is due to the poet's own weakness, fatigue and delirium. It is to these somewhat peripheral, though importantly related points that we shall give our initial attention, before launching our appraisal of the theme proper of the withdrawal of the self.

#### Nakedness, Fatigue and Delirium

Very many of Reverdy's poems tell of the poet's fundamental feelings of nakedness and exposure before the world, its inhabitants and, indeed, paradoxically, at times before the poet himself. Now it is the head that is bared to the elements and forced into a state of unwilling exposure;<sup>113</sup> now man goes "pieds nus sur les pavés tranchants qui l'écartent insensiblement des tendres lieux où les anges perdus ont organisé leur repaire";<sup>114</sup> now the ordeal is less physiologically particular, the nakedness being a symptom of a more general state of isolation and exposure and pointing to a confrontation between self and others which leads to the anguish of what is still felt at times to be an oddly privileged ostracism.<sup>115</sup> But, perhaps most significantly and certainly most noticeably, nakedness is a quality that attaches itself with increasing frequency to the poet's heart or breast, that vulnerable part so symbolic of the whole of the poet's being. In a world that is, itself, sensed to be increasingly denuded and barren,<sup>116</sup> the poet's fund of sensibility, of emotion and being, is, too, gradually eroded. "Goutte à goutte le temps creuse ta pierre nue/Poitrine ravinée par l'acier des minutes", Reverdy declares in 'Le temps et moi'.<sup>117</sup> The

poet has, as we have argued earlier, always felt his centrality. But to this centrality there now attaches itself a feeling of the self's nakedness, of his dangerous exposure to others and things, harmful and resistant as they so often are. This fear of nakedness and exposure may indicate either of two related, but distinct plights besetting the poet. On the one hand, and most terrifyingly, nakedness may in effect constitute an end state, the state of nothingness to which the poet is, like all men and things, to be finally reduced by the unstoppable rhythms of time's erosion and decay. This is the case in the poem just quoted or, again, in the poem 'Les hauts degrés de la famine' ("Toutes les gaines usées/ Les élans élimés/Tous les amours/Toutes les haines dévidées/La poitrine nue vide"), where nakedness and emptiness fuse, are what the poet is definitively reduced to, it would seem.<sup>118</sup> This kind of reduction we shall examine more fully later in our study,<sup>119</sup> but it can be said here that such nakedness is fundamentally beyond remedy, beyond the possibility of protective withdrawal. On the other hand, in the context of our present considerations, nakedness and exposure may be also seen to lead to withdrawal, to that seeking of reclusion and shelter with which we shall be principally concerned, to a seemingly odd, partial reversal or suppression of the self's centrality. It should be noted moreover, that such nakedness may be experienced in the domain of primary experience, but also in connection with the realm of being that is the poetic creation itself. For the latter, too, exposes; it, too, strips bare and reveals. The poet's withdrawal may well be away from negative self-world relationships stemming from the poet's 'natural' state of exposure; but it could -- and will -- also be shown how the poem is a zone which, whilst additionally threatening to equally expose and reveal the poet -- in his self-imposed nudity -- , finally constitutes, nevertheless, a realm into which

withdrawal may be channelled and via which, via whose figurative and imaginative manipulation, nudity may be minimised and that taut balance of showing and occulting, of which Blanchot speaks, may be accomplished.<sup>120</sup>

That the motifs of nakedness and exposure demonstrate, in principle, the fragility and vulnerability of the poet, is already fairly clear, but is further evidenced by an array of related images of fatigue, starving and thirsting and, finally, delirium, images to which we shall now briefly attend, before elaborating the central motif of the self's withdrawal proper.

To experience fatigue is, for Reverdy, to experience a harmful reduction of power and capacity that may lead at any given moment to complete collapse.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, if fatigue is aggravated in the long term by time, if fatigue is detrimentally cumulative -- despite cyclic restoration --, even in the short term fatigue is equally a major factor with which to contend. It is, in short, a more or less permanent fact of existence which thus offers recurring reduction and threatens collapse and finality at all times. But in effect, the dilemma of the poet does not quite stop here. Certainly fatigue may be felt to be a weakness "contre laquelle on ne peut pas lutter";<sup>122</sup> certainly it is an inevitable fact that sooner or later brings about a loss of strength or support that throws the poet back upon stark minimality: "A la fin les meilleurs se sentent fatigués/Les plus forts appuis nous manquent/On reste seul sans savoir à quel endroit se reposer".<sup>123</sup> But, as the last of these lines hints, fatigue does not automatically imply the cyclic possibility of rest and, indeed, although it seems unavoidable and may lead to the temptation or desire to stop, to rest, to succumb to a closing of eyes<sup>124</sup> or a renouncing of advance,<sup>125</sup> fatigue, for Reverdy, like rest and stopping, is, as it were, not permissible in any profound sense and to any lasting

degree.<sup>126</sup> Rather, "il faut s'aider de calme et avec plus de forces et d'ardeur que la veille recommencer ailleurs".<sup>127</sup> Experience of fatigue and vulnerability is, in this way, set against the self's determination to overcome, to continue and to renew. Fatigue as a fact of existence cannot be denied, though it may be worked against. But the paradox and the dilemma remain: if the poet stops to rest, he risks succumbing, immediately, in the short term, to the process of reduction to nothingness, inasmuch as doing and being may be equated; if he continues, as it seems he must, he becomes all the more conscious of fatigue, not only as rhythmic, daily reduction, but as a path leading, in any case, to a final state where reduction is complete and fatigue merges with death and void. Seen in this optic, therefore, retreat becomes a risky undertaking for Reverdy -- understandable, yet fraught with danger every bit as much as exposure itself.

The poet's contemplation of the option of a certain withdrawal from self-world contact is thus given added stimulus by the experience of fatigue. A number of other imaginative motifs -- those of hunger and thirst, fever and delirium -- are associated with the pattern of short-term or long-term reduction of which we have just spoken, although they all contain within them the seeds of a further paradox and tension. To begin with, just as fatigue brings about a lessening of the poet's capacity, so starvation and parching occasion various forms of reduction and, indeed, destruction of the self that grow to reach a climax in the frenzy of delirium and fever. Hunger and thirst, while both constituting a need and perhaps a desire, point, principally, to a somewhat exceptional and longstanding lack and absence. In Reverdy's work, they indicate less the impetuosity of impulse and fancy, than the fundamental -- and hunger is 'fundamental': "la faim au fond du corps"<sup>128</sup> -- experience of deprivation

before the withdrawal of the world's coveted substance. As Reverdy says in 'Les hauts degrés de la famine', hunger is profoundly disquieting: "La faim et tout le souci qu'elle me donne".<sup>129</sup> Elsewhere it may imprison<sup>130</sup> or, combining with thirst, abandon the poet in a desert, that of the world, but also that of his own loss and emptiness: "Ma part de faim/de soif/mains vides/sang perdu/Dans ce désert".<sup>131</sup> Hunger and thirst are finally capable of reducing the poet to a condition of desperate absence which the poet's restless 'winging' does not seem able to cure: "Dans les rides de la famine/Il n'y a pas lieu/Il n'y a pas d'art/Et sur le vent hurleur mon aile sans repos";<sup>132</sup> or else they plunge him into a living experience of death itself, an extreme dessication reminiscent of the evaporation of the world: "Dans l'immense étendue de la douleur flétrie/Je suis plus mort que vif/J'ai soif".<sup>133</sup> It is no doubt because of such experience that many of the same poems, or poems from the same collections (principally Plein verre, Le Chant des morts, Bois vert), also speak of the poet's feverish and delirious condition. We read, for example, of "les poignets débordés par la crue de la fièvre"<sup>134</sup> or of the poet's "paupières gonflées de délire".<sup>135</sup> A harmful excess (overflowing and swelling, in these cases) rather than a fruitful plenitude, has overcome the poet, an excess that rings hollow, signalling the emptiness and lack of a perhaps continuing, but frustrated desire. Hunger and thirst lead to fever and the hollow puffing out of flushed delirium.<sup>136</sup> The latter are symptoms of the frantic, almost giddy activity of the poet. But they point rather to the poet's impotence, to his possibly aimless circling within the mere periphery of poetic desire. They are thus signs of a continuing, self-fatiguing activity on the part of the poet that threatens the possibility of being irrevocably and impotently "perdu dans le délire".<sup>137</sup> And yet, of course, paradoxically, they are,

in Reverdy's eyes, part of a condition through which the poet must pass in order to have any chance of attaining his objectives. Indeed, as Sable mouvant tells us, the poet does not know what he would (or should) have done without delirium: "Je veux dire que la mort/A déjà pris presque toute la place dans la page/et comme le vent du soir crie de plus en plus fort/Je ne saurai jamais ce que j'aurais dû dire/ni ce que j'aurais fait en dehors du délire".<sup>138</sup> Delirium is therefore, in fact, a natural state of the poet, a condition with which he must live. Certainly it is an anguishing condition, for it leaves him caught up in the tension between the horror of final nothingness and total impotence (which are the extreme negative outcome of delirium) and the possibility of nourishment and fulfilment (which may, alternatively, result from poetic delirium). But without delirium, outside of a delirium that constitutes the poet's aesthetic/ontological desire pushed to its most precarious point of development, the poet risks losing his very rank of poet. Even though fatigue, hunger and delirium may therefore hasten the process of the poet's reduction to nothingness, paradoxically nothing is likely -- even more likely! -- to be aesthetically/ontologically accomplished without their distressing pressure upon the poet.

#### The Danger of Self-Defence

In this elaborated context of the poet's reduced and vulnerable state, gestures of withdrawal and self-protection will, therefore, be quite comprehensible. They nevertheless will contain within themselves a special and paradoxical risk which may be expressed briefly as follows: the poet may seek to withdraw in order to minimise the negative effects of his nakedness, hunger, fever and so on, in order to cover his nakedness in refuge, to diminish delirium arising from his want and starvation by turning in on himself in an attempt to block off the source of original agony, and 'hoard'

what minimal sources he is still left with;<sup>139</sup> however, in so doing, he risks a suicidal self-consumption, an utter drainage of all his resources, for he seems to be leaving behind the very matter he needs to feed on. The tension that results, is, in effect, characteristic of that informing Reverdy's aesthetics: movement away from things, from self-world contacts, on one level, permits a movement towards things and contacts on another level. Love is the overwhelming force dictating the poet's activity, but hate, fear and weakness force him into a desperate and dangerous manoeuvre of retreat which, nevertheless, if all goes well, may just allow sufficient contact by the incredible establishment of a certain distance. Hunger and delirium are signs that render appreciable both the poet's instinctive withdrawal and the feeling that this withdrawal is risky. Our examination of the notion of the self's withdrawal will show that the poet is steeped in a crisis of means of attainment, access and supply. Our purpose will be to assess to what degree withdrawal may be a means of self-preservation, necessitating perhaps self-imprisonment and stultifying self-mummification, and to what degree it may be an indirect means of magical circumnavigation.

A common imaginative feature of Reverdy's writings is that of the defensive gesture of retreat or evasion, considered by the poet himself to be, in spite of its intent of self-preservation, an essentially negative and isolating movement, "la conséquence d'un défaut [plutôt] que d'une qualité".<sup>140</sup> It is a movement away from the concrete, phenomenal world, because of the latter's repellent and inhumanly hostile postures. "Ce matin j'ouvre mes fenêtres sur la blancheur vierge d'une forte gelée. Le soleil rouge et comme en sueur vient de jaillir à l'instant par-dessus la cime des arbres", Reverdy begins an entry in Le Livre de mon bord, which, however, ends with the words "Mais cette campagne glacée si propre dans

son linge neuf, si nette et si claire me repousse tout à coup sous les couvertures. Elle est tout de même trop hostile".<sup>141</sup> And it is a movement that is equally away from the world's inhabitants, away from the other who is so often incapable of providing those channels of contact and communication that could lead the self out of his isolation and who becomes regarded more and more as an enemy<sup>142</sup> by a self whose outgoing gestures shrink and retract in a swirl of self-protective feelings. A passage from La Peau de l'homme amply demonstrates the logic at work:

Il avance vers cette main tendue dans laquelle il va déposer la sienne inondée des sueurs de l'angoisse. Il avance, mais croyez qu'il lui faut, pour ne pas s'enfuir, [...] une appréciable quantité de courage. Il avance et dès qu'il se trouve à une distance convenable, l'autre, avec des démonstrations perfides, s'empresse de lui marcher sur la pointe du coeur. Ah! comme il a raison de vouloir se tenir le plus possible hors de portée.<sup>143</sup>

The poet's predicament is clear. He is torn between, on the one hand, advance, desire for contact and fulfilment, a need to close the gap between self and other and, on the other hand, a withdrawal that is, as it were, imposed upon him, an essentially involuntary and impulsive need to guard himself from negative contact by maintaining the gap.

Man is perhaps most basically motivated, Reverdy notes on more than one occasion, by the impulse to calm or avoid suffering.<sup>144</sup> But, although such avoidance and consequent retraction have their utterly excusable and comprehensible side, Reverdy remains equally sensitive to the idea that they may reveal nevertheless a fatal deficiency in man's make-up, one that could be either physical or mental.<sup>145</sup> When, therefore, Reverdy's poems tell, for example, of his hunted escape into darkness,<sup>146</sup> of the lonely, fatigued traveller's flight "devant les menaces vagues de la peur"<sup>147</sup> or of a frightened scurrying into the peripheral space of a minimal salvation;<sup>148</sup> when Reverdy announces his longstanding desire

for invisibility, to see, to be able to advance and to probe without in turn having to suffer being seen and exposed,<sup>149</sup> then, such (and many other similar) movements of evasion, whether actual or merely dreamed, constitute, for Reverdy himself, moreover, symptoms of his own weakness, of the defectiveness of his 'armour'. "Je suis armé", he declares in Le Livre de mon bord, "d'une cuirasse qui n'est faite que de défauts".<sup>150</sup> He is painfully conscious of the fact that withdrawal and the solitude that results, imaginatively associated as they are with fever and delirium, stand perilously close to constituting a fundamental existential sickness for which a cure may not be available. Shelter and hiding are thus instinctively sought, but such forms of self-occultation -- much as they may possibly secure a miraculous victory of antinatural greatness over natural weakness, as in the case of Baudelaire<sup>151</sup> -- , may equally reveal deficiency and flaws in that they may point to an inability to continue, to struggle, a basic inadaptability of the alienated, the repelled, the withdrawing. "On peut déjà pressentir une paille dans l'intelligence d'un homme que sa sensibilité trahit au point de l'éloigner du combat de la vie", Reverdy asserts in Le Livre de mon bord.<sup>152</sup> Withdrawal from struggle, and thus, indeed, from life itself, would denote marked unintelligence, an illogical self-defeating manoeuvre in conflict with the logic of withdrawal as self-preservation. Although withdrawal into isolation is legitimised by "le repos à l'abri de tous" that it just might provide,<sup>153</sup> it nevertheless risks effecting a profound denaturation of the self and even a self-destruction which practically aborts the original rationale of self-restoration. Rest must be temporary, momentary at most, for abandonment of struggle is a fundamentally hazardous procedure. The need for a sheltering of the self may thus be strongly felt, but the poet must respond to it with extreme caution. Continuing is of paramount importance

to Reverdy. Any indelicately impulsive surrender to the urge to withdraw may be fatal to the delicate equilibrium the poet needs to maintain between painful advance and restorative, self-defensive retreat.

It is therefore all the more alarming to discover the poet's increasingly felt inflation of this urge which lures him even to the point of willing upon himself the blank face of nothingness or death itself. Not only does the poet shrink from the world with a mixture of disgust and horror, but he may shrink too, from himself, from a seeing of himself.<sup>154</sup> He thus chooses to accept his weakness at such moments, refuses a clear-sighted relationship with himself and the world and acquiesces in the wilful impulse to neither see nor hear anything, to stifle and erase everything. "Effacer étouffer l'image le souvenir le bruit/Ne plus rien entendre/Ni voir"<sup>155</sup> Although this is an inclination to withdrawal basically imposed on the poet by his own defectiveness, it is one that may commonly assume an air of having been consciously chosen. However, as one of Reverdy's letters to Rousselot (c. 1951) reveals -- we have intimated as much already, but it should be stressed -- if it is a choice, it is a choice in which the poet has acquiesced, into which he has slumped. Withdrawal to non-being, to a point of negating life and its various self-creative acts (seeing, hearing and so on) and accepting death -- such withdrawal into some "coin obscur",<sup>156</sup> into a dry margin blown with leaves,<sup>157</sup> into a zone where isolation and death are synonymous,<sup>158</sup> where "il aurait la place juste pour mourir",<sup>159</sup> comes about not as a forceful, positive, ontologically inspired act, but "par cette fatigue, ce dégoût d'une vie réellement peu digne des efforts éreintants qu'elle coûte".<sup>160</sup> There can be no doubt, however, that such drives are strongly experienced by Reverdy and, as such, they constitute perhaps the ultimate in danger, undermining as they do all that the poet

otherwise seeks and strives towards. For the will to self-destruction threatens to subvert all alternative drives towards the constitution of being, converting them into hollow gestures by a strange tendency to refuse "la bague que j'envie" <sup>161</sup> and, more generally, highlighting the tense and fragile character of the dialectic in Reverdy's work between the movement towards attainment and the collapse into defeat, death and nothingness.

#### From Disengagement to Engagement

Having observed such a negative orientation and colouring of the motif of withdrawal of the self, however, we must now prepare to verify and elaborate its more positively connoted aspects -- which will include indicating a certain ambivalence and paradoxicality often attaching to its expression in Reverdy's creative work. What we find surprisingly, to begin with, is that withdrawal is not merely negatively connoted for the Reverdyan imagination. Withdrawal may be of a different order, stemming not from weakness but from strength, the resultant solitude being "la conséquence [...] d'une qualité", instead of a defective flaw in the poet's defensive shield. <sup>162</sup> Moreover, withdrawal of this kind is experienced as a positively connoted necessity and is chosen accordingly. It may, indeed, involve flight and seeking of refuge, but it may equally and paradoxically constitute a going towards, a turning away in order to embrace, a fleeing in order to bring about an ultimate finding of both world and self. <sup>163</sup> The poet thus endeavours to move away from one level of being and functioning, not in order to sink and cower in nothingness, but to move towards another level of being and doing. This is true in Reverdy's case whether the move is from raw primariness to Christianity and the pure spirituality of absorption in and oneness with God or whether the withdrawal leads to art and poetry. In both cases, as we have seen,

a profound need to be and to do motivates Reverdy's withdrawal -- a need for an ontological plenitude (of a supernatural or antinatural order) that will firmly eliminate the menace of nothingness (that a purely self-defensive mode of withdrawal might, anguishingly, ensure).

Although in both the above cases, withdrawal constitutes a gesture of straining towards advance and fullness, we must nevertheless distinguish between them. Both movements, religious and artistic, demand a shift away from primary being and doing, it is true, but in the case of religion (or, to be more precise, the movement towards God), the shift away is more absolute, more definitive. There is a need to withdraw "au monastère et au désert pour faire vivre [son âme] comme elle demande"; <sup>164</sup> it is necessary to "tout abandonner"/"Quitter le monde", <sup>165</sup> "rompre les attaches qui nous engagent aux autres et au monde". <sup>166</sup> In this way, by an acceptance of "la solitude spirituelle [...] -- la source rare des conceptions originales, la seule qui rende vraiment grand", <sup>167</sup> we may indeed come to a better and fuller possession of ourselves -- an aim which, therefore, by no means basically conflicts with the artistic aspirations of Reverdy, but whose acceptance may, paradoxically, expose us to "la solitude sentimentale [...] qui est à tous insupportable (et qui pousse à ces unions, ces réunions de gens qui se détestent -- à la recherche pourtant de cet indispensable bonheur d'avoir quelque part, dans ce désert touffu et surpeuplé, quelqu'un qu'on aime et qui vous aime)". <sup>168</sup> But, for Reverdy, religion, unlike art, could not stop at the point of self-possession, the latter gesture being essentially one of self-gathering in order to give oneself more completely to God. Finally, "pour se donner à Dieu, il faut rompre les attaches qui nous engagent à nous-même". <sup>169</sup> This, then, is the logic of spiritual-religious withdrawal taken to its extreme limits. It is a logic obviously necessary if one's goal is to

be achieved, but it is a logic that demands a definitive abandonment of the sensible world and all form of dependence on it. It is, moreover, a logic and an option before which Reverdy finally hesitates and stumbles. Just as art and poetry stop equally short of such definitive and ethereal abandonment. Art's withdrawal, like religion's, may be to establish an alternative realm and mode of being, but the former continues to require the world and, indeed, aims, by transforming it (and the poet's primary experience of it), to be ultimately able, via the poem, to allow self and world to coexist harmoniously and re-join in that consubstantial embrace we have already described. No doubt Reverdy's inability to maintain the initial momentum of his ardent conversion was due to his finding religion to be crammed with the human rather than the godly.<sup>170</sup> But it seems also likely that Reverdy could not, by nature, operate a complete dichotomy between himself and the world -- both in the sense that he would give up the world and in the sense that he would give up himself, as constituted in and via the world, as a sacrifice to God, in whom his identity would be lost -- , because of his desperate love of the world.<sup>171</sup> Such a definitive separation Reverdy would seem to be incapable of, just as he could not allow his poetry to be lured into the over-hygienic realm of concern and functioning to which Mallarmé aspired and may, indeed, be said to have at times attained.<sup>172</sup>

Withdrawal of the self on this scale, then, implies no rest, no quiet settling in a corner of seclusion, though like the purely self-protective gesture of withdrawal, it offers a means of coping and survival. It secures this 'overcoming', however, not in an aura of timidity but rather in a mood of triumphant defiance. Such withdrawal represents, in fact, a quite blatant effort of attainment, for it is really a form of advance, an artist's gesture towards the creation of being, towards a

reconstitution and re-situation of world and self in the context of new and reconciliatory relationships. The kind of disengagement that thus occurs is, paradoxically, the only way to assure the necessary artistic and ontological engagement of the poet. The poet must first of all disengage himself from harmful and non-productive involvement with the world in circumstances that dictate his subjugation. He must extricate himself in order to acquire a clearer vision of things,<sup>173</sup> in order to guarantee artistic distance and judgment<sup>174</sup> and, above all, to obtain for himself that envied, though precarious, solitary freedom "du braconnier".<sup>175</sup> Such a freedom will not mean that the poet is prevented from rejoining the world and its originally uncontrollable phenomenality to which he has been brutally exposed. But he will only rejoin it, can only re-engage himself, on (and, of course, in) his own terms, via his art.

#### The Poem: Retraction and Revelation

There is one final point of particular relevance to the above that merits some discussion, namely the question of the poem itself considered simultaneously as a place of advance and withdrawal. We have already seen, of course, that the act of poetic creation demands an initial withdrawal which is converted into an ultimate advance towards a certain new fullness of co-being and co-functioning of poet and world. Once ciphered, however, the poem becomes -- witness the somewhat perplexed reaction of certain readers before Reverdy's work -- a locus (and gesture) of giving and withholding, of embrace and demurring retraction. The created poem, like the act of creation itself, continues to come towards us, to advance in the fullness of its various revelations. But we must understand, too, that the poet Reverdy has, as it were, withdrawn into the place and form of the poem, a place and form that offer, reveal and advance the poet towards us, but only by means of a discreetness which, in fact, simultaneously

points to the poet's withdrawal into the poem. In effect, as we have shown, the poet does not really want to be seen and yet he must render himself visible, both for his own sake, and therefore, though far less desirably, for the 'benefit' of others. His prime concern is with himself, as we have seen. He must remain self-centred in order to 'be' at all. He writes to become, to come into being; to satisfy his needs, to accommodate himself in a new locus and mode of being. But in so doing he must reveal himself, expose himself, offer himself, not only to himself, but to all men.

The closing lines of Reverdy's last poem, Sable mouvant, obliquely reveal -- which is precisely our point -- the poet's continuing concern for the problems presently under discussion. If, as he must by virtue of his act of writing, the poet is to become 'visible', then he fervently wishes that his visibility be of a special variety:

Je prie le ciel  
Que nul ne me regarde  
Si ce n'est au travers d'un verre d'illusion

Retenant seulement  
Sur l'écran glacé d'un horizon qui boude  
Ce fin profil de fil de fer amer  
Si délicatement délavé  
par l'eau qui coule  
les larmes de rosée  
les gouttes de soleil  
les embruns de la mer 176

The poet thus asks to be sought and observed through the distorting, disfiguring/re-figuring glass of his art. It is from behind this special glass partition that the poet shows himself; it is from his locus of ultimate retreat and hiding that he proffers towards others his most authentic and revelatory being, the poem being at once the place of the poet's finest withdrawal and the 'clearing' into which he steps -- and invites us to step with him, <sup>177</sup> in an act of self-fulfilment and self-revelation. As Reverdy suggests in Le Livre de mon bord, the artist's

creative work will indeed bear (bare) the minimal marks of the poet's concrete experience, the occasional bloody traces of his sensible, phenomenal journey ("Quelques traces de sang qui marqueront la ligne de tes pas")<sup>178</sup> but in the final analysis, "nul jamais n'aura vu ta blessure":<sup>179</sup> the intimate and specific details of distress and pain remain beyond the prurient gaze of the reader, deliberately and discreetly recessed beyond his grasp. The advance, engagement and showing that are involved, do not therefore provide a banal anecdotal, sentimental épanchement; nor does the gesture of withdrawal of the self arise simply out of pure coyness or pudicity.<sup>180</sup> Both gestures occur with the same boldness and unobtrusive forthrightness that point to the fact that it is only via poetic transformation and re-figuring that the poem (and poet) may come to fruition. Only, equally, can a poetic transformation that entails a certain hiddenness or obscuring, permit the poet to reveal to himself and to others the newly fashioned form of his true being, his only worthwhile self. For his gesture of advance and revelation to be fully authenticated and pushed to its extreme limit, it must be a gesture that, whilst offering all, offers it in a certain mode, the mode of a discreet retraction, the mode of a regenerative hiddenness.<sup>181</sup>

By way of conclusion we may say that Reverdy's imagination of the notion of the withdrawal of the self is beset, most typically, by considerable tension and risk. Withdrawal may, indeed, lead to something, to some fullness, via its miraculous advance into the realm of poetry's transmutation and consubstantiation; but it may equally tend to lead to nothingness, to a sensation of despairing emptiness, to a desperately, bitterly accepted self-destruction wherein the potentially renewed contact and realisation available via art have withered to helplessly masochistic suffocation and self-mummifying failure. In the latter case, of course,

withdrawal can only lead to atrophy, barrenness and death; in the former case, acquiescence and self-reduction are cast off in favour of a regenerative, creative form of withdrawal which will permit the poet to emerge into true being and self-revelation. Here, the only connection with death may be expressed in terms of the cubist notion of art as the death of nature -- a kind of nature-morte that the poet deliberately seeks, for it is a death leading to a new nature, one that is significantly humanised, re-formed and re-realised. Here, if the poet continues to operate a kind of self-retraction, to persist in a certain obscuring, it is only because he must do so to fully regenerate himself and his being and because it is only in his regenerated form that he can propose a full and authentic self-revelation. But the delicacy and fragility of this special and transcendent mode of withdrawal that Reverdy is capable of engineering serve equally to remind us that the general emotional thrust of the imaginative motifs discussed throughout this chapter has been distressingly negative in tone. The world's phenomena, human and objective, reveal an aggressive streak that manifests itself in various ways. Almost everywhere the poet turns he seems to be confronted with factors that militate against his advancing gestures of contact and attainment. Feeling his own vulnerability in the midst of this swirling mass of inhibitions, he is drawn to seek a refuge that, quickly deteriorating, may even lead to his self-destruction. Certainly, as we shall show in the chapter that follows, attainment remains feasible and realisable -- our analysis of the positive dimension of withdrawal will have jogged our memories in this regard -- , but, as the following pages will also show, the menace posed by the frustrations of advance is real and may, indeed, be translated into even more disturbing and obsessive images.

#### Notes to Chapter IV

1     Moreover, we have deliberately left until a later chapter (V) consideration of other 'negative' motifs, because we have wished both to show that their negative colouration corresponds to a particularly anguishing stage or level of negative consciousness and to allow an adequate appreciation of the strange tensions that may underpin such a consciousness and relate it, paradoxically, to the opposing 'positive' imaginative structures of achievement and attainment characteristic of Reverdy's consciousness.

2     Chapter VI gives particular attention to the question of equilibrium and tense resolution. Moreover we have of course deliberately mapped out in the early stages of our study the logic of Reverdyan aesthetics and ontology, so that their full weight will remain at least implicit, if not specifically and continually stressed, throughout the rest of the thesis and particularly those sections dealing with 'negativity'.

3     Chapter V will, in effect, deal with the final stages of such a movement from something to nothingness.

4     Plupart du temps, 34 and 35, respectively.

5     Ibid., 82.

6     Ibid., 33.

7     In an interesting note in En Vrac, Reverdy shows himself fully aware of the positive dimension of laughter, when speaking of the madman's sad loss of "le précieux don de détente du rire" (p. 119). (We should not forget that Reverdy himself was renowned for his brilliant, flashing smile in his early years in Paris.) It is as if the other, whilst still laughing, has lost precisely the true gift (or dimension) of laughter.

8     Cf. ibid., 192: "L'essence du comique -- le malheur des autres, dans certaines conditions dégradantes, quand on est, ou l'on se croit soi-même, à l'abri de ces mêmes disgrâces. Il pourrait y avoir dans le rire qui en découle une certaine bassesse et un peu, ou même beaucoup, de lâcheté".

9     See, for example, the second half of 'D'un autre ciel' (Plupart du temps, 115). It is interesting to compare somewhat Léon-Paul Fargue's experience of the city (with which he undertakes a more complete relationship) with that of Reverdy: Fargue's only way of ultimately coping with the city is to transform it into what Jean-Claude Walter has called "la cité du poème", to transcend its despotism in an "espace poétique pur qui s'ouvre à nous et nous propose l'interminable poursuite du bonheur que Léon-Paul Fargue y a tracée" (Léon-Paul Fargue ou l'homme en proie à la ville, Paris: Gallimard, 1973, p. 148). If, as Jean Onimus points out, one could count as many poets who have cursed the city as have celebrated it, let us not forget that for Reverdy, as for Guillevic (whose attitude is altogether less anguished), the essential factor remains possession and transmutation (cf. Onimus, Expérience de la poésie, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1973, p. 131).

10 Cf. our later remarks on solitude and this early note from Self-defence: "Celui qui se mêle à la foule en partage l'esprit et la façon de voir" (Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 119).

11 Cf. La Peau de l'homme, 13-14, 69, for example. Cf. also Risques et périls, 124, 127 and Le Voleur de Talan, 30.

12 See Reverdy's comment concerning his good fortune to have encountered a small nucleus of brilliant men and good friends: "Je me demande souvent si quelque autre homme fut jamais plus, <sup>au</sup> même seulement autant, favorisé, sur le très délicat chapitre de l'amitié, que moi-même ('Le coeur se souvient', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 149).

13 Cf. 'Un oeil de lumière et de nuit', Note éternelle du présent, 212.

14 Cf., for example, 'L'envers à l'endroit' (Plupart du temps, 54), where we read that "à chaque porte il a crié son nom, personne n'a ouvert"; or 'Droit vers la mort' (ibid., 79), where the poet declares: "Seul il roulait sa boule parmi les yeux indifférents".

15 Cf., for example, 'Grand caractère' (Main d'oeuvre, 375), where Reverdy speaks of "le frottement féroce coeur à coeur".

16 'Cascade', ibid., 352.

17 This ethic of self-interest characterising the other is ironically opposed to the 'detachment' of the poet or savant in La Peau de l'homme (p. 39).

18 The poet's self-centredness has, in fact, a higher logic (and, indeed, ethic) to it altogether, as we have seen.

19 We might mention here, for example, the concluding lines of the poems 'D'un autre ciel' (Plupart du temps, 115): "Personne n'est venu me prendre par la main"; 'Les traits du ciel' (Main d'oeuvre, 90) and 'Monsieur X' (ibid., 477).

20 La Peau de l'homme, 114.

21 'En avant', Main d'oeuvre, 63; cf. Risques et Périls, 113.

22 Cf. 'Sur les routes de fer et de lumière', Plupart du temps, 290 and Sable mouvant, 17.

23 'Jour monotone', Plupart du temps, 97.

24 The poet is, in fact, confronted with the primary 'strangeness' of the world. The latter is dominated, its hostility subdued, in the poem. Elements of this primary emotion linger, become building blocks of new structures whose 'strangeness' is now indicative of the fact of poetic domination: this 'strangeness' is a sign of the poet's familiarity with the world and its hostile elements. Hostility is subdued, original 'strangeness' is lost, but becomes a secondary 'strangeness' that is part of the poem's essence. The notion of despair evoked here is, indeed, a not unexpected and, in fact, recurrent theme of Reverdy's

work (cf. Main d'oeuvre, 50, 109 for example). Such despair is attributable both to self-world experience of a quotidian nature and to the related and increasingly felt difficulty in converting such negative experience into a transcendent substance. To the extent that the theme of despair lingers one might argue the poet's defeat; to the extent that the poem exists, embracing despair itself, one might argue the defeat of despair and a tensely articulated poetic victory. Cf. our discussion, infra, of 'The Thorn', and Chapter VI, part II.

24a 'A travers les signes', Main d'oeuvre, 364.

25 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 31.

26 'Dans le monde étranger', Plupart du temps, 161.

27 La Peau de l'homme, 82.

28 Main d'oeuvre, 355-6. The writer Henri Thomas, at times sympathetic to Reverdy ('Pierre Reverdy', Cahiers des saisons, 23 (Aut. 60), 331-3), finds the closing portion of this text "insupportable" in a discussion with Fumet, Follain, Mambrino and others in which his remarks are somewhat discordant ('Entretiens du Polyèdre', loc. cit., p. 387).

29 For an analysis of the degree of discretion and understatement attached to Reverdy's expression of such notions as concern us here, see our forthcoming essay "The tensions of understatement: Pierre Reverdy's Poèmes en prose", Australian Journal of French Studies; and infra, the concluding section of this chapter, 'The Poem: Retraction and Revelation'.

30 Plupart du temps, 105.

31 "Je me souviens des rêves angoissants après les journées de combat/ Le coeur rempli d'épines et la mort aux oreilles", we read in an early Cale sèche poem, 'Tentative' (Main d'oeuvre, 494).

32 See 'Sur la route à demi', Plupart du temps, 367 ("Tout ce qu'on n'aime pas arrive/S'abat/Se creuse un nid dans ma poitrine"); 'Après sang' Main d'oeuvre, 178 ("Les yeux percés par les rayons brûlants"); or Sable mouvant, 41 ("Le coeur est traversé/Comme par une vrille").

33 Flaques de verre, 98; Main d'oeuvre, 494; Flaques de verre, 127, for above quotations respectively.

34 Cf. 'L'homme aux étoiles' (ibid., 98), 'Tentative' (Main d'oeuvre, 494) and 'Quelque part' (Plupart du temps, 291), for example. In the latter example the stigmata of piercing are in association with the notion of crucifixion's stigmata and the theme of crossroads.

35 In effect, Reverdy himself makes the thorn-cataclysm association: 'Les graines de la liberté', Flaques de verre, 121. See our discussion in the next paragraph.

36 Ibid.

37 See infra, chapter VI, 'The Image: A Matter of Justesse'.

- 38 Sable mouvant, 17-18.
- 39 Main d'oeuvre, 344.
- 40 Cf. A. Artaud who argues that "il y a un point phosphoreux où toute la réalité se retrouve, mais changée, métamorphosée -- et par quoi?? -- un point de magique utilisation des choses" (op. cit., p. 98).
- 41 Plupart du temps, 196.
- 42 Main d'oeuvre, 10 and 142, respectively.
- 43 'Mon coeur de verre', Main d'oeuvre, 491.
- 44 'Dans le vent', Main d'oeuvre, 307.
- 45 Plupart du temps, 242.
- 46 'A l'abri des mains', Main d'oeuvre, 199.
- 47 Cf. 'Temps sec' (Main d'oeuvre, 98), where Reverdy speaks of "le visage inquiet du vagabond/toujours conduit et rejeté/au temps qui le dépasse".
- 48 Already in 'Sujets', from Cale sèche, Reverdy makes it clear that withdrawal applies equally to réel<sup>1</sup> and réel<sup>2</sup> (which, as we have suggested earlier, are, from a certain point of view, fused): that is to say, in essence, that "les mots rebelles fuient et encore les idées" (ibid., 499).
- 49 Plupart du temps, 9.
- 50 Ibid., 291. Cf. also 'Bataille' (ibid., 47) for the discolouring effect of rain upon things. The effect is ironic, of course, given the poet's need for moisture in the context of the motif of evaporation and dryness.
- 51 See 'Crépuscule au-dehors', Flaques de verre, 97.
- 52 Cf. 'A voix plus basse', Main d'oeuvre, 429 and 'Tard dans la nuit', Plupart du temps, 180.
- 53 See, respectively, 'Le flot berceur' (ibid., 360), where we read that "le marais sec déteint/Les plantes sont plus rares"; 'Guerre' (Main d'oeuvre, 138), where we are told that "les mouchoirs qui pendaient aux balcons/tricolores en signe d'allégresse/ont déteint"; 'Le temps qui bat' (ibid., 165), where the poet speaks of "tous les amours déteints"; and 'Main-morte' (ibid., 392), where Reverdy tells of "la chaleur qui se perd/Le sang [qui] se décolore".
- 54 Ibid., 409. Untitled, from Le Chant des morts.
- 55 Plupart du temps, 360.
- 56 We might mention here by way of example the poems 'N'essayez pas' (Main d'oeuvre, 25), where we read of "les traces de tout ce qui passe/

qui luit/qui monte/Et puis s'efface"; and 'Auberge' (Plupart du temps, 177), where the poet tells us of "ton ombre au bout de l'avenue/[qui] s'efface/On n'a rien vu/De tout ce qui passait on n'a rien retenu".

57 Ibid., 285.

58 The changes are often quite considerable and merit careful study, both from the thematic and stylistic standpoint.

59 Such an interpretation would certainly conform to Reverdy's occasional dry scepticism, as well as to our remarks concerning a certain 'fusion' of the notions of coming to an end and attainment (infra, the conclusion to Chapter V).

60 Main d'oeuvre, 164-5.

61 Cf. 'Sujets' (ibid., 499) and supra, n. 48.

62 Ibid., 346.

63 Ibid., 364-5.

64 'De la main à la main', ibid., 432.

65 Ibid., 531.

66 The poem's title (ibid., 528).

67 'Fil d'encre', ibid., 394.

68 Cf. also 'Dans ce désert', ibid., 528-30.

69 See, for example, 'Comme on change', 'Un homme fini' and 'Danse de terre' (ibid., 104, 50, 445, respectively).

70 Cf. 'Et maintenant' (ibid., 533) and 'Le littoral' (Plupart du temps, 377).

71 'Rides du temps', ibid., 117.

72 'Sur les routes de fer et de lumière', ibid., 290.

73 Obviously, this something must be on Reverdy's terms. There are certain kinds of attainment that the poet rejects out of hand. Cf. 'L'âme en péril' (Flaques de verre, 110-11), where Reverdy, in an obscurely allegorical style, seems to be rejecting the falseness of social 'glory'.

74 See, for example, 'Toujours le même' (Main d'oeuvre, 322) where the wind is capable of 'unscrewing' or dislodging the stars from their privileged position; 'Forte mer' (Plupart du temps, 382) where the wind strikes up panic in everyone, 'clouding' the features of things (cf. Chapter V); and 'Toujours le même' (La Liberté des mers, 51-5) where the storm wreaks havoc and "les lacets perfides du désastre tourbillonnent".

75 'Coin obscur', Plupart du temps, 348.

76 Similarly the whisperings of the wind may be deemed spurious, deceitful and Reverdy is able to speak of "les mensonges du vent" ('Murmures entre les quatre murs ... ', La Liberté des mers, 28-9).

77 'Les yeux inconnus', Main d'oeuvre, 261 and 'Ce souvenir', ibid., 31.

78 'Front grisé', ibid., 441-2.

79 Cf. 'Tourbillons de la mémoire' (ibid., 467) and 'Une seule vague' (ibid., 388).

80 The question of instability is given fuller attention in the context of our later discussion of motifs of collapse, sinking, capsizing and falling (Chapter V).

81 En Vrac, 175.

82 Plupart du temps, 237.

83 'Grand caractère' (Main d'oeuvre, 375) and 'Cran d'arrêt' (ibid., 519), respectively.

84 Whether it be the world or people or the self, i.e. any object of desire lying hopelessly beyond desire.

85 'Marche', ibid., 200.

87 'Autres jockeys, alcooliques', Plupart du temps, 261.

88 Cf. the following, for example: 'Mais pourquoi' (Main d'oeuvre, 513), 'X' (ibid., 335), 'Il a la tête pleine d'or ... ' (ibid., 403).

89 Art, although it may provide the something desired is already not exempt from such an experience and our remarks concerning blockage-vitiated relationships between self and world, self and others, self and (other-)self should be understood to convey that fact also.

90 'Sujets', ibid., 500. Moreover, blockage's renewability is often emphasised by the fact of its association with the diurnal flow of man's time. Every evening brings a closure that often seems anguishingly definitive, a sharply stabbing, repeated experience of a blockage that immerses the poet in a final nothingness, the wrong side of being and fullness (cf. 'Mais pourquoi', ibid., 513, for example).

91 'Maison hantée', Risques et périls, 187.

92 Cf. 'Autres jockeys, alcooliques', Plupart du temps, 261.

93 'Joueurs', ibid., 210.

94 'Les bornes de l'oubli', Flaques de verre, 125.

95 Cf. 'Autres jockeys, alcooliques' (Plupart du temps, 261), where the question of what lies beyond the wall poses a confusing, troublesome enigma and fear has a freezing, immobilising effect.

- 96 'Vitesse des mots', Flaques de verre, 120.
- 97 Cf. infra, the Conclusion, especially.
- 98 Cf. Chapter III, 'Mind' (and n. 153) and Chapter VI on the image.
- 99 'Près de la route et du petit pont', Plupart du temps, 279.
- 100 'La Langue sèche, ibid., 393.
- 101 'Ciel étoilé' (ibid., 209) and 'Temps sec' (Main d'oeuvre, 98). Cf. also a poem such as 'A double tour' whose concluding line reads: "Je suis si loin quand je compte tout ce que j'aime" (ibid., 424) -- excessiveness that is somewhat less definitive. Excessiveness, moreover, it should be noted, is a quality that often attaches itself to other impediments and modes of frustration, with similar effect. In his analysis of the 'affective' adverb, Rizzuto (op. cit., 40) shrewdly singles out Reverdy's use of trop and même (cf. infra, Chapter V, 'The Obsession of Nothingness'); and Greene, in 'Pierre Reverdy, poet of nausea' (PMLA, LXXXV, 1 (Jan. 70), 51), speaks of the "inert 'too-muchness' of everything" in a broader context of self/world hiatus.
- 102 Cf. for example, these concluding lines from 'Se débattre' (Main d'oeuvre, 318): "L'homme loin du pays/L'homme sans ses merveilles". Philippe Jaccottet is able, on the other hand, whilst recognising the 'immeasurability' of the vastest, most excessive distance, to contemplate the latter still "comme une ligne, un lien, comme un chemin" (Poésie, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 166; my emphasis).
- 103 'Location de première', Plupart du temps, 364.
- 104 'Par tous les bouts', ibid., 152.
- 105 'Le buveur solitaire', Risques et périls, 43.
- 106 '4 et 9', Plupart du temps, 65. Cf. also Main d'oeuvre, 434, Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 47, En Vrac, 210.
- 107 'Le sommeil du coeur' (Main d'oeuvre, 69) which begins: "De ses ongles il griffait la paroi dure de cette cage. Il était prisonnier du cauchemar ou de ses ennemis"; and Le Voleur de Talan, 33 where Reverdy tells us that "la chambre où je suis entré pour la première fois s'est refermée comme une cage/Et depuis quelqu'un frappe à la porte que personne ne vient ouvrir" (Reverdy's emphasis).
- 108 Cf. Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 41. Cf. also the thinking of Freud and, for example, Marcuse in his Eros and Civilisation, although in these cases we are concerned rather with the tension between the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle' in the development of the genus (phylogenesis) and the individual (ontogenesis).
- 109 'Je tenais à tout', Main d'oeuvre, 34. Cf. 'Départ' (ibid., 506) and Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 36.

110 Cf. 'Dans ce désert', Main d'oeuvre, 529: "Houle du monde nu/  
Fermé/cercle de ma prison/Amour sec".

111 'Départ', ibid., 506. Cf. 'Envie' (Plupart du temps, 11) and 'La saveur du réel' (ibid., 55) which indicates that, unlike Baudelaire ('L'Albatros'), Reverdy appreciates a certain logic to restriction and 'falling' (in the context of present considerations, at all events).

112 One only need look at a few early poems such as the following, to ascertain this phenomenon: 'Fantômes du danger' (Plupart du temps, 31) where we are told that "l'homme seul qui sort hésite à s'éloigner pour marcher dans la nuit"; 'Miracle' (ibid., 195) where we read: "La porte se serait ouverte/Et je n'oserais pas entrer/Tout ce qui passe derrière"; or 'Tourbillons de la mémoire' (Main d'oeuvre, 467) which begins ominously: "Si tout ce que l'on n'attend pas allait venir/Si tout ce que l'on sait allait finir".

113 Cf. 'La croix de l'ombre' (ibid., 157) where we read of "la tête nue/Montrant ses membres"; and 'Grandeur nature' (Plupart du temps, 116) whose second stanza reads:

Entre le chemin qui penche et les arbres il est nu  
Et ces cheveux au vent que soulève le soleil  
C'est la flamme qui entoure sa tête

In the latter poem, the mixed impression created is of a Christ-like apotheosis and torture.

114 'Vitesse des mots', Flaques de verre, 118. The classic notion of trial or ordeal is quite sensible here.

115 See 'Lui et eux' (Plupart du temps, 388), for example, which confronts men and 'Le pilote nu/seul/à la pointe du môle'. In the Poèmes en prose, the theme of shame is prevalent and often associated with nakedness (cf. ibid., 27), so that the movement becomes nakedness to shame to self-protection. Here, however, shame seems to have disappeared and a certain hardening and entrenchment have occurred -- this does not mean that sensitivity has diminished, but that outer tissues are thickly scarred over, the heart remaining still bare within. This kind of hardening of the outer skin, of course, hints at the necessity and logic of the self's withdrawal.

116 Cf. 'La langue sèche' (ibid., 393) or 'Danse de terre' (Main d'oeuvre, 446), where Reverdy tells of "la piste nue déserte sans ornières".

117 Ibid., 377.

118 Ibid., 410.

119 See infra, Chapter V, 'Attainment and Reduction to Nothingness'.

120 Cf. Maurice Blanchot, L'Entretien infini, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, pp. 40-5; and infra, this chapter, 'The Poem: Retraction and Revelation'.

- 121 Cf. 'Maison hantée', Risques et périls, 132: "La misère te suit, la fatigue te nuit".
- 122 'Le coeur dur', Plupart du temps, 103.
- 123 Le Voleur de Talan, 69.
- 124 Cf. 'Cabaret', Main d'oeuvre, 507: "Il est encore temps de baisser vos paupières puisque vous n'avez pas la force de tout voir".
- 125 'Maison hantée', Risques et périls, 132-3: "La misère te suit, la fatigue te nuit. Arrête-toi. Renonce à suivre en vain cette route profonde qui mine sournoisement, comme la gale, l'épiderme crasseux de la nuit. Repose-toi, enfin, puisque tu as dans l'oeil la lumière qui filtre aux rideaux de l'auberge, à l'heure où les forêts frissonnent sous les caresses frénétiques du délire aux doigts de cristal".
- 126 Cf. 'La place dangereuse', ibid., 117.
- 127 Ibid.
- 128 'Recueil de temps', Flaques de verre, 49.
- 129 Main d'oeuvre, 410.
- 130 Cf. 'La bonne piste' (Flaques de verre, 75), where Reverdy speaks of "le forçat évadé, qui traîne encore les chaînes de la faim".
- 131 'Dans ce désert', Main d'oeuvre, 530.
- 132 'Train de vie', ibid., 525.
- 133 'Enfin', ibid., 396.
- 134 'Main-morte', ibid., 390.
- 135 'Ma chambre noire', ibid., 427.
- 136 Cf. 'Dans ce désert', ibid., 528 ("Et la soif de bonheur qui me donnait la fièvre") and 'Goutte à goutte', ibid., 389 ("Les joues gonflées de feu/ces foudres crevant de faim/quand l'amour lumineux souffle sur l'amertume/et danse sur la corde-rêve du néant").
- 137 'Prison', ibid., 420.
- 138 Sable mouvant, 25. Richard shrewdly speaks on one occasion of Reverdy's "délire heureux de la rêverie qui ne se sépare jamais d'un malaise" (Onze études sur la poésie moderne, Paris: Seuil, 1964, p. 29).
- 139 Cf. 'Train de vie' (Main d'oeuvre, 524) and the idea that "il est temps de "garer son or"; or 'Sur la ligne' (ibid., 371) and the poet's unwillingness to share his meagre store of 'grain'.
- 140 En Vrac, 235.
- 141 Le Livre de mon bord, 165.

- 142 Cf. ibid., 161.
- 143 La Peau de l'homme, 31.
- 144 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 15 and En Vrac, 125-6, for example.
- 145 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 166.
- 146 See, for example, the closing lines of 'Des êtres vagues' (Plupart du temps, 39).
- 147 'Le temps passe', Main d'oeuvre, 58.
- 148 Cf. 'Honteux à voir', Plupart du temps, 58.
- 149 Cf. En Vrac, 187: "Pour moi, il n'est rien que j'eusse tant aimé être qu'un homme invisible et pouvoir m'arrêter à tous les spectacles sans être vu". Cf. also 'Le bruit des vagues' (Plupart du temps, 332), where Reverdy tells us of "celui qui n'était venu là que pour voir et non pas être vu".
- 150 Le Livre de mon bord, 67.
- 151 Cf. En Vrac, 164. Reverdy's case, somewhat different in its details, is undoubtedly akin to Baudelaire's in its broad patterning.
- 152 Le Livre de mon bord, 167.
- 153 Le Voleur de Talan, 86.
- 154 Cf. 'Toujours là' (Plupart du temps, 146): "J'ai besoin de ne plus me voir et d'oublier", the poem begins, "de parler à des gens que je ne connais pas/De crier sans être entendu/Pour rien tout seul".
- 155 'Le poids des hommes', Main d'oeuvre, 418. Cf. 'Les illusions multiples de la gloire' (ibid., 298) and 'Coeur de plomb' (Plupart du temps, 148).
- 156 Title of poem, ibid., 348.
- 157 See 'Train de vie' (Main d'oeuvre, 524) which begins by declaring that "il fait sec dans la marge avec les feuilles mortes".
- 158 Cf. 'Les mots qu'on échange', ibid., 284.
- 159 'Voyages trop grands', Plupart du temps, 43.
- 160 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 50.
- 161 'Comme chaque soir', Main d'oeuvre, 481.
- 162 En Vrac, 235. Mortimer Guiney argues in Cubisme et littérature appropriately that "la solitude de Reverdy n'est pas celle, solipsiste, des poètes romantiques et symbolistes mais plutôt la solitude de l'homme qui cherche, à travers les innombrables formes du monde que l'homme a fait,

de vrais contacts humains" (p. 80). Reverdy, in fact, seeks both people and world through self-isolation. Cf. Robert Guiette, 'Notes', PR:MF.

163 In Le Livre de mon bord we encounter the rather gnostic statement that "la meilleure façon de se trouver, c'est de se fuir. — Se suivre en avant" (p. 217). Reverdy's following comments point to the fact that one's primary (and especially sensory) experience only enables us to 'find ourselves' at the moment of its transformation or adaptation, only when we surpass it in order to ex-press ourselves (antinaturally). Cf. P. Brunner (op. cit., p. 99), whose commentary lacks consideration of context and could only assume any validity in our view if set in relation to Reverdy's aesthetic theory and the arguments we present in 'From Disengagement to Engagement' and 'The Poem: Retraction and Revelation'.

164 Le Gant de crin, 102.

165 'La conversion', Risques et périls, 78.

166 Le Gant de crin, 143.

167 Le Livre de mon bord, 69.

168 Ibid. My parentheses.

169 Le Gant de crin, 143. Richard also shows himself sensitive to the equilibrium Reverdy brings about between his need for transcendence and his need to know and possess himself (cf. op. cit., 19).

170 This in some respects may seem ironic, given the fact that it is precisely a humanisation of the world that the poet in fact seeks to accomplish. In religion, for Reverdy, the humanising is demeaning and detrimental. A writer such as Voltaire shows this almost to a fault, in Candide for example.

171 Robert Greene, in a generally perceptive essay 'The Moralism of Pierre Reverdy' (French Studies, 4 (Oct. 67), 323-35) speaks of Reverdy's "Catharist hatred of life [which] was driving him ever closer to despair" and relates this to Reverdy's supposed view that man is "hopelessly and tragically flawed". We should argue, however, that this is to overlook, precisely, Reverdy's often repeated declaration of his desperate love of life and the fact that both the theory and practice of his poetry work against Greene's argument (cf. E. Stojkovic, 'En marge d'une correspondance', PR:MF, 97).

172 As Rizzuto (op. cit., 7) says, withdrawal from reality conforms precisely to the Symbolist aesthetic (not to say ethic), whereas Reverdy opts for an equilibrium between sign and object.

173 Cf. La Peau de l'homme, 112: 'L'imperméable', where Reverdy announces: "Je me dégage pour regarder de plus loin".

174 "Il me faut aller trèsloin de ce que je sens pour reconnaître ce que je sens", Reverdy states in Le Livre de mon bord (p. 256), where we also read: "Le moment où l'on se juge le mieux, celui où l'on se sent

le plus étranger à soi-même" (*ibid.*, 154). Cf. also 'La place dangereuse' (*Risques et périls*, 115) where Reverdy, in a smiling self-reflexive gesture it seems, points to the writer's withdrawal as an act establishing 'distance' for the success of the "mise en scène" and the "mystère".

175 Le Livre de mon bord, 58.

176 Sable mouvant, 51-2.

177 "Venez avec moi dans la même clairière", Reverdy says in his preface to Self-Defence (*Nord-Sud*, *Self Defence*, 103).

178 Le Livre de mon bord, 221.

179 Ibid.

180 This dislike for the anecdotal, that Reverdy himself confesses, has been remarked on by critics such as André Malraux who sees Reverdy's poetry as lacking 'development', whilst working towards the 'synthesis' of its parts (PR:MF); and Clancier who declares: "pas d'action, pas de récit, l'horreur de tout pittoresque" (*De Rimbaud au surréalisme*, p. 274). But, if this is so, and if we accept Reverdy's own argument concerning the 'reticence' of his work, it is clear, as we have already suggested, that his work remains highly personalised and a work "qui révèle, avec une sorte de sobriété janséniste", as Clancier puts it, "tout le réel tapi sous quelques signes passagers" (*ibid.*): a withdrawing work that boldly confronts self and world, that develops the poetic tone of a tough, muscular, unsentimental 'romanticism', as Luc Bérumont has it ('La percée nouvelle', HPR:ELA, 144).

181 For all this, see also Maurice Blanchot (*op. cit.*, pp. 40-5 and *passim*), whose thoughts on the relationships between words and things, poetic disclosure and obscurity are of interest in this context.

## Chapter V

### Attainment and Reduction to Nothingness

In this chapter we shall seek to demonstrate the powerful appeal of two groups of tensely antagonistic, though imaginatively related motifs in Reverdy's creative and critical writings. On the one hand the latter speak repeatedly of moments of contact, attainment and fulfilment; on the other hand, curiously in imaginative parallel to this movement of attainment of cherished goals, Reverdy's work reveals his hyperconsciousness of a movement which also leads towards an end, but end as finality, end shrouded in an aura of silence and death, an end that, instead of bringing about something, some at least minimal plenitude, drains and disperses all possibility in a final reduction to nothingness. The advancing movement we have spoken of is thus seen to lead to two antithetical outcomes, that of fullness (or something representative of a fullness) and possession of being, and that of emptiness and nothingness.<sup>1</sup> It will fall to us principally to indicate the separate and divergent natures of these two movements, but we shall also briefly comment upon certain of their points of imaginative convergence, some of which will receive much fuller consideration in the following and closing chapter of this study.

#### I. Attainment: Fact and Theory Openness, Potentiality and Realisation

Despite the persistent presence in Reverdy's creative work of the imbricated motifs of blockage, withdrawal and separation, we must not lose sight of the crucially dogged recurrence of those motifs connoting circumvention or neutralisation of such a general impedimentation. If contact, attainment and fulfilment become ultimately available, it is undoubtedly due, partly, to the poet's adoption, in the face of such

impedimentation, of new strategies. We have already examined one example of this: the special kind of withdrawal the poet may operate in order to better advance towards the ultimate point of arrival and attainment which, in itself, remains fundamentally unchanged. Furthermore, in this regard, the poet's continued openness may be of capital importance in such circumstances. Thus, for example, in the poem 'Cascade' from Ferraille -- that poetic catenation of remorse, bitterness and despair -- , the poet, "A la rencontre des froids silences/A la rencontre des regards détournés/ ... /Devant la perspective semée d'obstacles", is still able to declare, in a concluding burst of quietly defiant energy, the fact of his persistent availability, his vulnerable, risky opening and offering of himself in a spirit of heroic exchange: "J'ouvre mon corps au soleil pétillant/J'ouvre mes yeux à la lumière de ta bouche/Et mon sang pour le tien dans l'ornière du temps/A grands traits notre vie coule de roche en roche". <sup>2</sup> More often than not, however, a specific gesture of stubborn resistance and determination may be required in order to achieve some form of solution or compensatory overcoming of the blockage encountered. This gesture may involve a profiting from some "porte entr'ouverte", "la porte [qui] s'entrebâille", <sup>3</sup> some seizing of opportunity for miraculous flight, salvation or mere continuing advance. <sup>4</sup> Opportunity for circumvention and transcendent attainment may thus present itself, unexpectedly, unpredictably; but its chance offering must still be seized by means of an active, vigorous employment of force evoked in poems such as 'L'esprit sort' from the Poèmes en prose ("De mes ongles j'ai griffé la paroi et, morceau à morceau, j'ai fait un trou dans le mur de droite. C'était une fenêtre et le soleil qui voulait m'aveugler n'a pas pu m'empêcher de regarder dehors") <sup>5</sup> or 'Sujets' from the early Cale sèche collection ("J'étais seul devant le mur sans fin rebelle à mes efforts/J'ai ouvert

cette lourde porte et je n'en suis pas mort/ ... / Puis un grand changement dans l'ordre est survenu /La joie m'était aussi pénible que l'ennui/ Mais l'habitude prise j'ai continué avec plus d'ardeur et j'ai suivi").<sup>6</sup>

As this passage from 'Sujets' suggests, the accepted or promoted effacement of obstacles may lead to what we may think of as a form of attainment or achievement (here involving great change and extreme though painful happiness), yet an attainment that seems to refuse the possibility of settling and permanence, leading on rather to a continued advance, an attainment that seems to lack absoluteness, 'ultimateness'. What we need to appreciate here, then, is that the Reverdyan imagination distinguishes between potentiality as future fulfilment and possibility as actual, achieved fulfilment, whilst tending at times to merge their significance owing to the aura of fragility and insubstantiality that may surround the act proper of realisation of possibility. A few examples are in order to elucidate the point at hand.

Two early poems will serve to bring out the true flavour of the notion of potentiality as future, anticipated fulfilment. The poem 'Tentative' whose title already points to a certain non-accomplishment and yet to the continued positing of goals to strive towards, ends on a note of optimistic anticipation: "Je vais essayer d'écrire/Déjà je sais ce que je voudrais dire/Il me manque les mots que les autres ont pris/Comment faut-il qu'on me comprenne/Je demande à chacun qu'il y mette sa peine/Et beaucoup d'indulgence/Pour pardonner mon ignorance/Attendez je vais pouvoir vous dire".<sup>7</sup> Despite the frustrating and crucial lack experienced by the poet, his condition is less one of a Mallarméan sterility than one of a maturing potentiality expected to bear fruit imminently. A quiet confidence in ultimate arrival and accomplishment is thus intimated, a confidence seemingly dependent upon an initial coming-together that will

facilitate progress towards a final point of achievement. Such a confidence and aura of potentiality are to be found also, for example, oddly 'inserted' into a poem of somewhat chilling thematics, 'Les cornes du vent', where the poet boldly declares: "Ensemble la route et le village moins longue, moins loin nous arriverons et la nuit sera gaie".<sup>8</sup> The potential felt, perhaps in the midst of difficulty, struggle and wretchedness (that may, moreover, not necessarily dissociate themselves from the future), points to a future of at least some attainment, some joy, however transient, minimal and fragmentary they may turn out to be.

In contrast to this unrealised, yet posited and realisable potential, many poems speak rather of possibility as fulfilment. Projection of achievement is thus replaced by achievement itself -- although it is important to bear in mind once more that the achievement is often of the simplest, most inconspicuous kind, carrying with it an air of impermanence and minimalness that, as we shall finally stress, is nevertheless of great importance to the Reverdyan imagination. For the moment let us simply observe the kind of innocent, unadorned accomplishment that may derive from the poet's continued searching in the face of deprivation and hostility. The concluding section of the early poem 'Belle étoile' may serve as an example:

Alors un peu plus loin que la ville, au bord  
d'une rivière et d'un bois, j'ai trouvé une porte.  
Une simple porte à claire-voie et sans serrure.  
Je me suis mis derrière et, sous la nuit qui n'a  
pas de fenêtres mais de larges rideaux, entre la  
forêt et la rivière qui me protègent, j'ai pu dormir.<sup>9</sup>

What becomes possible, what is attained, is of the most humble and distressingly ephemeral order. But despite this fact, which pertains to a general level of understatement attaching to much of Reverdy's poetry of this period, the notion of possibility as accomplishment, placed as it is in a position of final stress, retains a quiet contextual strength which

remedies any inclination we may have to dismiss its significance. Similarly, a poem such as 'Le même numéro' from Les Ardoises du toit radiates the same atmosphere of insubstantiality and unobtrusiveness whilst presenting a vision of possibility and satisfaction:

La lampe à présent nous éclaire  
 En regardant plus loin  
 Et nous pouvions voir la lumière  
                                   Qui venait  
 Nous étions contents  
                                   Le soir  
 Devant l'autre demeure où quelqu'un nous attend <sup>10</sup>

A seeing is possible, a seeing bringing happiness. Achievement and contact are brought about, they step beyond mere potentiality. Even though the poem deftly articulates also the idea of a further, deeper contact, with a light still not completely upon us, with a 'someone' waiting on the threshold of a perhaps even fuller communion, the simple act of seeing that occurs constitutes in itself an event of already significant and quietly gladdening realisation.

#### Images of Contact, Discovery and Liberation: A Poetic Reality

We shall now go on to examine in somewhat greater detail certain manifestations, in Reverdy's creative work proper, of those joyous, if sometimes delicately joyous occasions when the poet is able to speak of his privileged moments of contact, discovery and liberation. Though not abundant, such moments are extremely important to the thematic balance of Reverdy's work and bear witness both to his sensation of natural experiential triumph and to his appreciation of an attainment, an accomplishment that is rather more transcendent, rather more antinatural in character.

The self's contact with others in Reverdy's imaginative universe is, as we have already shown, fraught with danger and frustration. As we may ascertain in 'L'imperméable', from La Peau de l'homme, the heart's 'skin' may be exposed to the tearing of claws and the decaying touch of

lifeless lips; but it also feels upon itself the occasional fondling of hands "dont le contact est doux comme la chute des flocons de neige est silencieuse", <sup>11</sup> a contact thus corresponding to the poet's yearning and sensitivity. Reverdy's poetry bears ample trace of such delicate and fulfilling contact between self and other and from its earliest manifestations has been eager to 'record' the innocence of such an act of fusion. When we read that "les lignes de mes yeux et les lignes des siens se croisent", <sup>12</sup> we are reliving a moment of intimate intermingling at and across the frontier that is any point of encounter ("et c'est là qu'on se rencontre/C'est une frontière").<sup>13</sup> No longer is there a futile parallelism of gestures on either side of the frontier. Separation collapses. Encounter is no longer confrontation, but coming together. It is a gesture of seemingly quotidian banality and yet one of richness and innocent significance, a gesture of fusion finally confirmed by an intertwining of arms that seeks to preserve the threatened intimacy.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere Reverdy frequently stresses the unspectacular but sure significance of such contact in terms of a mingling of hands or a manual transfer that equally implies a leaping of the frontier that otherwise divides. Thus, in 'Le sommeil du coeur', the poet, "prisonnier du cauchemar ou de ses ennemis", suddenly achieves an unexpected liberation and reversal of circumstances, the possibility of breathing "un air frais qui changeait le décor", by virtue of the fact that "une main qui cherchait la sienne le frôla. Plus fraîche que l'aube sur son front".<sup>15</sup> Certainly Reverdy intimates that an initial contact stimulates a subsequent bringing about of an implicitly desired transformation -- one sees this commonly enough in Reverdy's work, as for example in 'Deux étoiles' where attained contact opens on to still further penetration and exaltation ("J'ai posé ma main sur la vôtre/Par la fente du haut/On peut voir le ciel/Tout brille")<sup>16</sup> -- , but, in one poem as in

the other, contact, discreet and fleetingly brushing as it is, remains a significant measure and sign of attainment and fulfilment and, indeed, in 'Le sommeil du coeur', the notions of transfer and magical alleviation are of paramount importance. As in 'Sur les dix doigts', where the closing verses tell us that "Je tiens entre mes doigts/Sa main encore tiède", <sup>17</sup> transfer involves a giving and a receiving, a passing over to the self, across the frontier of contact, of a simple but crucial sensation of freshness or warmth. The self may thus hold and have the essence of this transfer (or intermingling, as above) -- a transfer beyond mundane economics, a transfer transacted by means of the pure currency of the self's (and the other's) being and feeling, a discreet, ordinary, but profound act of existential communion and love. <sup>18</sup>

This apparently simple, yet profound contact attainable between poet and others, leading to exchange or transfer with its implicit act of having, is, as we might expect, also found to occur between poet and world. Thus, the notion of grasping or seizing, in a muted act of attainment, the things of the world, is found to inform Reverdy's creative work with typical delicacy, fragmentedness and unobtrusiveness. Reverdy's work is not the place of triumphant acclamation, of trumpeted victory. It does offer fragmentary glimpses and tokens of the poetic/ontological conquests being made, but such elements are never worked into an emphatic or extended discourse and thus tend to retain their 'innocence' and their withdrawing, somewhat imperceptible quality. Thus is it that Reverdy may devote a whole page to the most understated of acts of discovery and seizing in the following untitled poem from La Lucarne ovale:

Dans quelques coins  
du grenier j'ai trouvé  
des ombres vivantes  
qui remuent <sup>19</sup>

In a context of scarcity and reduction to which Aragon has shown himself most sensitive in his reading of these poems <sup>20</sup> and which is revealed more specifically in the preceding and liminal poem 'En ce temps-là le charbon ...', Reverdy manages to articulate the fine and yet plain moments of transcendent, palpitating contact still available to the poet. Thus, despite the poet's experience of barrenness and lack, the world is repeatedly sensed to be full, full of the comforts of a time of seizure and possession, a time when the poet may cry out: "Ce carré est à moi et toute la chanson", <sup>21</sup> thus proclaiming (as he does in a following poem) a firm appropriation and mastery of the world's resources and virtualities: "Un poing sur la réalité bien pleine". <sup>22</sup> The world's reality is in this way contacted and attained by dint of an act of seizure that is, as we have shown earlier, in fact one of re-realisation. The poet grasps and has, within his grasp, the things of the world; he catches them and reduces them to that poetic immobility which Reverdy prizes so much. <sup>23</sup> "Mais les poissons et les jambes ne bougent plus", as Reverdy puts it in the closing lines of a subtly self-reflexive poem from Flaques de verre, 'L'air de glace', "l'eau est prise, les lignes des rives sont prises, et rien ne bouge plus". <sup>24</sup> It is at such moments of seizure and realisation that not only are the tensions of immobility and re-invigoration or re-realisation set in play, but also the tensions of seizure and absence. It is at such moments of attainment that the poet finds himself in a situation where "les distances sont abolies et pourtant tout reste en place". <sup>25</sup> That is to say that subjective poetic contact comes about despite objective distance. Such is the miracle of artistic attainment and seizure that a having occurs in a realm apart from that where absence persists. There is a complete closing of the gap between poet and world in poetic appropriation, despite the gap's continuing objective existence.

At this point of our argument it is essential to appreciate that contacting, grasping attainment may involve not just a coming-together that permits possession and being, but a discovery (or re-discovery <sup>26</sup>) of what seemed likely to remain obscure or beyond reach, beyond a resolution of the tensions of frustration. Looking may thus be converted into contact with the very substance of mystery: "Et cette prunelle regarde et touche au loin le corps blanc du mystère". <sup>27</sup> Distance is traversed and suppressed in a contact which recompenses the poet's own risky self-exposure by matching it with an uncovering, a revelation of a secret suddenly sprung upon him. "Voilà la clé/Et le mystère découvert", we read in an early poem 'Obscurité', for example, <sup>28</sup> and, in the section of Le Voleur de Talan significantly entitled 'Enfin une clarté dans les nuages', we are told that "le secret était découvert", a secret whose discovery is intimately associated with 'otherness' and newness. <sup>29</sup> The poet, one of those dogged "rameurs de l'absolu attelé au regain", as Reverdy still terms himself in Le Chant des morts, <sup>30</sup> thus attains to a revelation of the previously unknown or unglimped, to a revelation if not of the absolute itself then surely of one of its more humble, though still rich manifestations. Moreover, the uncovering of mystery and the access to secrets give rise to further uncovering and access inasmuch as they permit a maturing of certain sentiments previously only posited by desire. In this way discovery of the secret potential of self and other for union or of the intuited but previously hidden potential of things for re-realisation and transfiguration would appear to allow the poet to accede simultaneously to an experience (and a kind of having) of purity, liberty, beauty and fullness -- all of which engender in turn a 'rugged' joy, an aesthetic/ascetic joy that Reverdy deems to be precisely the high point of poetic accomplishment. "J'ai découvert la pureté/Et l'âpre joie/

qui m'empêche à jamais de formuler ma plainte", the poet declares in the concluding lines of his Cale sèche poem 'Mon coeur de verre'.<sup>31</sup> Dirge and lament are thus banished by discovery which sets the poet free to intone a purer chant, to shake and infect the household, as Reverdy elsewhere has put it, with a bliss "[qui] retient ceux qui voudraient mourir/ par les notes de sa chanson".<sup>32</sup> At such times the poet experiences, indeed seems to internalise, a pure simplicity and joy colouring even natural reality.<sup>33</sup> The poet is filled with illumination in an understated experience of transfiguration that is evoked on various occasions<sup>34</sup> and which puts us in mind of the magical, semi-mystical experience of poetic creation itself, that wondrous imaginative plenitude so finely figured by both the substance and title of the last poem of Reverdy's Flaques de verre, 'La tête pleine de beauté'.<sup>35</sup>

It is not necessary to point redundantly to the not altogether infrequent occasions when Reverdy gives expression to the notion of attainment of joy, purity, fullness and beauty. It will suffice essentially to stress, firstly, that the latter images of attainment are imaginatively imbricated one in the other and constitute different facets of the same central motif; and, secondly, that the images of joy and liberty manifest themselves with particular and perhaps surprising persistence. Reverdy's poems thus mark with a special if still fragile vigour the varied moments of discovery, contact and having that are conceived of in terms of happiness: the joy of an intimate coming together of self and other ("La joie/ Toi contre moi");<sup>36</sup> the possible intoxication of self-world relationships<sup>37</sup> or "le bonheur des mots" in self-world-word relationships.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps even more striking are those occasions of attainment when the sensation of liberation is overpoweringly experienced as the end product of the act of attainment. In this way, after struggle and disaster, freedom may come

upon the poet: "La liberté était venue la veille après un superbe cataclysme".<sup>39</sup> The poet is thus, on certain occasions, suddenly possessed of a liberty that had previously escaped him; at other times, possession seems to be more direct, more attributable to his own gesture of seizure: "J'ai gagné ce matin la liberté/Je vais pouvoir prendre ma pauvreté pour une grande fortune".<sup>40</sup> Verses such as these express so much that is of significance in Reverdy's conception of attainment and plenitude: the act of transforming the minimal into the maximal, the possibility of relating in a profoundly new and transcendent manner to one's primary experience, to one's 'pauvreté'.<sup>41</sup> Such transformational liberation is indeed perhaps so difficult to attain precisely because it is so intangible, so limpid, so pure -- "la liberté transparente, légère comme l'air limpide, comme l'aube neuve et l'alcool pur", as Reverdy refers to it in 'Le dialogue secret'.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, if such lines as these offer insufficient indication, Reverdy is eager to show us elsewhere that this act of liberation is indeed fused in his imagination with the poet's very act of creation. "Les poumons de la liberté boivent de l'encre", Reverdy asserts in 'Les graines de la liberté';<sup>43</sup> and a few pages later, in 'La porte à portée', the same notion is affirmed: "Chaque mot qui sort et s'aligne doit être un chaînon de la liberté luisante que je gagne".<sup>44</sup> Attainment of liberty is thus structured by the act of creation. Wording and poetry constitute a self-liberating mode of discovery and achievement that offers the poet perhaps the purest joy and the most transparent fullness he can hope to attain. To attain to creation is thus, for Reverdy, synonymous with attainment of the most precious form of liberation.

As far as the thematics of Reverdy's poetry is concerned, we may venture at this point of our argument a number of interim conclusions with regard to the broad imaginative motif of attainment. To begin with, the

latter finds an expression that is multi-faceted, embracing as it does simple but profoundly significant gestures of contact with people and things, sensations of purity and joy, acts of seizure, discovery and liberation. All these gestures and sensations funnel their significance back, as it were, to the central and unifying notion of attainment of some vaguely, but essentially transcendent end and Reverdy's texts thus provide collectively a mosaic of attainment that is composed of closely associated imaginative structures which are nevertheless somewhat sparse, fragmentary and often understated. It is indeed important to fully appreciate the extent and level of manifestation of the structures concerning us -- their quantity and quality, as it were. We have in fact observed that many moments of attainment are fleeting and modest, occasions that celebrate in an uncluttered and uneventful fashion humble, quotidian and therefore apparently insignificant gestures of contact and discovery. However, in the light of poetic context, given the facts, that is, that such gestures are retained in the poem at all; that they are often stressed syntactically or structurally (they are often in a position of strategic significance within or at the end of the poem, for example <sup>45</sup>) and may even be 'isolated' in a short individual poem; that Reverdy's prose writings (his journals especially) demonstrate frequently the great and persistently explored significance he attaches to acts of contact, grasping and self-liberation, not to mention acts of seeing and hearing which in the light of our present observations might be even more firmly interpreted as constituting in themselves, both literally and metaphorically, gestures of profoundly significant contact, discovery and attainment -- given, then, the accumulated weight of these facts, what may strike initially as occasions of banal and minimal attainment must be appreciated finally as events betokening a more considerable achievement, events of a more

thoroughly meaningful and indeed aesthetically/ontologically transcendent order. Furthermore, such evidence of 'significant minimal' attainment may in this way be said to tenuously emulate and softly echo those rare but not altogether infrequent occasions in Reverdy's poetry when acts of discovery and attainment assume a more explicit and striking posture: the uncovering of secrets, the accession to a state of purity and bliss, the attainment of self-liberation.<sup>46</sup> However, having appreciated this, we must be equally certain not to neglect the fact that a careful sifting of the imaginative motifs of Reverdy's poetry reveals Reverdy to be a poet of failure, non-attainment and nothingness. Before proceeding therefore, in the second half of this chapter, to an examination of the powerful thematics of death and nothingness in Reverdy's work, it remains to be shown to what extent Reverdy himself considers his poems to be a locus of exceptional attainment and an embodiment of success and fulfilment. Here we are no longer concerned with the individual motifs of attainment in the poetry, but rather with the poetry as a concrete fact of attainment. We shall thus rapidly survey the Reverdyan logic of such a 'fact of attainment', calling principally upon Reverdy's own articulation of the idea of poetry as a transcendent means of attainment, contact, finding and seizing, and taking care only to stress aspects of his theory of particular relevance and new interest. To do this will permit us to amass the full weight of the various imaginative factors of attainment informing Reverdy's poetry and we shall thus be well placed to appreciate the contrastive and somewhat excessive weight of those motifs of extreme negative value that would seem practically to deny the relatively fragile thematics and the necessarily 'peripheral' theory of attainment elaborated in Reverdy's writings.<sup>47</sup>

### The Abstractions of Triple Attainment

In a letter of May 1951, Reverdy explains to Jean Rousselot the extent to which poetry constitutes for him the realisation of an effort of attainment and apprehension:

Cet effort dans la nuit pour tenter d'aboutir à une clarté plus éblouissante que celle du jour. Cette difficulté à appréhender le réel; et l'expression poétique comme moyen d'appréhension du réel en même temps que de libération de l'emprise trop obsédante de ce même réel, qui se dérobe à l'étreinte, sauf par le moyen de l'art. <sup>48</sup>

Whilst insisting on what impedes the poet's access and 'arrival', whilst not neglecting, equally, the crucial paradox of self-liberation from a réel which the poet otherwise seeks to embrace, Reverdy succeeds in focussing attention upon the act of poetic expression as an exceptional and even unique means of achievement in the form of apprehending and having. It is via art and its particular means that the poet has what he wants. This does not necessarily imply that he always knows precisely what to aim at: "En art, on ne vise pas, on atteint. Et c'est ce qui est atteint qui devient le but", Reverdy remarks in Le Livre de mon bord. <sup>49</sup>

But the poet is quick to recognize that what he one day miraculously and unforeseeably attains, is what ( -- and this 'what' may continue to lack any stable specificity -- ) he wishes henceforth to move towards and to allow to come upon him. Moreover, as we have suggested in an earlier chapter, poetry is not just a question of simple acquisitive, materialistic possession. Any having that is achieved by the poet is far too intangible and ethereal, a having that comes about for the sole purpose of being, of attaining and knowing "ses plus justes dimensions, celles que son oeuvre seule lui permettra de connaître, et de faire connaître, si le besoin s'en fait sentir". <sup>50</sup>

The attainment that art thus offers is, then, one of being and having, the deepest of contacts available on all fronts of the

poet's being: his contact with the world, his contact with others and his contact with himself. Whilst art, to be sure, is crucially concerned with its means, these means ensure for Reverdy not only artistic, aesthetic attainment, but, even more fundamentally, an attainment that is the purest ontological expression of the poet's existential drives.

Art and poetry thus provide a mode of attainment that constitutes the sole true way of satisfying desire and expectation and establishing contact with world, others and self -- an attainment that may be said to lie within the creative act, but which is not essentially complete until the creative work is articulated and formed. We shall now briefly affirm Reverdy's preoccupation with each of the three aspects of this mode of attainment, so as to better appreciate the full range of significance characterising the fact of poetic accomplishment, as also to stress the intensity of feeling that is involved in Reverdy's association of the notions of contact and attainment with poetic creation viewed either as creative gesture or created text.

In a famous early passage reproduced in Le Gant de crin, where he speaks of (his) poems as "ces cristaux déposés après l'effervescent contact de l'esprit avec la réalité", <sup>51</sup> Reverdy seems to point to what we might be tempted to think of as a dual notion of attainment via self-world contact: an initial, effervescent, spiritual-mental contact, followed by a 'deposition' and 'crystallisation' which in themselves might seem to suggest a further and final, permanent stage of contact, namely that of verbal formulation proper. However, Reverdy does not elsewhere take up such a distinction and, in effect, even if he were implying such a double layering of attainment, Reverdy seems to clearly suggest that the one process of attainment would be a carbon copy of the other, whatever is contacted and 'had' via the process of mental effervescence being laid down

to continue to be in the crystallised form of the poem's words. Pre-artistic process and artefact, thus constitute in principle, for Reverdy, the same sign of attainment, if they do not involve precisely the same locus of attainment. Furthermore, this contact is not with surface reality, not just with the sensorily available features of the world, but with "la réalité profonde, le réel, [...] ce que l'esprit seul est capable de saisir, de détacher, de modeler", "la source profonde et fertile de la pure réalité".<sup>52</sup> Despite all difficulty the poet clearly maintains a contact with such reality whose energy is caught by the freezing process of written verbalisation, "par le moyen des mots, cet insaisissable lien entre tout ce qui existe au monde et soi".<sup>53</sup> The attainment and preservation of self-world contact are thus assured in and via the process -- in itself beyond 'seizure', but capable of seizure -- of the poet's words and means. It is here that Reverdy can bind himself to the things of the world by pressing them to himself, by possessing them. It is in his art(-efact) that he may achieve, as we have seen earlier, a truly transcendent mode of being with things, by converting their domination of him (via their very aloofness, their objective apartness) into a having of them. In this way the poet may truthfully claim to have converted the things of the world into his things, for it is in poetry alone that he may announce, as Reverdy does in the moving conclusion to Le Livre de mon bord, that "j'ai trouvé ma mer, mon ciel d'azur, mon espace sans frein et ma nuit étoilée".<sup>54</sup>

Poetry also provides, in Reverdy's firm view, a locus for the realisation of otherwise virtually unattainable self-other contact and in this way achieves a second and equally crucial degree of accomplishment that parallels the magnitude of the self-world attainment achieved. This does not mean that the poet imagines for a moment that his contact will be

immediate and contemporary. Whilst the poet, having no one in particular (other than himself) to speak to in his act of writing, may thus be said to address himself potentially to everyone,<sup>55</sup> Reverdy, like Stendhal, looks rather to those readers who will remain to him long after his death: "Lecteurs dans cinquante ans", Reverdy states at the outset of En Vrac (and in 1956, therefore), "j'avoue que ce serait pour vous que j'ai écrit".<sup>56</sup> It is with them that, as a writer, he will "tenter tout de même ce miracle de garder, si peu que ce soit, le contact avec l'esprit et le coeur humains, grâce à ce qui a été mis [...] dans ses oeuvres et dont il ne pouvait savoir lui-même la mesure, ni le poids ni la densité".<sup>57</sup> This contact, so fragile, so select, so miraculous, comes about in poetry by a 'deep touching' of the other "dans le choc le plus émouvant".<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Reverdy argues, "c'est par là que s'opère la communion la plus hautement et la plus spécifiquement humaine".<sup>59</sup> It is via art and poetry that self-other communication may be raised to its highest point of perfection and that the poet may provoke in the other that precisely poetic, unsentimental emotion, "cette émotion appelée poésie", as Reverdy puts it in the title of his essay from which we have just been quoting and which thus reveals the following 'circular' logic: self (and primary emotion) → poetry → other → provocation of aesthetic emotion → access to self (self-other contact).

But for this aesthetic-emotional communion to come about between self and other, two conditions must be fulfilled. Firstly, the poet must be able to secure his means of accession to the other, his technique of real penetration of the reader. "Pour que la communion ait lieu sans équivoque", Reverdy announces, still in the same essay, "il faut pénétrer dans l'homme, et pour y pénétrer sans équivoque, quitte à ce que ce soit rarement, il faut y pénétrer avec sa forme de penser, de sentir et y

apporter la chose modelée à cette forme-là. Si elle y entre, elle y sera alors pour toujours. Pour toujours parce qu'elle aura trouvé dans l'autre la place exacte qu'il lui fallait pour se loger".<sup>60</sup> For the poet to achieve an exalted level of penetration and contact, he must therefore be in a position to seize things, to make them his, to mould them according to his own authentic and most intimate feeling and thinking. Anything less will spell non-attainment, "la chose modelée" will serve as a mediator, but only more or less imperfectly. Nevertheless, Reverdy is fully aware that if the special transfer and communion are to come about, then penetration -- and the act of attainment -- cannot be solely the task of the poet. "L'oeuvre est un rendez-vous", Reverdy states in a simple but telling note in Le Livre de mon bord.<sup>61</sup> The writer owes and indeed offers his most authentic presence. If the reader responds in kind, then a creation and communication are truly born and "l'oeuvre vivra".<sup>62</sup> It is a responsibility to which Reverdy is increasingly sensitive, writing as he does in En Vrac on a mixed note of overt concern and implicit appeal: "On ne veut plus, grâce à ce qui est écrit, penser, imaginer, recréer en soi. On veut voir. La littérature n'est plus un stimulant, un appel à la collaboration entre auteur et lecteur, c'est une lorgnette, une loupe ou un microscope, un instrument d'optique plus ou moins perfectionné, plus ou moins déformant. On veut voir, et vite, pour passer et ne plus penser".<sup>63</sup> What is required of the reader is a commitment, paralleling that of the writer, to thought, imagination and re-creation, a commitment not to parasitic and unsatisfying consumption, but to a self-fulfilling as well as truly communal, inter-subjective production.<sup>64</sup> Of course, Reverdy's remarks also constitute an indirect criticism of writing that tends either to foster sterile modes of reading or offer itself as a too complete, too self-sufficient substance. As he

himself says in a later note in En Vrac, speaking clearly of fine creative enterprises, but those that are still second-best, "les plus grandes oeuvres, les plus durables, les plus fécondes, ne sont pas tellement celles qui comblent tout par elles-mêmes, que celles qui ont le don ou le mystérieux pouvoir d'évoquer dans l'âme humaine, toutes les virtualités qui y sont impliquées".<sup>65</sup>

For the poet to attain his degree of maximum communion with the other, then, there must remain what we might term a margin of potentiality, of incompleteness, of non-attainment, even -- a margin that must remain the domain and responsibility of the other, of the reader.<sup>66</sup> If the poet must therefore take care not to erase this margin, but rather to demand of the other a level of creativity, an advance and a will to attain equivalent to those of the poet himself, it is plainly clear that the other must be equal to this challenge and that the self-other contact depends on the degree to which the other, "dans une oeuvre qu'il aborde, est capable de mettre autant et même plus qu'il n'y va trouver".<sup>67</sup>

It is, however, perhaps fair to say that, if for Reverdy attainment via poetry constitutes an attainment or contact of world and others, the very great importance of such attainment is nevertheless surpassed by that associated with poetry as a means of attainment or contact of the self. In Reverdy's eyes, as we have just argued, it is indeed to the poetry that the other must go and it is there that he must stay, if he wishes to establish contact with the poet's true (although 'other') self.<sup>68</sup> The reasons for this are clear and commonly stressed by Reverdy.<sup>69</sup> It is there, in the poetry, that the poet is able to "atteindre l'absolu et le réel"; there that whatever is, in any profound sense, to be found of the poet, in fact, is; and, in consequence, "c'est là qu'il faudra bien le suivre".<sup>70</sup> But this logic does not apply solely to the reader, it is

also articulated for and addressed to the poet himself. For he, too, demands an encounter with himself, an encounter of the most profound order and one which he comes to appreciate as only available in a new, transposed form of himself, in a poetry that involves a thrusting away from the self, before the self, of his most comprehensible and ontologically significant form. Although Reverdy may experience moments of severe doubt in this connection,<sup>71</sup> the overwhelming evidence of his critical writing and private notes comes down on the side of a positive outlook and interpretation: poetry is the poet's unique means of both expressing and knowing "les plus justes dimensions [de] l'être profond".<sup>72</sup> It may seem paradoxical and even, as we have suggested, anguishing, to realise that the self can only be truly contacted, embraced, attained, via a process that projects the self as an other and that it is only in this other form of self that the poet may fully realise himself. But, of course, this is precisely the formula that is, viewed from another angle, lovingly proposed and vigorously elaborated throughout Reverdy's aesthetic canon: poetry is a decanting, a transmutation, a rendering other, of world and self, in an effort -- the only fruitful one -- to attain a superior level of being for the self. Poetic creation thus offers, despite any sense of frustration or even failure, the chance of a curious self-coincidence or, at least, of a certain 'agreement' or resolution with respect both to the inner tensions that haunt him<sup>73</sup> and those that would seek to hopelessly dichotomize the primary and secondary selves of the poet. The man of action, Reverdy says, becomes identified with his acts. The artist, on the other hand, is obliged to accept the necessity of an at times painful dédoublement.<sup>74</sup> But it is only via this process of dédoublement that he can "être d'accord avec [lui]-même",<sup>75</sup> only via being the self-created other-self that is his writing that he can see and know himself and find his only possible

"vraie place au soleil".<sup>76</sup> Some kind of self-encounter is, in a certain obvious sense, inevitable and necessary, as Reverdy himself admits.<sup>77</sup> But the self-encounter that is of capital and over-riding significance to Reverdy, is only capable of reaching the apogee of its fulfilment via creative expression, via the transcendent and yet astonishingly revelatory rendering other of the self.

We may see then from the above that poetry, like art in general, permits, according to the Reverdyan imagination, a triple attainment involving world, others and self. But although Reverdy may care to lay stress successively now upon one form of attainment, now upon another, it is always implicitly clear that poetry -- any individual piece of poetry -- is in fact a place and means of coming-together not just of self and other or world, not just of self and (other-)self, but, simultaneously and at all times, of self, world and others. All three acts of attainment and contact are therefore inescapably interdependent, dialectically enmeshed one with the other. There can be no contact with self without a parallel attainment of the world, without a transcendent and transmutational seizing of those special phenomena impinging upon the poetic consciousness at a given moment of creation and a resultant establishment of new self-created relationships between self and world. Only then can what Reverdy on one occasion thinks of as a true com-prehension of self come about, via this simultaneous com-prehension of world and self-world relationships. Similarly, no attainment or contact can operate between self and other without a poetry that simultaneously contains and offers the evidence of contact between self and world, self and self. A poetry which offered to the reader no such evidence would be a poetry with nothing to offer, a poetry with no hope of attainment, no hope of proposing to the reader the necessity of his own act of creation and production.

II. The Obsessions of Death and Night and The Movement  
towards Nothingness

The imaginative motifs to which we must now turn our attention are, in effect, not just rigidly set against those imaginative motifs and abstract notions of attainment that reveal themselves, as we have just observed, both in Reverdy's creative work proper and in the poetics that underpins it. Whilst, therefore, it will be our task throughout the coming analysis to determine the extent of Reverdy's obsession with night and death, finality and silence, it will be important also to remember, firstly, that all 'negative' elements of Reverdy's poetry remain, despite their dark oppressiveness, bathed in the light of that creative and ontological success or attainment just elaborated; and, secondly, that, as we shall demonstrate in our concluding chapter, Reverdy's negative thematics is not only dialectically engaged with a positively connoted and transcendent aesthetics, but also finds itself caught up in and imaginatively subsumed within another dimension of Reverdy's poetic consciousness (and thematics) -- a dimension whose imaginative motifs are once more transcendent, equilibrating, compensatory and serve to demonstrate that, despite the general predominance of certain negative elements in Reverdy's poetic consciousness, the latter always seeks to establish a functionally viable solution to 'negativity' by placing it within the overall context of a series of definitively controlling imaginative motifs. Such parenthetical considerations should not allow us to underestimate the significance of the motifs about to be discussed, but they should serve to counter any impression that they may be deemed finally governing and, as it were, imaginatively irreversible. Crucial as they are, they will ultimately be seen to be parts of a whole whose functioning is governed more precisely by those motifs of vacillation, equilibrium and tension dealt with in the closing chapter of our study.

Just as the motifs and findings of the first part of this chapter constitute a logical imaginative extension and termination of all those earlier examined elements of desire and means of advance that work towards fulfilment and attainment, so those numerous motifs of obstacle and withdrawal discussed in Chapter Four constitute the beginning and middle stages of a movement whose imaginative conclusion is given voice through the motifs with which the second part of this chapter is now concerned. Our analysis of the latter motifs, which manifest themselves abundantly in both the vertical and horizontal planes of Reverdy's imagination, will involve an initial discussion of the process of losing and related notions of a spatial or material reduction to fragments, as well as an appreciation of the inability of the self to control a negative temporal movement. Secondly we shall proceed to a scrutiny of Reverdy's obsession with death and elements such as night, blackness, fog and clouds. This obsession will, in turn, be related to another series of significantly haunting motifs, this time operating in the vertical plane: collapse, vertigo, sinking, falling, motifs all feeding into the central preoccupation with the hole, the abyss and the void, and pertaining to the fact of Reverdy's compulsive but horrified attraction to the notion of his reduction to nothingness.

The Dilemma of Loss and Le Point <sup>Mort</sup> ~~Noir~~

A frequently and increasingly registered phenomenon in Reverdy's work is the poet's consciousness, not of a complete and utter reduction to nothingness, but of a condition that would seem to immediately precede such dire and total absence. Such a condition is characterised by a sensitivity to a still remaining minimality, to the continuing presence of fragments that, if incapable of masking the lurking void behind or beneath, nevertheless offer a minimal and still discernible purchase upon a slippery rock

face. Nothing remains any longer but some minimal substance to which the poet may cling. "Il n'y a plus que quelques mots confus dans les derniers remous de la poitrine", Reverdy tells us in 'Et maintenant'; <sup>78</sup> "Il n'y a plus rien/Seulement la façade/Le visage/Et la place d'un regard/La palissade", we read in 'Haut terrain vague'. <sup>79</sup> Almost everything has slipped away beyond the reach of the poet's consciousness or vision, but flimsy traces still remain available: "Sur la chaise il n'y a plus qu'un trou/Une forme vague dans l'ombre/Le portrait au fusain dans le coin le plus sombre/Presque rien". <sup>80</sup> Such remaining traces or fragments rarely have about them an aura of victoriously achieved retention. Although their presence in the poem certainly constitutes an indication not only of a remaining something but also of the fact that the poem is being fashioned from a similarly barely tangible materiality, the poems do not necessarily give the impression that the poet is salvaging an eminently desired element and that such fragments are therefore objects upon which the poetic desire would ideally wish to concentrate. <sup>81</sup> This is not to suggest that Reverdy ceases to deem such substance precious, but rather to note that an air of despondency obliges him to feel its fragile presence rather as loss and imminent absence: such fragments are the tattered and anguishing remnants available to the poet, the last rags before complete poverty, the scant outlines of a substance that is almost entirely wasted away. In the poem 'Prison', from Le Chant des morts, Reverdy speaks of his delirious condition, lost as he is in the space and time that have crumbled around him, and tells finally of the near-empty skins of images that linger in his consciousness, the last shimmering vestiges of a glorious something that now risks withering to an atrophied insubstantiality:

Plus rien à conserver dans les mains qui se brouillent  
 A retenir ou à glaner entre les doigts  
 Il n'y a que des reflets qui glissent  
 De l'eau du vent  
 filtres limpides  
 Dans mes yeux  
 Et le sang de désir qui change de nature  
 Des images  
 Des images  
 Sans aucune réalité pour se nourrir<sup>82</sup>

This minimal substance -- these 'reflets qui glissent', these 'images', these 'filtres limpides' -- that the poet clings to, despite its despairing hollowness, such is the only substance that remains to him in his life and of his life. This is the substance of his primary existence, just as it must become, if necessary, the frail materiality of his poetry. The menace of minimality is thus evident, for if the poet is still able to cling to something, the imminent nothingness of this something is in fact increasingly manifest to the poet himself, for it is a nothingness that increasingly swamps the few remaining fragments out of which the poet may fashion his slender salvation. Consciousness of minimality, then, is, for Reverdy, consciousness of an approaching total and definitive loss of poetic voice and a future immersion in the blank nothingness of poetic -- and 'ontological' -- inarticulacy.<sup>83</sup>

It is in effect common to find in Reverdy's work specific reference to the notion of loss. This loss may be conceived of as a process still under way, an act of losing still occurring in the present and thus parallel in function and connotation to those motifs of discolouration and evaporation discussed in an earlier chapter. This is evidenced in a poem such as 'Sur la ligne' where the poet declares a loss that is actually coming about before him: "Et je perds mon labeur/Ma pensée immobile qui pèse sur l'écueil".<sup>84</sup> The living process of wastage, ruin and losing is here being sensed and recorded, in contrast to Reverdy's rather more usual conception of the process of loss as a process having taken place, the self

being merely left to verify an absence and look back upon a desired phenomenon definitively sealed off from attainment. Now the loss sensed derives more from the poet's incapacity, as when he is forced to avow:

"J'ai perdu le secret qu'on m'avait donné/Je ne sais plus rien faire",<sup>85</sup>

or else: "J'ai perdu ma joie dans cette aventure/Alors plus rien depuis qui me soutienne";<sup>86</sup> now Reverdy stresses rather the uncontrollability of phenomena and experience, as when the poet, whose "adresse perdue" continues to plague him,<sup>87</sup> is faced with the disconcerting "caprices des événements",<sup>88</sup> with a condition in which "rien ne marche plus", the world being deemed "à l'abandon".<sup>89</sup> Thus is it that "le soleil a perdu ses rayons et ce n'est plus la vie" or that phenomena or words are designated as 'lost', 'wasted', without the blame for loss being clearly laid at the poet's door.<sup>90</sup>

There are two other relevant notions attached to the recurrent motif of loss that deserve brief attention here. The first must be situated in the context of the poet's advancing drive towards attainment, for it reveals loss as a loss of direction, a spatial-spiritual disorientation.<sup>91</sup> The poet may thus dramatically reveal that "il est perdu dans l'univers", thus drawing attention to his disorientation on a macrocosmic scale; or else, reducing the scale to everyday proportions, declare a disorientation perhaps even more perplexing because it comes about within the framework of an apparently familiar microcosm: "Je me perds dans le changement de direction des routes, à travers les conseils du Touring-club et des marchands de pneumatiques. Je me perds. Je cherche. Je me perds".<sup>92</sup> The self thus finds himself in the world or universe, surrounded by phenomena which no longer seem to relate to him or to offer him the spatial and existential purchase he requires. Moreover, the net result of this process is in fact a loss of the self, a ruination and reduction to nothingness

of the self, for disorientation prevents a location of the self, a precise identification of where and what he is.

A similar situation may arise with respect to the second, this time temporal, notion of loss, "la perte du temps".<sup>93</sup> With the flow of time, what is being lost is time itself -- not in any absolute sense, but time relative to the self, the self's time. Time in an absolute sense, the pure movement of time in which individual times briefly flower and mature -- such time is felt, repeatedly and increasingly, by Reverdy to no longer be bringing something to the poet, but, on the contrary, to be taking away what potentially remains to him. Time thus constitutes a relentless act of imposed losing shifting the poet nearer to a final, total loss and immersion in nothingness. Although given periods of time may appear to assume a length and slowness of unfurling reminiscent of a Baudelairian ennui, the broad sweep of life is felt by Reverdy to be unduly short, caught up in an unduly rapid movement.<sup>94</sup> "Et toujours le sursaut du temps doublant le pas", Reverdy cries out in 'Enfin',<sup>95</sup> feeling that detrimental effect of a speed "[qui] obnubile la perception et dérouté l'esprit",<sup>96</sup> a speed that the poet feels within him, not only psychologically but physiologically in "les pulsations intermittentes le courant trop rapide des artères".<sup>97</sup> Time's flow is thus implacable and even at times feverish.<sup>98</sup> There is, as Reverdy maintains on a number of occasions, no need to hasten "vers la froide lumière que l'on atteindra malgré tout".<sup>99</sup> On the contrary, the poet desires to slow (his) time down, to stop it even, "pour boire", "pour apprendre quelque chose", to develop that capacity to "savoir attendre et savourer".<sup>100</sup> Such a deceleration, "une exquise lenteur paisible" as Reverdy tellingly refers to it in 'Trajet',<sup>101</sup> would offer the poet the opportunity that, in fact, his poems alone may seize, namely the opportunity to pinpoint self and things

in a specific, renewable, though still becoming time.<sup>102</sup> Only via poetic time may real, primary time's destructive accelerative movement be arrested. Nevertheless, even if such a deceleration and imaginative equilibration may be said to occur via poetic creation, the consciousness of the accelerative movement is darkly projected into the body of Reverdy's poetry and the imminent loss of self that the loss of time implies is felt with ever greater urgency.

It is, in effect, in the 1940's, in Plein Verre and Le Chant des morts, that Reverdy speaks in a couple of poems and for the first time, of having reached what he terms le point mort. To the degree to which le point mort may function metaphorically, striking up analogies of a mechanical order, Reverdy is able to powerfully evoke the poet's enfeebled, incapacitated condition. In the poem 'Figure', for example, we see that the poet is deprived of all braking and gearing-down capacity as he is abandoned to a wild, free-wheeling, careering movement conveyed not only by the final image of le point mort but also by the rhythmic proliferation of preceding negative factors:

Sans parler  
 Sans rire  
 Sans plier les genoux  
 Sans respirer  
 La paix cicatrisée au rouleau des narines  
 Le point mort<sup>103</sup>

Metaphorically and rhythmically, then, the poem figures the poet's inability to slow down or stop the movement of his own time in absolute time. The movement towards finality, death and nothingness is thus unimpeded. Literally, of course, the self, already beyond gesture and defiance, "immobile au point mort" as Reverdy puts it in a later poem speaking of the same eschatological obsessions, may be said to be already immersed in death, a living death, a helplessness preceding his being thrown out of gear and suffering a totally unmaning loss of power. The experience of such a

complete and deadening lack, so widespread in Reverdy's work,<sup>104</sup> and whether or not it may be said to evoke the obsession with the final stages of a movement towards death rather than the feeling of having already died -- such an experience nevertheless shows clearly just how much the notion of loss, like that of the annihilating speed of time's flow, pre-occupies Reverdy and to what degree the thematics of his poetry is tensely and anguishingly at odds with, and at best forced into a fine equilibrium with, the attainment-orientated aesthetics underlying his work.

#### Death and Some Motifs of Darkness

It is true that in relatively rare moments of intellectual (and perhaps ironic) detachment or spiritual strength, Reverdy may speak of death as a phenomenon "[qui] compte si peu, ... la fin des tourments, le repos", something that offers a reconciliation with nature.<sup>105</sup> Death, our only certainty,<sup>106</sup> is not, in this optic, the fundamental cause of our pain or anxiety which stem rather from life.<sup>107</sup> But such a view of death, in fact oddly buoyant and somewhat tongue-in-cheek, is very far from that expressed almost everywhere throughout Reverdy's entire opus; even in Le Gant de crin where he briefly assumes a more detached spiritual posture, death is implicitly acknowledged to constitute a significant existential problem: "la mort, on peut la regarder froidement", he declares -- yes, but only "si on considère Dieu derrière elle".<sup>108</sup> Effectively Reverdy was marked by a terrible consciousness of death from the early days of his life in Paris, even before he had published his first poem. In a letter written in 1951 he recalls vividly the moment of his father's sudden and untimely death and affirms just how much "cette mort a marqué mon être". "Depuis ce jour", Reverdy adds, "l'idée de la mort est entrée dans mon âme comme un ver".<sup>109</sup> And to this personally rooted obsession, unreasoned, compulsive and beyond modification,<sup>110</sup> is added

the weight of a reasoned and, as it were, necessary obsession. Man is "sans espoir de survie" and "la conscience obsédante qu'il a [de la mort]" is thus natural and inevitable.<sup>111</sup> However, as Reverdy himself points out, it is via the fact of his obsession (whether experientially or 'logically' founded) that man condemns himself to a dangerously disproportionate participation in death even during life. It is such a participation that Reverdy's creative works constantly reveal and it now remains for us to characterise more precisely his conception and sense of death, a death whose presence and nature he not only in fact continues to have in mind but which he has occasion to feel also. "Penser à la mort", as Reverdy says four years before his own death, "c'est terrible quand elle signifie le néant, mais sentir la mort, dans le même esprit, quand un état de santé particulièrement déficient permet de pousser jusque-là, c'est proprement intolérable".<sup>112</sup>

Our first concern must be to fully recognize a point made only parenthetically to date, namely the fact of death's fundamental ambivalence or equivocalness.<sup>113</sup> For Reverdy, death is unquestionably seen, in almost all of his numerous pronouncements upon it or poetic allusions to it, as a definitive and terminal gesture, descending, even mockingly, upon man like the blade of some invisible guillotine.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, death condemns man to an irreparable loss of "[ses] insignes", thrusting him, as the following lines from La Liberté des mers show, into anonymity and oblivion: "Et les hommes détachés de l'humanité par la mort comme les grains de sable par le flot tout aussi inlassable -- s'en vont un à un fournir la matière anonyme des vastes étendues de l'éternel oubli".<sup>115</sup> Death as such offers not as Reverdy had once claimed in hope and inspiration "le passage inévitable mais absolument nécessaire pour aller réellement à Dieu",<sup>116</sup> but instead "la fosse, la pourriture et un arrêt stupide,

inexplicable", behind which lies the fundamentally inconceivable "steppe froide... du néant".<sup>117</sup> It is, in the final analysis, this nothingness, this absurd though strangely just<sup>118</sup> reduction to nothingness that exercises the stronger and, indeed, anguishing fascination over Reverdy. Death may thus smile equivocally, beckoning towards rest and reconciliation and teasing man with its own ultimate inscrutability, but its smile remains incurably bitter, "l'amer sourire de la mort".<sup>119</sup>

For the Reverdyan imagination one of the most disturbing characteristics of death is its corrosiveness, its voraciousness. "Toujours la mort entêtée/La mort vorace".<sup>120</sup> Death enters the mind and soul like a gigantic worm, as we have seen Reverdy put it in a letter to Jean Rousselot<sup>121</sup> -- a worm that hungrily feeds upon the poet's substance until his whole being is consumed. The process, once begun, becomes irreversible, inexorably pursued to its absurd end. It is as if the poet were made precisely in order to die. "On a des armes pour rire/Et un coeur pour mourir", Reverdy states unflinchingly in a very early poem.<sup>122</sup> The poet's very living moment is felt rather to be a movement "droit vers la mort", as the title of another early poem suggests.<sup>123</sup> Life cannot resist the magnetism of death<sup>124</sup> and thus urges and pushes Reverdy towards death,<sup>125</sup> so that he has a feeling of constantly being torn by the paradox of being psychologically and physiologically orientated away from what he needs towards what destroys him. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the whole of life is destined to undergo the detrimental effect of this magnetic attraction and despite the fact, too, that death is, for Reverdy, our one certainty, death remains, in its specificity, unforeseeable, unpredictable.<sup>126</sup> In consequence, obsession is compounded by a sense of impotence attaching to it.<sup>127</sup> Death is now imminent at all times, its dark reality virtually omnipresent. "La mort est à tout

bout de champ", Reverdy declares,<sup>128</sup> aware that death may come in any space and its potentiality is therefore with us in our every act, our every refusal to act, our every recuperation from action.<sup>129</sup> It is no doubt for this reason that Reverdy's poems reveal a poet highly sensitive to the signs of death everywhere about him: in particular dying or dead trees, dead animals and birds; but, in general, any of those multitudinous "formes inouïes qui ne veulent rien dire/Que la mort".<sup>130</sup> And it is no doubt for this same reason that Reverdy's work manifests, qualitatively if not quantitatively even in the earliest work, an extreme sensitivity to the imminence and ubiquitousness of his very own death. In La Lucarne ovale Reverdy's solitude and despair may be so sharply felt as to cause him to cry out: "Je me sens mourir/Secours-moi".<sup>131</sup> Death is thus with him from the outset of his literary career not only as a corroding notion gnawing into his reason, but also as a devastating, debilitating feeling -- and a feeling, it must be stressed, that is double-edged, sparking not just a sensitivity to the death of other phenomena, but a consciousness of his own death building up inside him, consuming and fattening itself upon the substance of his life. If, then, Reverdy's later work shows an almost permanent, still anguished yet lucid contemplation of a death increasingly comprehensible purely in chronological terms, if Reverdy can perhaps better tolerate the pain of his obsession, the fact that "la mort/A déjà pris presque toute la place dans la page"<sup>132</sup> and the reality of "ma vie dans la coulisse/D'où je vois onduler les moissons de la mort"<sup>133</sup> -- if this is so, then we must not neglect the equally significant fact that Reverdy has always been obliged to remain "face à la mort",<sup>134</sup> "marchant à côté de la mort"<sup>135</sup> and, from the beginning, has accepted death within him, where it can multiply its cancerous cells and wreak upon him ever possible destruction.

It is in the context of this unforeseeable, ever imminent and absurd reduction to nothingness that we must now consider a number of related and equally recurrent imaginative motifs: clouds, fog, blackness and night, the latter being perhaps the core motif of this particular group. We shall begin by examining the motifs of clouds and fog which relate in fact to others already discussed and then proceed to an analysis of Reverdy's conception of blackness and night, which will be seen to constitute an imaginative extension and completion of the function and character of the two former elements.

What we are concerned to demonstrate throughout this present section, of course, is Reverdy's sensitivity to the actuality or potentiality of nothingness via the obsessive deployment of certain imaginative motifs. The cloud, therefore, whilst being an agent of blockage, is felt to offer in its very act of occlusion an experience of absence, deprivation and nothingness which is no less disturbing for its fleeting, momentary quality. In 'La Saison dernière', for example, we read: "Un nuage passe à cheval/En courant le vent le dépasse/Une ombre sur l'oeil me tracasse/Je glisse dans un cauchemar".<sup>136</sup> Cloud, here as often elsewhere,<sup>137</sup> torments by its occlusion of vision, by a closing of the eye which is commonly associated with death itself. To cloud over is, almost invariably for the Reverdyan imagination, to veil over the eye, to cause a loss of light that is but a preliminary and fragmentary experience of blackness and night. Unlike fog, however, the cloud is generally otherwise lacking in characteristics and associations. We become acquainted with it through its negative function and effect, essentially. Although there is no doubt that there is a functional similarity between cloud and fog and, indeed, other Reverdyan occluding agents such as the cobweb or the veil,<sup>138</sup> fog is much more highly characterised by Reverdy's

sensibility. As with the cloud and the veil, of course, fog reduces visual or visionary contact by reducing light and threatens in so doing to impose, only more effectively and utterly, a reduction to nothingness. Fog thus renders sought information indecipherable; <sup>139</sup> it brings about an end to signification and illumination ("le brouillard, l'agonie des lampes et des signes"); <sup>140</sup> and it imprisons, isolating the self and denying all gestures of attainment ("Brouillard ... le plus grand isolant dans l'espace -- suppression totale des distances et de tout espoir de contact"). <sup>141</sup> It is not then surprising that fog is an element to be vigorously repulsed, <sup>142</sup> for it is oppressive, viscous and clinging, treacherously laying before us a faceless trap, associated with meanness, unawareness and grief. <sup>143</sup> As such, fog is a potent metaphor for all experience that works towards disaster and the destruction of the self and, in the cluster of motifs under consideration, it rivals night in the high colouration of its conception and the frequency of its imaginative occurrence.

We may feel that the negative connotations of blackness and night are perfectly normal and quite understandable. To a degree this is clearly the case, though it is by no means always so. <sup>144</sup> Even in Reverdy's conception of night there are fluctuations and momentary contradictions. What interests us principally, however, is the way in which the motifs of blackness and night embed themselves in, and thus powerfully reinforce, the overall imaginative pattern of a movement towards finality and nothingness. In effect, Reverdy shows a sensitivity to an inherent negative expressivity of the colour black which dates back to his initial exposure to 'cubist' painters in general and, it would seem from his essay 'Dans l'obscur mêlée ...', to Juan Gris in particular. <sup>145</sup> This is not to suggest that there is a deliberate, inauthentic application of blackness

by Reverdy's poetic brush, although he is aware of its aesthetic functionality. If black -- as often, indeed, grey<sup>146</sup> -- appeals to the Reverdyan sensibility and assumes a special imaginative potency, it is because Reverdy seems instinctively to have found intolerable the passage from his Southern experience of the "merveilleux soleil d'automne qui, la veille encore, me caressait de ses rayons" to the frightfully oppressive blacks and 'leprous' greys of Paris: "Le Paris de mon imagination s'effondrait dans la grisaille et la crasse d'un décor de catastrophe, et les arbres noirs - ça c'était le comble!"<sup>147</sup> Here, then, as indeed elsewhere and as with the motifs of cloud, fog and night, blackness is a sign of a (possibly permanent) loss of luminosity and soft caress, a sign of disaster and harsh finality. It is thus commonly associated in Reverdy's creative works with fear, anxiety and grief. "Noire la détresse", an early poem announces;<sup>148</sup> "le noir silence qui suivra la trahison", we read in the tellingly titled poem 'Le silence infernal';<sup>149</sup> or, in another early poem, 'Toujours seul', the quotidian becomes strangely intensified, producing symptoms of severe alarm: "Quand les toits se touchent on n'ose plus parler. On a peur de tous les cris, les cheminées s'éteignent. Il fait si noir".<sup>150</sup> When the poet casts about him for signs that may mature and blossom into plenitude and ascendancy, only to be greeted by "quelques signes noirs" or perhaps, even, "rien que des signes noirs sur les routes sans fin",<sup>151</sup> such signs articulate with "une puissance d'expression sourde"<sup>152</sup> the anguish of a reduction to blank absence and stark negativity. When the world around him becomes a "paysage noir"<sup>153</sup> or the white-washed walls he knew at 12 rue Cortot in Montmartre are 'exchanged' for the repeatedly evoked ultimate space of "ma chambre noire",<sup>154</sup> then there can be little doubt that Reverdy is discreetly presenting a powerful image of his experience of an oppressive nothingness, a blockage

of 'vision' and the drive to accomplish that threaten to impose their awful permanence.

From the beginning of his literary career Reverdy understood night to be the principal period of his creative endeavour, the essential back-cloth against which all that would be significant to him might be projected in light. His preference for night, his determination to "*commencer la vie nocturne et tout à fait impersonnelle*",<sup>155</sup> reveal his need to work at a time of uncluttered consciousness,<sup>156</sup> at the only time when the most serious and deeply self-centred concerns and visions might be transformed into that 'otherness', those heterocosms, of his poetry. But it should be noted that, even according to this conception of night, the latter retains a character of blank emptiness which, at best, exudes a dark, raw and uncertain potentiality from which the poet may hope to salvage a few nuggets for his delicate act of fashioning.<sup>157</sup> In consequence, even though Reverdy accepts night as a time and zone of possibility and availability, a tension is present from the outset<sup>158</sup> in Reverdy's imaginative conception of night, the tension between a fragile chance of something and the menacing pressure of sterility. Moreover, as we shall now proceed to show, night rapidly establishes itself as an image of negative potentiality and reduction to nothingness. The initially implicit threat of nocturnal non-fulfilment thus ultimately obsesses. Night as a metaphor of rich feasibility, whilst never quite smothered in Reverdy's mind, plays, finally, the merest of roles.

Faced with the abundance of negatively connoted characteristics of Reverdyan night, it is not difficult to trace the outlines of its increasingly nightmarish obsessiveness. Like blackness with which night is imaginatively connected in its most basic gesture of annihilation of light, night promotes strong feelings of fear. "*On a vraiment peur de la*

nuit", Reverdy confesses in 'Tourbillons de la mémoire'.<sup>159</sup> Night threatens in fact to unhinge the dreamer, whether he be slumberer or creator;<sup>160</sup> the heavy fullness that it possesses is purely destructive, one of danger and cruelty;<sup>161</sup> like fog, though rather less perfectly, it stifles space and brings about separation.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, the ultimate metaphoric menace of night is to bring Reverdy up against the facts of death, finality and nothingness. Night thus comes to be that black door, "le bout où finirait le monde",<sup>163</sup> a zone into which men and phenomena are drawn only to discover they are to be the victims of "le parapet du suicide" that night is for Reverdy in 'Le magasin monumental',<sup>164</sup> or to find themselves transformed, with the poet, into a disabled hulk sinking into the nocturnal waters, a pitiful "carcasse de la nuit".<sup>165</sup>

Despite the vividly hued tones of such characterisation, the most distinctive and interesting feature of Reverdy's consciousness of night is his sensitivity to the way it is part of an overall diurnal flow of time and, indeed, being. Furthermore, this sensitivity renders night a more thoroughly potent metaphor of the many faceted general negative movement under discussion. Reverdy's initial experience of death, as we have seen, comes almost at the beginning of his creative life in Paris and it is an experience that is stunning and compelling. Night presents itself as a figure of that compulsive, obsessive consciousness of death and absurd finality, as, indeed, of the artist's closely related experience of the nothingness of creative sterility. Indeed, night is almost the perfect figure of such a consciousness, mirroring its relentless assault upon the mind, the inescapable recurrence of its dark terror. Night, like death and the nothingness from which all being (whether 'primary' or artistic) arises, is predictable. It is a promise. But again like death and nothingness, night is also oddly volatile, unforeseeable in an

especially anguishing way, for the poet can never know when night will suddenly be nothingness or death: he is condemned to experience the drab, quotidian recurrence of a phenomenon he also paradoxically desires to experience in order to salvage some glittering ontological/artistic jewel -- but he can never know when night will cease to be a mere figure and take on the flesh of reality. To the extent that Reverdy writes and creates, we must argue that his poetry constitutes, by the very fact of its being fashioned, a powerful antidote to the poison it would dispense to its own creator. And yet, to the extent that the figures possess or speak of a substance and constitute a testimony to Reverdy's experience of night both before and at the time of creation, then we must equally conclude that his repeated, quasi-Nervalian experience of total night was indeed utterly terrifying, despite the paradoxical figurative transcendence posited and realised. In a poem from Le Chant des morts the opening lines run as follows:

Je ne pense plus qu'à la nuit  
 Le long hiver fondant des pensées souveraines  
 A présent que le circuit se ferme  
 Un astre mort traîne dans le ciel noir un feu sans étincelles 166

If, then, we can appreciate in these lines the magic of a beautiful transmutational gesture, let us not lose sight of the fact that the poem speaks concurrently of a tragic, obsessive sensation of an almost complete reduction to nothingness figured by the image of a night sky with its single lightless star. Similarly, in another poem written during the same period, precisely the same image is employed, but this time in such a way as to insist upon the loss of all source of nocturnal illumination:

Il y avait au front de tous les hommes une lumière  
 Une étoile vivante au creux de chaque nuit  
 Un astre camouflé au fond du lourd ciel d'encre  
 Quel vol de main saura rallumer cette lampe  
 Repolir l'étoile et le ciel  
 Desserrer l'étau de ma tempe  
 Et rouvrir dans mon coeur une porte au soleil 167

Here, the presently felt power of night, oppressive and ostracising, is thrust contrastively against the former strength of a light (star, lamp, sun) now quite extinguished not only in the poet but in all men. The unanswered and perhaps unanswerable question which forms the final lines can only manage to reveal the poet's continuing and desperate need to escape the darkness that besets him, but it offers nothing beyond its dry questioning. This is not to overlook, of course, the splendidly transcendent metaphoricity of the whole stanza, though it is interesting to note in this regard that ink is closely allied to night and that the "vol de main" which just might restore a crucial and creative gleam of light to the ubiquitous gloom is in fact, as we have already suggested, caught up in the syntax of a desperate rhetoricalness.<sup>168</sup> The horror evoked by such a poem lies finally in the presentiment, if not the actual and definitive experience, of what Reverdy calls, in 'Dans ce désert', "ma nuit sans horizon"<sup>169</sup> -- that is to say an experience of unending night, a night without stars and without dawn's sun, a night that is conclusion, end. Such night is no longer part of a diurnal rhythm that, if it is destined to produce a routinely, yet horribly renewed consciousness of all that night figures, nevertheless benefits from the respite of day. Night without horizon becomes a monolithic figure, it ushers in a figurative and imaginative permanence that constitutes the only seemingly available reality, that of death, end and nothingness.

#### Disintegration, Vertigo and Wreckage

We shall now turn our attention to a very important and somewhat extensive group of imaginative motifs whose significance resides precisely in the fact that they too figure, only this time more essentially in the vertical rather than the horizontal plane, the same broad imaginative logic that our present chapter is concerned to depict. A discussion of a few

of these motifs has inevitably been interwoven into parts of our earlier analysis and on such motifs we shall, in consequence, not dwell. This will particularly apply to the first, general question to concern us, namely the recalcitrance and qualitative depletion of 'upper space'. We shall then proceed to examine Reverdy's sensitivity to the notions of crumbling, vertigo, collapse, sinking and falling, all of which demonstrate a negatively valued descensional movement through the vertical plane resulting in a preoccupation with the phenomena of the hole, the trap and the void. The latter will form the topic of a concluding analysis which will in turn be related to and feed back into the questions of nothingness and finality.

As we have seen in an earlier chapter, the sky constitutes, originally, for the Reverdyan imagination, a zone and emblem of magical availability and possibility. In this, of course, Reverdy's sensibility is reminiscent of a central feature of Baudelairean imaginative consciousness.<sup>170</sup> However, Reverdy's creative work manifests, particularly, from its middle period on,<sup>171</sup> an about-face in the imaginative valuation of the sky. No longer is it able to appeal via its blue limpidity, as a region of purification or as a factor of support. Instead, it assumes now a bitterness or hardness,<sup>172</sup> now a deathly paleness or a dark and denuded starlessness.<sup>173</sup> It thus becomes a zone of frustration, confusion and refusal, a space of flashing, enervating storms,<sup>174</sup> an oppressive, evasive element ("le ciel qui pèse ou qui fuit"),<sup>175</sup> a heavy force blatantly associated with various acts of torment and annihilation ("le ciel pesant d'où tombe la neige noire de l'oubli").<sup>176</sup> By means of this re-portrayal Reverdy tends to convey either one of two negative impressions. The first of these would suggest that the poet is finally led to deem upward, ascending gestures to be largely futile due to the

sky's recalcitrance and depletedness, and that those gestures still directed skywards tend, as the following passage from La Liberté des mers graphically illustrates, to fall back helplessly, impotently, from a zone no longer offering any sign of recognition or communication: "Par les fenêtres qui s'ouvrent sur la nuit comme des yeux crevés, aucun rayon ne filtre, ni signe ni regard, les cris montent au ciel et retombent -- glacés, éteints comme des étincelles déchargées dans les oreilles froides des enfants plus que nus qui mendient la mort sur le pavé".<sup>177</sup> The second and imaginatively related impression that may be left with us pertains to the fact that the sky is seen in the perspective of a continual lowering: its heaviness is felt, it rains down upon the poet the various weapons (black snow, storms, etc.) of an arsenal that had barely been suspected to exist. The most forbidding 'perspective' is that, elaborated in the closing and illuminating lines of an otherwise rather obscure Sources du vent poem of that title, in which Reverdy declares that "quand le mur s'efface/Le ciel va tomber".<sup>178</sup> But whether the sky is about to 'fall in' or merely opposes a hostile emptiness to the poet's gestures of search and seizure, the result is ostensibly the same. There is a real or threatened collapse of (the viability of) a superior zone of potentiality, so that the sky and its changed qualities and activities become yet another powerful image of the general shift to nothingness that plagues Reverdy's consciousness. It should be stressed, however, that this figurative impoverishment of the sky is never complete, nor is there any neat chronological break signalling such imaginative devaluation. The latter is thus not rigidly localised and, it should be noted, even in the moments of its distinctly negative characterisation the sky retains an at least implicit, 'ghostly' aura of its former salubrity. Nevertheless the devaluation is sure and generally most manifest and it is, moreover, mirrored

by an increasingly common use of other often even more forceful figures of the same essential movement, in the same vertical plane, but occurring at a lower level. To these motifs of negative movement at the ground and sea level we shall now direct our attention.

Reverdy's work shows an early sensitivity to the unstable shifting of phenomena around him and, indeed, to their disturbing propensity for disintegration. Sometimes the surfaces of things are seen to flake off and crumble with time <sup>179</sup> -- in fact, exactly like time itself; <sup>180</sup> at other times the earth cracks, stones shatter, walls fall apart, houses collapse in ruins. <sup>181</sup> As Reverdy's last poem, Sable mouvant, vividly reveals, such a disintegration may be conceived of as a result of a night-marish earthquake which opens up the ground in such a way that the poet is caught in the gullet of the earth and on the point of being devoured:

Mais tout avait craqué  
 La terre était fendue  
 Comme une énorme bouche  
 Une immonde crevasse aux  
 lèvres boursouflées  
 Et  
 arrêté entre les amygdales  
 d'un monstrueux gosier  
 j'étais coincé <sup>182</sup>

Disintegration of this order is evidently on a vast scale and it exhibits Reverdy's obsession, to be treated fully later in our analysis, with the horror of the hole, the abyss, the void. However, disintegration may be presented somewhat less spectacularly, though its signification may clearly remain as great. An early poem, pointedly titled 'Ruine achevée', tells bluntly of the basic dilemma experienced:

J'ai perdu le secret qu'on m'avait donné  
 Je ne sais plus rien faire  
 Un moment j'ai cru que ça pourrait aller  
 Plus rien ne tient  
 C'est un homme sans pieds qui voudrait courir  
 Une femme sans tête qui voudrait parler  
 Un enfant qui n'a guère que ses yeux pour pleurer <sup>183</sup>

After confessing this disastrous quasi-aphasia that afflicts him, the poet speaks somewhat ambiguously of the necessity, despite this impossible condition, to complete a great journey in the presence of someone that resembles him, an other-self that horribly complements him. The poem ends quietly, with what might appear to be the mildly anxious verification of the crumbling of some external phenomenon ("Un pan de décor qui s'écroule/ Dans la nuit"), but not before a more ominous note has been struck, recalling the initially expressed dilemma of total loss ("Au retour je ne retrouve rien/On ne m'a rien donné/Tout est dépensé") and it is at this point that we are forced to come, as so often in Reverdy's poems, full circle, to link the closing line or lines and the title and to (re-)view the entire poem in the light their relationship discreetly projects upon it. Here, then, by means of his usual techniques,<sup>184</sup> Reverdy implies and leaves us to deduce that this mere fragment crumbling in the darkness is, in fact, a 'ruine achevée' -- and not simply of some external phenomenon, but, most catastrophically, of the poet himself. Needless to say, if this is so, the implicit relationship between the collapse or mere flaking of some unidentified fragment and the complete ruination of the self permits Reverdy to articulate in the most discreet and understated manner an existential condition become unbearable.

A good many striking Reverdyan images take as their inspirational nucleus the unsettled, unpredictable and potentially dangerous movements of the sea. In tracing the main aspects of this cluster of imaginative motifs it is useful initially to draw attention to Reverdy's heightened awareness of the rotating movement of the earth -- a matter which will receive further attention, though with a different stress, in our concluding chapter. One of the most significant effects of such rotation is the fact that what is in fact a normal movement produces in Reverdy an abnormal

sensitivity to the vertiginous dimension of the movement. "Le sol devient glissant", he announces in 'Piéton', "et tourne/tourne".<sup>185</sup> What is conventionally an acceptable turning, becomes a dizzying, spinning movement, one that seems to be unsynchronised ("Tout tourne plus vite que le temps"),<sup>186</sup> one that confuses the mind and the heart<sup>187</sup> and inflicts a severe sensation of vertigo upon the poet from the earliest days of his creative endeavour: "Mais le chemin qui se déroule comme une bande de papier/C'est un tapis roulant qui tourne donnant le vertige à mes pieds".<sup>188</sup> Moreover, as a note in Le Livre de mon bord indicates, the poet's hope of countering such an all pervading sensation of vertigo is dismally limited, for regardless of his creative, equilibrating efforts,<sup>189</sup> vertigo is destined to remain, it would seem, an integral part of his existential dilemma: "[Le poète] n'a rien à donner que ce qu'il n'a pas, qu'il ne connaît pas -- et qui ne se révèle à lui-même que quand c'est là, venu d'il ne sait où lui-même. Quelle assurance contre le vertige!".<sup>190</sup>

If Reverdy's work manifests an attraction to images of marine adversity and calamity, we can now readily observe the close relationships between such images and the poet's basic consciousness of a vertigo inescapably linked to the simple fact of his being-in-the-world. The sea's pitching, rolling and eddying movements,<sup>191</sup> imparted, as was the case with the sensation of disintegration and vertigo, not just to the phenomena of the world but also to the poet's inner being -- such irregular, unstable rhythms produce, in fact, basically the same disequilibrium provoked by giddiness, the same nauseating sensation of tilting and toppling. Worse still, such moments when "tout se déséquilibre et tangué"<sup>192</sup> may be seemingly easily transformed into times of capsizing and foundering, times when it is no longer merely a matter of imminent danger ("Des remous où risquent de sombrer et l'amour et l'esprit"),<sup>193</sup>

but rather of actuality, when emotion does indeed founder upon the rocks and when everything does go under.<sup>194</sup> All this explains the abundance in Reverdy's work, and again particularly in the post-Solesmes work,<sup>195</sup> of those somewhat Mallarméan signs of disaster, those "navires démâtés aux océans de peur", those "naufrages sans bouées", those "navires en perdition".<sup>196</sup> Indeed, the shipwreck is a starkly eloquent figure of a distress virtually beyond relief, a situation therefore in which the poet feels himself to be precisely on the point of death or even already dead, but drifting like some ghost ship, some half-scuttled skeleton of a vessel uttering a gurgling -- and anachronistic -- death-rattle. "Ma place est au niveau des cercles désunis/Appels désespérés/Signaux de ma détresse/Voile désemparée/Carcasse de la nuit", Reverdy writes in 'Santé de fer', a poem already quoted in connection with the theme of night.<sup>197</sup> And elsewhere, in Reverdy's celebrated 'Dans ce désert', the poet confesses his appalling identity, "Bateau perdu sans mât/Sans orientation/Tête tranchée".<sup>198</sup> In both poems, as with the whole notion of shipwreck, although one may argue the continued floating of the disabled vessel, it is clear that the poet's fundamental and, as it were, ultimate consciousness is one of catastrophe and either real or imminent end. If the disaster-stricken vessel continues to float, it does so in a 'beheaded' state, as a 'carcass' -- as a drowned body would drift upon the surface of a sea with whose force it could no longer cope in its slippage from being to nothingness.

In a long revealing letter written to Jean Rousselot in the spring of 1951, Reverdy speaks at some length of what he himself considers to be his crucially self-determining sense of a certain 'cosmic instability' evoked by all the motifs either just examined or about to be examined and which, for being somewhat unjustifiable, is no less real and all-permeating. Let us, at this point of our argument, briefly, but strongly reaffirm the

importance of this sense:

la terreur du monde réel n'a jamais cessé de peser dans ma destinée. Je crois qu'on n'a jamais vu, dans mes poèmes, que la terre n'a jamais été solide sous mes pieds -- elle chavire, je la sens chavirer, sombrer, s'effondrer en moi-même. Le sens de cette instabilité cosmique que j'ai toujours ressentie, ne m'a jamais tant frappé que depuis que cette crainte semble avoir gagné un peu tout le monde. De même pour l'insécurité sociale, matérielle. Vous savez ce que je veux dire. Je connais peu de gens qui en soient autant hantés que moi-même, en somme, je le reconnais, quand il n'y a pas tellement de quoi. 199

It is evident from this extract that, in spite of Reverdy's desperate love of the world about him, he is never able to stifle within himself, or blind himself to the fact of, the world's terrorising effect upon him. It would appear that this stems in some significant measure from the very real primary contact Reverdy experiences with the world, a kind of deeply resonant sensation and anguishing interiorisation of "cette instabilité cosmique" that really belongs not to the self but to the world, but which is horribly transferred from one to the other. No wonder, then, that we see in Reverdy's works the obsessive recurrence of motifs of capsizing, disintegration and so on. And no wonder, either, that Reverdy seeks to translate by means of a widening range of images this central menace of cosmic instability leading to disaster and end. The images that we shall next survey all pertain to a sensation of viscosity and that of a corresponding sinking. We shall then examine Reverdy's sensitivity to holes and the void. Interwoven into this discussion will be a brief exposition of the Reverdyan notion of falling and we shall terminate by establishing the basic notional links between Reverdy's conception of the void and the ultimate 'attainment' of nothingness that his poetry so insistently articulates.

### Viscosity, Holes and Falling

Reverdy's creative work contains a good number of striking and important images of a viscosity that he abhors.<sup>200</sup> A very early poem from the Poèmes en prose contains the following closing declaration: "Après la fuite, après la peur, sauvé de la boue j'ai fini la poursuite sous la porte cochère".<sup>201</sup> Mud is, from the outset, a substance whose contact the poet gladly escapes. The problem is that mud is, as it were, too 'terrestrial', too much an integral part of being on earth. It may thus swamp the mine being exploited by the poet<sup>202</sup> and it threatens to inundate "les ornières de [la] destinée".<sup>203</sup> Mud is "ignoble",<sup>204</sup> possessing that fleshy, sensuous mollesse that Reverdy seems instinctively to dislike, no matter how it manifests itself.<sup>205</sup> This no doubt accounts for the binding of the notions of tiredness and sluggishness to the sensations of syrupy stickiness and clinging softness;<sup>206</sup> for the combination of the notion of wretchedness, reduction to poverty, and the sensation of an impossibly adhesive mucosity;<sup>207</sup> and, in a couple of fine poems from La Liberté des mers, for the association of night with mud's tacky glutinosity ("la chaîne de pas que le trottoir entraîne dans la glu de la nuit")<sup>208</sup> and the image of a tarry, viscid darkness in a space already bristling with the effects of terrifying collapse ("Je ne distingue plus dans cette nuit de poix, dans l'épaisseur des masses qui emprisonnent la poitrine, vers quelle direction me porte le courant -- entre les murs croulant dans un frisson de peur et l'éparpillement des plus lourdes assises").<sup>209</sup> In effect, any soft, viscous substance -- mud, syrup, pitch, paste -- seems intensely repellent to Reverdy. What they all lack is the quality of solidity, firmness. What they all represent is the horror of an inescapable glutinosity that is perhaps best evoked by the image of quicksand. Indeed, Reverdy's long final poem, written in 1959-60, is significantly

entitled Sable mouvant. As with marine disaster,<sup>210</sup> the experience undergone is one of sinking, of being sucked down towards death and nothingness, only here the sensory dimension is more palpably repulsive, as the treacherous, drowning liquid becomes slimy and semi-emulsified. To feel oneself caught in quicksand, then, is to feel one's helplessness in the event of a relentless and horrific movement of annihilation. It is to suddenly realise that the "feux du sémaphore"<sup>211</sup> are of no avail, that arrival and attainment are now out of the question, that the only distance to be traversed is that leading down into the soft, mucilaginous end below.<sup>212</sup>

In the Reverdyan imagination the hole, the trap and abyss play privileged roles whose basic significance is highly relevant to that of the images of shipwreck and engulfment in viscous matter: whilst retaining their individual characteristics, all involve the poet in experience of an unpleasant involuntary downward movement into a space that is uncertain and unfathomed. Many of Reverdy's poems demonstrate obsessively a simple yet oddly enigmatic awareness of the mere presence of holes. "Il y a des trous", we are told; "la terre était pleine de trous".<sup>213</sup> Or else it is the turn of traps or chasms to receive attention, once more with respect to their strangely proliferating existence: "Là il y a un piège"; "Il y a des gouffres et des pièges"; "Les trappes bâillent"; "Et pourtant le piège est toujours là caché".<sup>214</sup> Sensitivity to this yawningly evident or perfidiously hidden presence of holes, snares and gulfs, whilst not exclusive to the earlier, pre-Ferraille writings, is especially noticeable there. The impression thus made upon Reverdy's imagination is that of a dangerous terrain riddled with pitfalls, of phenomena outside the self but threatening him with the misfortunes of stumbling, slipping and falling. The negative connotation of these phenomena is, moreover, quite

unmistakable. Holes and abysses do not appeal to the Reverdyan imagination in terms of their inviting openness or the latent adventure they hold in store. They may remain mysterious, unknown entities, but such mystery is not a spur to casually fascinated scrutiny.<sup>215</sup> "Le trou/ Quel dégoût", Reverdy declaims in 'O',<sup>216</sup> and, elsewhere, holes are associated with torture and the tomb, weeping and despair;<sup>217</sup> traps, too, have that curious capacity for rendering the familiar ominous, as a poem such as 'Homme assis' from Au Soleil du plafond testifies right from the opening line ("Le tapis vert couché sous l'âtre c'est un piège");<sup>218</sup> and chasms and gulfs possess for Reverdy that dubious power of omnipotent erasure ("Avec la peur d'aller trop près/Du ravin noir où tout s'efface"),<sup>219</sup> the ultimate horror of void and silence with their total devouring of that delicate something the poet strives to foster ("Le gouffre noir, gelé où règnent le vide et le silence menaçants, la possibilité de toutes les morsures").<sup>220</sup> However, if many poems, particularly the early ones, project in a somewhat depersonalised way the poet's obsession with holes and abysses outside the self, so that such phenomena appear to proliferate in the world immediately around him, other poems make it clear that such a state of affairs is, if not a deliberate exteriorisation of an inner problematic, then at least a perfect figure of it. For gulfs and chasms may be entirely inner, the accidental stumbling and falling quite visceral:

Dans l'abîme doré, rouge, glacé, doré, l'abîme où  
gîte la douleur, les tourbillons roulants entraînent  
les bouillons de mon sang dans les vases, dans les  
retours de flammes de mon tronc. La tristesse  
moirée s'engloutit dans les crevasses tendres du  
coeur. Il y a des accidents obscurs et compliqués,  
impossibles à dire.<sup>221</sup>

It is in this interior and infernal abyss, in what Reverdy calls a few years later "mon gouffre infini que personne ne voit",<sup>222</sup> that the 'obscure and complicated accidents' arising from the self's abrasive contact with

world and others are now pictured as occurring. If the self's inner space continues to constitute a zone of latent possibility,<sup>223</sup> it is also, then, the screen upon which is now more clearly projected what was before more commonly externalised -- a shift in manner of projection and focussing which reflects a generally more pronounced personalisation of Reverdy's poetry, particularly from Ferraille on, although the prose poems of Flaques de verre reflect this shift which the short stories of La Peau de l'homme and Risques et périls had in fact anticipated much earlier. Of course in the final analysis both the inner gulf that stretches 'infinitely' within the poet and the countless holes and squares that lurk to inveigle and swallow up in the space around the poet, figure the same scene of self-world misadventure, the same deteriorated relationships that make Reverdy proclaim in an early poem and with a splash of bitter irony: "Le désespoir est singulièrement tenace/Avec lui on va au fond de tout/Quel fond/Le trou sondé n'en vaut pas la peine/On le voit/Je suis remonté les bras raidis/La bouche amère tordue".<sup>224</sup>

We should be careful in all this not to lose sight of the earlier examined and crucially important Reverdyan notion of the self as a locus of primary experience that is, aesthetically and even ontologically, set at naught for the poet. The latter is a store wherein primary reality and experience are burnt and reduced to the precious ash of art. He is a curious assemblage of motley 'nothingnesses' that wait to be transformed into the something of poetry, a void ever-pending a magical filling that can only manifest itself outside of him, in his poetry. In consequence he constantly experiences the sensation of void in the form of need and desire, as well as in terms of the anguish of his primary experience and the frustrations of his creative endeavours.<sup>225</sup> The images of hole, chasm and void thus constitute a constant figurative reminder of the problem

of emptiness and nothingness, that only (self-)creation can solve <sup>226</sup> -- though, even then, only briefly, only momentarily. <sup>227</sup> In addition, such images continually jog the memory into a veritable obsession not just with that nothingness and void that the poet may still hope to magically, though briefly neutralise and actually profit from, but with that other form of nothingness, that particular and most horrible form of void remaining quite beyond neutralisation, quite beyond any poetic remedy. Such a void is, like the hole, <sup>228</sup> a space that leads nowhere, a space of utter futility. But, unlike the hole, the true void can offer no opportunity of return, of scrambling up the slopes of its empty impasse. It is in this way the image of a bottomless space in which the experience of falling is felt most acutely and in which the sensation of inescapable, definitive nothingness achieves perhaps its most sobering expression. If despair takes the poet to the 'bottom of everything', <sup>229</sup> then to experience the void is to pass beyond despair itself, into a realm where nothing is felt to remain, where there is "rien derrière moi et rien devant/Dans le vide où je descends" <sup>230</sup> or, alternatively, where everything is felt to be in that state of permanent colloidal suspension envisaged by Reverdy in his poem in memory of Sylvia Beach: "Dans le vide où fondent les mots/La neige ne peut plus ni monter ni descendre/Parce qu'il n'y a plus ni de bas ni de haut". <sup>231</sup> In this realm all elasticity, all resilience, is gone and is replaced by a deathly stillness, a mummified lifelessness. Instead of freedom and at least the virtuality of an upswing towards something, the poet confronts finally an inverted, hellish freedom, "la liberté du vide/Au miroir infernal", <sup>232</sup> the freedom of an emptiness repeatedly experienced earlier, <sup>233</sup> but now faced as a phenomenon of a definitive nature in which the full "sens du vide" is made horribly clear to him: its affinity to (not to say its homologous relationship with)

death, its cold finality, its conclusive untying of the poet's "noeuds de l'espoir".<sup>234</sup>

Before proceeding to an examination of the final question of Reverdy's preoccupation with nothingness, it is appropriate to explore somewhat more specifically his obsession with the sensation of falling, for, as we have already partly shown, it is one that relates closely to the images of the hole, the void and so on, and its better understanding will thus strengthen our appreciation of them. We should stress immediately that falling for Reverdy is a decidedly involuntary movement, a descent that, unlike the poet's calculated gestures of fathoming and subterranean exploration, works against his desire and need, plunging him into misfortune and the ultimate experience of deprivation.<sup>235</sup> Falling and the initial slippage that precedes it derive, in fact, from the instability, the viscosity, the cavity-ridden nature of the world, as also from the internalised sense of abysmal hollowness that invades the self upon contact with such a world.<sup>236</sup> As such, slipping and falling are not wanted, not 'reasoned'. On a number of occasions, in effect, Reverdy stresses the idea that falling is a "chute au fond de la raison",<sup>237</sup> an occasion of at least temporary, at worst permanent slippage into imbalance. "La main qui guide les saisons se trompe", Reverdy confides in 'Bascule', "et moi je tombe/Ma raison/glisse".<sup>238</sup> And once the slippage or fall has come about, the poet may find the task of recovering his sanity and restoring a 'balance' so precious to him, distressingly difficult, perhaps even beyond the power of his particular magic: "S'il n'y avait qu'un mot à dire dans ce gouffre/Qu'un seul geste à gravir pour remplir la raison".<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, important to underline in this respect, is the fact that falling is in Reverdy's eyes not only a falling into, but very much a falling from. There is, as it were, a nostalgia for an originally

conceived or experienced condition still implicitly held in 'impossible' reverence. This becomes particularly evident upon reading Reverdy's notebooks. It is via such readings that we discover, for example, Reverdy's concern with the notion of relapse or falling from grace. Certainly, for Reverdy, religion was never "un niveau étale, médiocre ou normal", rather did it constitute "une ascension" and finally "une chute".<sup>240</sup> We observe, too, that Reverdy appreciates well the kind of crushing disillusionment that may hurl man down in an accelerated loss of altitude and which may occur when his own incapacity to play the role of God is suddenly understood.<sup>241</sup> This is a disillusionment awaiting any man; but perhaps particularly the poet used to the heady atmosphere of his 'other world'. Certainly Reverdy traverses such bitter moments: "La poésie", he says in an ironic and typically perfunctory note in Le Livre de mon bord after a period of relatively barren poetic production,<sup>242</sup> -- "il me semble qu'elle s'élabore dans une autre planète d'où je suis aujourd'hui descendu -- ou tombé".<sup>243</sup> Undoubtedly the worst feature of falling, however, no matter from where it has occurred, is the fact that it may prove to be cataclysmically final, a "chute définitive dans les abîmes sans fissure du malheur", as Reverdy expresses it in the closing line of the poem 'A pic' from Le Chant des morts.<sup>244</sup> From such a definitive fall there can be no surfacing: the poet is haunted by the fact of a terminal burial, a decline without dawn and reducing him to an indecipherable, indistinguishable trace, that of his ultimate nothingness.

#### The Obsession of Nothingness

To examine at this point the Reverdyan obsession with nothingness is necessarily to engage in a certain overlapping of analyses which we shall attempt to minimise in an effort to bring out those features of the motif that are distinctive and as yet essentially unexplored or understressed.

The extent, chronologically and quantitatively speaking, of the preoccupation with nothingness is perhaps the initially most striking feature of the imaginative motif. Like Reverdy's consciousness of the significance of death and finality with which nothingness is intimately associated,<sup>245</sup> the poet's sensitivity to nothingness is intense from the early moments of his literary career, becoming anguishingly acute towards its close. Moreover, 'statistically', the motif of nothingness ranks extremely high, so that 'quantity' matches 'quality' quite noticeably. This is, it is arguable, quite natural and comprehensible. Nothingness is, after all, the end towards which all movements of evaporation, hostility, withdrawal, impeding, collapse, falling and so on, have tended; it is the end they all imply as the final outcome of their own terrible logic. More specifically, our present analysis will concern itself firstly with the manner of presentation of the motif of nothingness in the poetry of Reverdy; and will secondly elaborate Reverdy's conception of nothingness as revealed, beyond the confines of his poetry (where it remains implicit and 'undeveloped'), in the discursive realm of his notebooks.

Reverdy's poetry teems to an unusual degree with certain kinds of images of the poet's reduction to nothingness, those, namely, that posit an utter and complete sensory and physiological deprivation. We are not speaking here, moreover, just of the (previously examined) fact that the poet is commonly reduced to a point of being unable to see or to hear -- though such reduction is certainly related to the point at hand. No, we are less concerned with the poet's declaration of his own perhaps near-complete physical and mental ruination, the kind of disastrous asthenia announced in a 1922 poem: "Aveugle/Sourd/Et sans savoir/Les jambes plient".<sup>246</sup> The poet's deafness or blindness are crucially crippling no doubt and it is clear that such personal and in effect relative reduction

assumes a measure of absoluteness for Reverdy. If nothing is seen, he himself states, perhaps there is nothing.<sup>247</sup> Nevertheless there is an imaginative step to be taken from this point to the position that the poet finally reaches: it is not so much a question any longer of blindness -- there is, ultimately, nothing to be seen and the absoluteness of this nothingness would seem to be more objectively established (despite the continuing fact of the poet's involvement in establishing this objective fact).<sup>248</sup> "Il n'y a plus rien dans notre hémisphère", Reverdy agonisingly proclaims in 'Le poids des hommes', "rien à boire/Rien à dire/Rien à voir/Un voile plus épais sur l'esprit/Une housse sur la face".<sup>249</sup> This kind of objective nothingness is repeatedly stressed by Reverdy. "Il n'y a plus rien à dire/Tout est mort", we read; or, elsewhere, "Il n'y a plus rien à faire".<sup>250</sup> And, of course, from evidence such as this, we may readily observe the link that exists between such external nihilism and an internal tabula rasa. As Reverdy says in a later poem that links nothingness to being "dans le vide", "rien ne me donne rien".<sup>251</sup> The poet feels the pain arising from the fact that because there is nothing without, there is nothing within, nothing to be said, nothing to be done.

There are, moreover, certain important stress patterns attached to the central fact of this nothingness. Many poems interestingly underscore the present exposure to nothingness simply by implying the nostalgia for a time preceding nothingness, a time therefore, presumably, when a certain something (if not a fullness) was indeed available. Hence Reverdy's constant use of the ne plus construction. There is no longer anything to be done; "il ne reste plus rien"; "là il n'y a plus rien".<sup>252</sup> In addition, often linked to this stress pattern is another whose function it is to drive home the definitive nature of the prevailing nothingness. Thus a basic and already powerful sense of nothingness may be established,

only to be finally reinforced by the Reverdyan pas même. We can see this in Reverdy's necrological poem for Sylvia Beach:

Et dans cet avenir  
 Lourd comme un soir sans lampes  
 Aucun signe de main  
 Pas un froissement d'aile  
 Rien  
 Pas même un écho 253

The future -- the future of the (dead) poet -- is really not a future at all. It is a future of unalleviated and oppressive blackness, a future without gesture, a future of nothingness, without even the barest trace of articulation. Reverdy's technique here as in other poems, <sup>254</sup> is one of negative accumulation and intensification, resembling somewhat Mallarmé's technique in 'Brise marine'. <sup>255</sup> It is, moreover, as already intimated, a technique of whose potential effect Reverdy is fully apprised. <sup>256</sup> In the poem 'Repos' from La Liberté des mers, Reverdy again climaxes his poem by means of a negative crescendo: "Aucun secours ne vient, tout le sang retenu s'étend, se noie dans la campagne vide où les gouttes de la rosée sanglante s'évaporent. Attaché au chevet de la mort, le temps retient son souffle sans rien dire. Plus un pas, plus un battement de coeur vers la lumière. Pas même, dans le creux de la tête assourdie le moindre souvenir de l'éternel retour de flammes de l'aurore". <sup>257</sup> Such an accumulation of negatives, boosted as it is with repeated allusions to emptiness, blood, death and oblivion, can leave no doubt as to the central fact of the poet's very profound experience of nothingness. Both the above poems, in fact, offer fairly overpowering evidence of Reverdy's sensitivity to what remains essentially a simple, monolithic fact, that of sheer nothingness, of being brought face to face with "rien, rien et rien", as a note in En Vrac emphatically puts it. <sup>258</sup> As the note also concludes, it is "ce rien", this reduction to absolute nothingness, "[qui] commence à devenir le plus pénible à supporter".

The above paragraph gives ample evidence, then, of the extent of Reverdy's fixation with regard to nothingness, a fixation which in fact seems to date most acutely from his first moments of real awareness of death which, parenthetically, appears to have been responsible for his turning toward God and religion in search of peace -- and a security of being. "J'étais excédé, obsédé par l'idée fixe, morbide du néant", Reverdy recalls in his journal. <sup>259</sup> Yet just how does Reverdy conceive of nothingness? Just what does it mean for him? Wherein, precisely, lies its terror? During the brief period in which Reverdy seems to have found the peace he was looking for, he acquires the strength to view nothingness less as the epitome of a vertiginous horror, "la plus terrible des illusions", <sup>260</sup> than as part of a natural and divinely governed process: "Le néant, c'est l'unité à quoi tend la matière, à travers les perpétuelles mutations de la forme. Dieu maintient la matière dans l'être par la forme qu'il lui prescrit. Quand la matière perd une forme, elle doit en prendre une autre pour subsister. Mais elle tend perpétuellement à son unité d'origine -- le néant, le seul néant d'où Dieu a tout tiré". <sup>261</sup> What Reverdy is seeking to convince himself of here, is the validity of the argument stating, firstly, that the nothingness of death is, rather than an 'absurd end', an integral part of a regenerative process or continuum of being; and, secondly, that original and even terminal nothingness need not be feared, because they are equally factors in a total process inspired and controlled by God. Merely because we are, as Reverdy puts it in a later Gant de crin entry, "pétris de néant", is no reason for us to believe in nothingness as if it were the more crucially determining existential factor. What is needed, Reverdy feels at the height of his faith, is an effort to appreciate the above factors in order to break loose from a purely negative orientation of being and gain access

to, be reborn to, "la vie spirituelle".<sup>262</sup>

Like Reverdy's faith and conversion, however, the ability to sustain such a divinely orientated conception of nothingness is relatively short-lived. It is the slippage of God from such a conceptual model that, of course, fundamentally transforms it, reconverting peace and reconciliation into anguish and revulsion. A note in Le Livre de mon bord marks this negative 'reconversion', when Reverdy describes man's movement from being to nothingness as "ce passage répugnant de la forme à l'informe, cet effroyable glissement de l'être physique au néant".<sup>263</sup> Such a conception would seem to have at least the merit of leaving life itself, unpleasantly sandwiched as it may be "comme un sable mouvant entre deux tranches de néant",<sup>264</sup> relatively independent of the nothingness that presses in against it. But Reverdy is finally aware that this would be a simplistic interpretation of the being/nothingness relationship. In effect, not only are we "pétris de néant", moulded out of a nothingness to which we are destined to return ultimately and completely, but, worse still, we are naturally and continually immersed in a kind of living, animated nothingness. "On redoute tant le néant", Reverdy declares, "mais nous y sommes, nous y sommes. Nous le tissons, chaque jour, patiemment".<sup>265</sup> Everywhere, at all times of our existence, "perce l'amère et sournoise racine du néant", Reverdy asserts in the concluding lines of Le Livre de mon bord.<sup>266</sup> This dreadful condition results not just from Reverdy's realisation that time itself is nothingness and that only doing nullifies nullity, only our deeds permit us to remain suspended "sur un abîme, un trou sans fond, comme l'on passe un torrent sur les pierres d'un gué".<sup>267</sup> No, what is most anguishing here and what is also the deep significance of this last realisation concerning nothingness and doing, is the fact that primary being itself is but a form of nothingness and even doing is inadequate

to solve this problem of an all-permeating nothingness -- unless it be a doing of a very special order. And here, of course, we rejoin a central motif of the Reverdyan imagination: the poet, who is fundamentally concerned with being, is surrounded by the ultimate formlessness of nothingness which is his given being, his own primary existence. What the poet aims to do is to convert this 'empty being' into a form of being that, as we have shown earlier (and will therefore not elaborate upon here), is precisely of the order of poetry or art. In his most cryptic and paradoxical pronouncements Reverdy may make even this conversion seem enigmatic: the poet is thus a "poète, accoucheur de néant".<sup>268</sup> What he produces, made as it is, like himself, from nothingness, is, in effect, again a form of nothingness. But, as he is careful to add, it is an other, special form of nothingness, "un néant doué d'un pouvoir magique que ce qui est recèle et ne délivre pas".<sup>269</sup> What Reverdy is showing us here is a teasingly inverted form of his usual aesthetic equation (nothingness of primary existence → being, fullness, the something of the (sub-)transcendent artistic existence, as accomplished via poetic transmutation). What, however, the inverted equation discreetly reminds us of, is the fact that even the poet's production is ultimately threatened by nothingness, if it lacks (or the poet deems it to lack) that critical measure of 'magical power'.

#### An Appendix: The Tensions of End and Attainment

Somewhat by way of an appendix to the analysis offered in this chapter, we should like to conclude by considering briefly a recurrent element of tension in Reverdy's imagination between, on the one hand, the movement towards nothingness, death and finality and, on the other hand, the movement towards attainment and the achievement of one's end. It is, moreover, particularly useful to conclude with this examination, as some

of the basic implications of the 'tension' observable relate to and prepare our discussion of certain crucial imaginative motifs dealt with in the following and final chapter.

Reverdy's sensitivity to the idea of coming to an end, of being plunged into some atmosphere of distressing finality, dates back to and stems perhaps most particularly from his experience of the First World War. Indeed, in a letter, he goes so far as to divide his life into three periods: his childhood, the "époque antédiluvienne" of the immediately pre-war period and the period of 1914 onwards which is darkly coloured in contrast to the relatively carefree, confident attitudes that led Reverdy, with his many artist friends, towards an unwitting confrontation with the unknown, which turned out to be the war.<sup>270</sup> However, there is little doubt that Reverdy's understanding of finality, of 'end', is not simply limited to a certain tendency to envisage the entire post-1914 period as a long slide towards finality. Reverdy's stress, even in the context of the war, is rather upon a appreciation of the fact that an age of innocence and confidence has been sharply halted (and is to be followed by a period of finality, as it were);<sup>271</sup> and, elsewhere, it is clear that other experiences such as the death of his father -- that abrupt and absurd 'end' as Reverdy considered it -- have contributed significantly to the development of his sense of a more definitive finality which is related to his conception of death and reduction to nothingness on both a personal and a cosmic scale. In the poetry proper, Reverdy frequently evokes in an often ambiguous and polyvalent manner the notion of finality and the personal and cosmic are commonly fused either overtly or implicitly.<sup>272</sup> It is not our intention to demonstrate at length the poetic presence of such motifs, moreover. Our intention points elsewhere. Let it suffice to say that motifs of end and finality do indeed abound in the poems of

Reverdy: he may thus commonly speak of his experience of "la fin du monde", of some "dernière heure", exclaim "Ah tout va finir" or declare a final cosmic and poetic bankruptcy ("Rien de neuf sous le soleil jaune/ Le der des der des louis d'or").<sup>273</sup> What we are primarily concerned with here, is the tensely articulated and paradoxical relationship that may often exist implicitly between this kind of terminal consciousness and another which posits end not as death and nothingness, but as accomplishment, realisation of desire and aim.

Some of this tension derives no doubt from Reverdy's half-ironic and certainly self-conscious sensitivity to the basic fact that he is engaged in an act of writing, of creation. Sometimes this sensitivity is quite clearly, though still delicately, signalled, as when the last line of a poem heralds "la fin d'un autre conte"<sup>274</sup> or when, at the end of a chapter of that especially self-reflexive poetic novella La Peau de l'homme, Reverdy declares: "enfin l'homme, le mur du temps, le visage enfantin, l'heure sont hors d'usage", thus marking in a manner frequently adopted in his short-story writing the redundancy of the characters and principal items of decor now that the tale has reached its (in this case temporary) end.<sup>275</sup> Whereas this sensation of finality may be rendered in somewhat cavalier fashion in certain of Reverdy's short stories -- 'Ma pièce' springs to mind as a good example: all items of decor are finally swept away and disappear at the end of this carefully assembled and dismantled story<sup>276</sup> -- , it is evident that there is a certain deliberately provoked tension between that fact that the poem or conte is creation, realisation and attainment of the poet's creative goal (and a consequent sealing off of the finished creative product whose self-containedness within the terms of its articulation is thus proclaimed) and the announcement of the termination of such creative achievement (and a consequent return to a nothingness outside the

confines of the work's createdness).

There are two further points essential to the question of Reverdy's articulation of this special kind of tension. Firstly, Reverdy may care to evoke, more or less simultaneously, both notions of end: attainment as final poetic closure and finality preceding a return to nothingness. This may be done at times with a somewhat loosely organised explicitness, as in the poem 'Dernière heure' which concludes: "Il faut compter tout ce qui sort/Et le dernier rayon qui passe/ferme la nuit/La porte/Le livre/Minuit".<sup>277</sup> Here the poet demonstrates his sensitivity to the complex implications of finality and closure by evoking firstly the close of the day (which, for Reverdy, often assumes in itself a cosmic eschatological significance); and, secondly, either the shutting of a book before retiring or the closing off of the poem (these lines terminate the poem) as the poet ceases and completes his creative activity for the night. It should be noted too that, because the imaginative evocation of closure is indeed loosely, polyvalently structured, all imaginative motifs may coexist and the poem thus reserves for the reader a purer aesthetic emotivity emanating from the structuring proper rather than just from what is structured. On the other hand, instead of showing this tendency to evoke with a fair degree of specificity the at least dual implication of end, the poem may achieve this by less direct, less overt means. This is the case, for example, in the closing lines of the poem 'Pente douce' which tell of "la fin du monde/Dans une cicatrice rose au fond du verre" and seem to evoke, via the image of the pink-tissued scar in the glass, the setting of the sun in a pale, translucent sky (mentioned earlier specifically) and, in turn, the ultimate extinction of the world via this setting. Undoubtedly this is the principal imaginative factor at work here, but it is not the sole one: what is implicitly rendered, too, and precisely in accordance

with Reverdy's aesthetics, is the idea that the given world is coming to an end in a dense flurry of poetic imaginativeness and that via this terminal gesture poeticity comes about and is sealed in.

Even though it could by no means be said to be, quantitatively, a major poetic concern of Reverdy, this kind of muted implication is not unusual in Reverdy's work and is, it must be repeated, imaginatively 'supported' by the main argumentative thrust of his poetics. The poem 'Verso' which in finely allusive style depicts someone leaning out of a window gazing upon a flaming, dusk-laden world with which he is in a barely stated communion whilst plunged into grief, concludes with these lines:

Toutes les raisons de ne plus croire à rien  
Les mots se sont perdus tout le long du chemin  
Il n'y a plus rien à dire  
Le vent est arrivé  
Le monde se retire  
L'autre côté <sup>278</sup>

Coming after the image of a face drowning in tears, these lines undoubtedly have the effect of explaining such grief. Nothingness is the only and completely logical object of future faith. A total loss of words has occurred and nothing remains susceptible to utterance. The wind has got up and its dispersal is matched by a final image of withdrawal that recalls in more dramatic and cosmic terms the earlier suggestions of dusk and day's end. But, whilst this interpretation is understandable and in appreciable conformity with so many important imaginative patterns of Reverdy's work, it cannot be denied that, paradoxically, concomitantly, ever so delicately, the final lines also succeed in articulating a statement of creative accomplishment and transformation. Thus there is nothing to say any more because the poem has drawn to its end, leaving scattered along its trajectory the words that construct it. At this point, which

is the point at which the poet brings forth into a strange form of being that 'magical nothingness' spoken of, the world that is recedes, comes to an end and gives way to attainment of that earlier discussed poetic otherness situated on the other side.

In all of the above examples there is, as we have seen, a greater or lesser degree of specific and deliberate signalling of the kind of tension and paradox of which we have spoken. What we must also take into account in this regard, however, is that the tension and paradox, even if not palpably implicit, may be said to always remain, as it were, purely implicit. That is to say that, even if the notion or sensation of end, finality, closure, is not evoked in any way, the dual fact remains that Reverdy's poetry and poetics depend crucially upon both an appreciation of poetic completion and heterocosmic sealing off and a lucid sensitivity to the fact that in this very act of completion there is a return to a once more anguishing nothingness, to a silence that always threatens to be an ultimate, irreparable silence -- a kind of vertiginous slippage from the pinnacle of victory into the chasm of defeat. Here we are once more faced with the kind of paradox that is at the heart of Reverdy's poetic imagination and to which we have given occasional fleeting attention in commenting on the ironic tension to be sensed everywhere in Reverdy's work between, on the one hand, an often negatively orientated thematics whose fully matured force we have observed in this chapter and, on the other, a transcendent imaginativeness or 'createdness' that neutralises and poetically transmutes such negativity. In our final chapter we shall seek, amongst other things, to fully elaborate the basic features of this and other tensions. Of particular interest and relevance to this present chapter will be the ubiquitous and multi-faceted Reverdyan dialectic between negative and positive movements, the thematic and emotional vacillation

that informs his work and that is crucially dependent upon those sure but often fragile indicators of attainment we have examined in the earlier part of this chapter, and, above all, the analysis of the most characteristic aesthetic or purely poetic means of equilibration of the dark obsessions that have been seen to preoccupy Reverdy in the major portion of this chapter.

Notes to Chapter V

1 A nothingness to which the poet may move according to either a linear (experiential) or a circular (poetic) concept of time.

2 Main d'oeuvre, 352-3.

3 'Porte entr'ouverte' (ibid., 289) and 'Haut terrain vague' (Plupart du temps, 281).

4 See, for example, 'Honteux à voir' (ibid., 58). Cf. also a number of poems from Poèmes en prose: 'Incognito', 'Le patineur céleste', 'Le voyageur et son ombre', 'Belle étoile' (ibid., 24, 26, 27, 33).

5 Ibid., 36.

6 Main d'oeuvre, 500.

7 Ibid., 494-5.

8 Plupart du temps, 16.

9 Ibid., 33.

10 Ibid., 211.

11 La Peau de l'homme, 125. Jean-Pierre Richard argues that Reverdy dislikes "toutes les formes immédiates du contact" (op. cit., 22), a declaration for which we find little real justification. 'Immediate' contact may be exhilarating, though it is clearly fleeting and often distressing, hence, certainly, his desire for 'indirect' poetic contact.

12 'Plus loin que là', Plupart du temps, 12.

13 'Piéton', ibid., 267. Reverdy's emphasis.

14 Cf. ibid., 12, again.

15 Main d'oeuvre, 69.

16 Ibid., 255.

17 Plupart du temps, 84.

18 Cf. 'Note' (Main d'oeuvre, 246), where the notion of transferred intimacy and emotion, promoted by the poet, this time among others, is evoked in fairly direct terms.

19 Plupart du temps, 78.

20 See Chroniques du Bel Canto, Geneva: Skira, 1947, pp. 15-26. Bachelard (La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p. 109) also selects this

point for comment, but is drawn rather to the notion of the attic as a specially privileged locus of rêverie -- the idea, only implicit in Bachelard, that this is the occasion of an equally privileged attainment, is nevertheless essential.

21 'La garde monte', Plupart du temps, 276.

22 'Près de la route et du petit pont', ibid., 279.

23 An immobility that should be understood to imply the 'death' of things only in the sense of their attainment of an interlocking relational stability, the overall poetic equilibrium they create amongst themselves in their new 'static' context. Cf. Le Gant de crin, 46-7, En Vrac, 45-6 and infra, Chapter VI, n. 132.

24 Flaques de verre, 22.

25 'Il devait en effet faire bien froid', Main d'oeuvre, 285.

26 In effect, memory can play a significant role in Reverdy's poetry, for it offers a chance to re-have, to operate a continued having, a retrieval that parallels the creative act itself (and whose importance is echoed by creative writers as diverse as Lamartine, Proust and Bernard Noël). For typical examples of memory's positive functioning within Reverdy's poetry see 'Tournant du val' (ibid., 36): "Tous les noms retrouvés qui brillent les étoiles comptées"; 'Dans le monde étranger' (Plupart du temps, 161): "Rappelle-toi le temps où nous allions ensemble/Nous marchions dans les rues entre les maisons/ ... / Tu chantaïs au soleil/Et la neige me rendait gai".

27 'Couleur des fenêtres', Main d'oeuvre, 14.

28 Ibid., 511.

29 Le Voleur de Talan, 95 and 99.

30 'Vivre tard', Main d'oeuvre, 425.

31 Ibid., 491.

32 'Pour le moment', Plupart du temps, 112.

33 Cf. ibid.

34 Cf. ibid and, for example, 'Sujets' (Main d'oeuvre, 500): "On pourrait devenir fou de joie/Le coeur illuminé/Et les remords fondus dans la naïveté".

35 Flaques de verre, 134.

36 'Le monde devant moi', Main d'oeuvre, 218. Clearly the 'against' does not point to confrontation, but rather to a deeper, fuller contact.

37 Cf. 'Pour le moment', Plupart du temps, 112-13 or 'Sujets', Main d'oeuvre, 500.

38 'Le bonheur des mots' is the title of a poem from La Liberté des mers (p. 79).

39 Le Voleur de Talan, 63.

40 'Comme chaque soir', Main d'oeuvre, 481.

41 Cf. the last two sections of Chapter VI.

42 La Peau de l'homme, 194.

43 Flaques de verre, 122.

44 Ibid., 130.

45 Again Barbara Smith's comments on poetic closure (op. cit.) confirm that Reverdy's technique (conscious or unconscious) here is widely adopted. However, Reverdy's discontinuous syntax and, often, his typographical arrangements give him also the opportunity to create the equivalent of a terminal impact in the actual body of the poem.

46 In this way the more explicit signification of attainment tends to 'rub off' on the less explicit and rather more 'minimal' expressions of attainment mentioned above.

47 I use the expression 'peripheral theory' to distinguish between attainment in the 'central' locus of the poetry and the aesthetic notions pertaining to attainment elaborated in Reverdy's notebooks and essays. Reverdy himself, however, once distinguished radically between pure theory of art and the particular aesthetic of a poet determining his work (cf. 'L'Esthétique et l'esprit', Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 174).

48 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 47.

49 Le Livre de mon bord, 208. Attainment here seems safe, guaranteed, but, despite Reverdy's continuing, undying claim that poetry does attain, there are moments of doubt, expressed, for example, in this note in En Vrac: "Ah! quel plaisir j'aurais pris à écrire si ce que j'ai écrit avait pu ressembler un peu à ce que je rêvais d'écrire" (p. 231).

50 Ibid., 47.

51 Le Gant de crin, 18.

52 Ibid., 18-19 and, 28, respectively.

53 En Vrac, 134.

54 Le Livre de mon bord, 256. My emphasis.

55 Cf. En Vrac, 114: "C'est moi, seul homme à mon bord, n'ayant personne avec qui parler et qui parle à tout le monde -- en écrivant". Brunner points out that writing is for Reverdy an opportunity to reduce his feeling of solitude, which is clearly so (as we show), but it is not appropriate to argue that the poet writes 'thinking about the other' (op. cit., 53): cf. infra, especially n. 56.

56 En Vrac, 1. We should not overlook, however, the essential argument of Reverdy's 1935 essay 'Mépris de la postérité', which may be roughly resumed as follows: "L'auteur à la recherche effrénée du lecteur est profondément méprisable. Si la rencontre doit se produire un jour, que ce soit parce que le lecteur aura fait tous les pas" (Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 84). Jean Bařaine's argument, moreover, that the artist can in no way afford to engage himself in any other commitment than his own, is equally espoused by Reverdy. "La réalité d'un tableau", Bařaine states, n'est pas au service d'une cause, si exaltante soit-elle. Elle vit pour soi. Elle porte témoignage, mais c'est pour le peintre qui l'a animée, et, à travers ce dernier, pour l'homme. C'est en cela et en cela seulement qu'elle est efficace et fraternelle. A vouloir prouver autre chose qu'elle-même, elle disparaît" (Notes sur la peinture, Paris: Seuil, 1953, p. 97).

57 En Vrac, 1.

58 'Cette émotion appelée poésie', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 23.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 24.

61 Le Livre de mon bord, 172.

62 Ibid., 172-3.

63 En Vrac, 21.

64 In this regard Reverdy may be compared to a number of contemporary poets and critics, of whom Denis Roche is a particularly striking example. (For him the text must refuse all sense, all 'consumable' matter, its discourse must be reduced to the utterly non-figurative, whilst at the same time remaining in accordance with the pre-semantic forces of that screaming, pulsing, vomiting, phantasmal energy residing within him.) Whilst Reverdy does not, of course, wish to deny and suppress the figurative, subliminal sense of his poems, he does wish to eliminate the discursive, anecdotal logic of poetry, thus demanding of the reader that he commit himself every bit as much as the poet to an attainment of that emotion which alone can fully activate the poem and force it to yield up its otherwise half-dormant potential.

65 Ibid., 224.

66 In this Reverdy might be compared to Mallarmé, although the latter pursued this logic of margin to the point of an esoteric hermeticism unacceptable to Reverdy. Anne-Marie Supervielle (in Fumet, Etudes, 1968) argues that it is precisely "la rigueur de son écriture" that limits Reverdy's audience: "il faut aller à lui; lui-même ne fait aucune concession" (p. 376). His only concession, though self-centred, is to write at all; any other tends to prove self-ruinous.

67 En Vrac, 224. Heidegger suggests that this essential effort of 'preservation' of the artistic Gestalt is a historic responsibility (cf. Lee and Mandelbaum, Phenomenology and Existentialism, Baltimore:

John Hopkins, 1967, p. 87). Unfortunately it is equally true that 'preservation' can involve the establishment of a surrogate myth. It seems clear, therefore, that the reader must be careful to preserve not the myth but the reality, to start afresh with any piece of art, to really give himself over to it authentically.

68 In Reverdy, this idea of ex-pressing oneself, the 'other' of one's self, is related to his aesthetic theory which decrees that it is only via otherness, the constitution of the artistic heterocosm, that the self's being may be truly attained.

69 See supra and almost any of the essays of Note éternelle du présent and Cette émotion appelée poésie.

70 See Le Gant de crin, 18 for these quotations.

71 Cf. En Vrac, 181 and supra, Chapter I.

72 En Vrac, 47.

73 That is to say, the splitting of his self into two, three or multiple fragments, of which we have spoken in Chapter I.

74 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 170 and supra, Chapter I.

75 'Dans l'obscur mêlée', Note éternelle du présent, 128. It is interesting to note the parallel existing here between Reverdy and Tzara who proclaims in Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre (Paris: Nagel, 1966, p. 75): "[Le poète] est essentiellement révolutionnaire. Son sentiment profond tend à la transformation du monde actuel en un monde où l'homme puisse à nouveau être entièrement d'accord avec lui-même" (my emphasis). The remainder of the paragraph suggests just how difficult this is, the extent to which his thought is 'sociologically' orientated at this time, and evokes the dangers known to Reverdy also in this effort of self-coincidence: "Mais le monde présent est tel, que toute révolte individuelle est non seulement inefficace, mais nuisible, car, vouée à un échec consubstantiel certain, elle mène à l'évasion ou se réfugie dans une attitude pessimiste".

76 Le Livre de mon bord, 152.

77 'Réponse à une enquête' Quelle a été la rencontre capitale de votre vie', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 175.

78. Main d'oeuvre, 533.

79 Plupart du temps, 281.

80 'Visage', ibid., 236.

81 The notion of things being scarcely, barely, à peine possible or available, is quite commonly expressed in Reverdy's poetry. Cf. ibid.

82 Main d'oeuvre, 420.

- 83 Exposure to this threat of definitive loss and nothingness is experienced no doubt constantly by Reverdy, but with particular acuteness on three separate occasions: 1930-37 and 1940-44 (as previously mentioned), but also 1950-60, during which period he wrote, certainly, a number of very important essays, published En Vrac, completed earlier projected joint creative enterprises with Juan Gris and Georges Braque (Au Soleil du plafond and La Liberté des mers), but wrote hardly any poetry.
- 84 Main d'oeuvre, 371.
- 85 'Ruine achevée', Plupart du temps, 110.
- 86 'Départ', Main d'oeuvre, 505.
- 87 'Chemin tournant', ibid., 81.
- 88 'Maison hantée', Risques et périls, 133.
- 89 'Terre', Main d'oeuvre, 306.
- 90 Cf. 'Etranger à tous' (Flaques de verre, 39), for example.
- 91 See the title of the poem 'Marche sans direction' (Main d'oeuvre, 92). This is not to forget that the poet does not know precisely where he is going, what he is aiming at (cf. Chapter III, 'Intentionality and Nomadism') -- the what he wishes to attain is other and the poet can only intuit it before actually, miraculously, creating and finding it. In the context of our present discussion, however, the stress is upon a quietly despairing loss of orientation, a feeling of being lost that tends to drown out intuition and effort to attain.
- 92 'Vitesse des mots', Flaques de verre, 120.
- 93 'Rase campagne', Plupart du temps, 363.
- 94 'Courte vie' is the title of the liminal poem from La Balle au bond (Main d'oeuvre, 41) and the opening line of 'Rives' (Plupart du temps, 200) reads: "La pièce est courte et l'acte est long". With respect to Baudelaire, I am thinking of a poem such as 'Spleen' ("Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux"), but not just for its thematic elements -- its rhythm is mimetic of the prevailing sluggishness.
- 95 Main d'oeuvre, 396.
- 96 En Vrac, 135.
- 97 'A l'aube le veilleur', Main d'oeuvre, 345.
- 98 For a fuller appreciation of such movement, see poems such as the following: 'En avant' (ibid., 63), 'Le temps et moi' (ibid., 376-7).
- 99 'Dans le monde étranger', Plupart du temps, 162. (ibid., 255)
- 100 See 'Piéton' (ibid., 269), 'Les jockeys mécaniques' and En Vrac, 221 respectively.

101 Main d'oeuvre, 482.

102 It is interesting to observe that Reverdy loved to evoke the idea of pinpointing or fixing time in his very earliest works. In his middle and later poetry his imagination is drawn more to a consciousness of the negative effects of time, although the same logic of arresting time in order to situate oneself in it in a more permanent and renewable (poetic) manner, still obtains.

103 Ibid., 385.

104 The notion of being without is very common in Reverdy's work, particularly from Ferraille on. However, even in Flaques de verre (and other volumes) whose texts date back to the earliest days of his writing, such motifs are often powerfully voiced, though without the later overtones of death and absolute finality. See, for example, this opening passage from 'Etoile filante' (Flaques de verre, 127): "Il y a des éclairs sans cigales à l'horizon, il y a des déchirures sans une goutte de sang à la tempête, mais il y a surtout, dans le désert et la raison sans oasis, les fenêtres sans abri, les lumières sans écran, les abat-jour sans rayons obliques de la guillotine qui exécute les plus criminels souvenirs de mon temps de forçat".

105 See En Vrac, 48; and cf. ibid., 224 and Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 50: such an attitude seems oddly to manifest itself on occasion towards the end of his life.

106 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 78.

107 See En Vrac, 11-12: here we can appreciate the dry irony of Reverdy's writing, the obvious paradox that would seek to draw attention away from the fact that death, for Reverdy perhaps above all, casts an immense shadow across life, affecting its very structure by virtue of its certainty and its naturally increasing imminence.

108 Le Gant de crin, 63.

109 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 50. Aragon, in his moving necrological article 'Le soleil noir de Solesmes' (Les Lettres françaises, 830 (1960)), stresses, thinking particularly of Le Chant des morts, Reverdy's lucid obsession with death and asks "qui jamais a parlé ainsi de la mort?".

110 cf. ibid and our n. 105. Reverdy does acclimatise himself at times to the idea of death, but generally only in his 'catharist' moments of extreme disgust with life.

111 En Vrac, 56.

112 Ibid., 46.

113 Cf. the closing passage of 'Un homme fini', Main d'oeuvre, 50.

114 Cf. 'N'essayez pas' (Main d'oeuvre, 25), for example.

115 La Liberté des mers, 23-4.

- 116 Le Gant de crin, 118.
- 117 Ibid., 109
- 118 Cf. 'Le sens du vide' (Main d'oeuvre, 419): "La mort étant le plus juste prix".
- 119 'Chair vive', ibid., 523.
- 120 'Tête à tenir', ibid., 412.
- 121 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 50.
- 122 '4 et 9', Plupart du temps, 65. Cf. Main d'oeuvre, 74, where the title, 'Pour mourir' suggests almost the prescriptive nature of Reverdy's relationship with death. The final line, it is true, somewhat modifies this interpretation (in this poem), but cannot erase the strange impact of the title.
- 123 'Droit vers la mort' is the title of a poem from La Lucarne ovale (Plupart du temps, 79). Cf. the conclusion to 'Horizon' (ibid., 72) for a more extensive expression of this idea.
- 124 Cf. 'Reflux' (Main d'oeuvre, 343) where Reverdy tells us of "le voyageur exténué [qui] ne résiste plus aux passes magnétiques de la mort".
- 125 See 'Ruine de la chair' (ibid., 489: another early text, this time from Cale sèche):
- Ton coeur recule  
Mais bien plus fort  
et minuscule  
La vie te pousse vers la mort
- 126 Cf. 'Mais pourquoi' (ibid., 513): "Je ne saurai jamais quand m'aura pris la mort".
- 126 Cf. 'Arêtes du péril' (ibid., 497), where the notion of the physiological effect is voiced: "ta face est teinte du futur trépas". Once more, the poem is from Reverdy's early period: Cale sèche.
- 128 'Paysage noir', ibid., 444.
- 129 See, for example, the following poems: 'Auberge' (Plupart du temps, 176): "On pourrait mourir/Ce que je tiens entre mes bras pourrait partir"; 'Charge de plomb' (Main d'oeuvre, 448): "On peut mourir de soif ou d'ambition/On peut mourir de rester trop longtemps dans la même attitude"; 'Sentinelle' (Plupart du temps, 208): "Les yeux se ferment/ On pourrait mourir".
- 130 See 'Aile' (ibid., 212) and 'Calme intérieur' (ibid., 224) for the tree and let us not forget that M. Guiney has rightly suggested that the tree often constitutes a 'symbol' of the poet himself. See, in the case of animals and birds, 'Son de cloche', 'Secret' and 'Départ' (ibid.,

190, 197, 185, respectively), just to select from one collection and let us again recall Guiney's just observation of the at times intimate association set up in Reverdy's imagination between bird and word. The death of the bird thus implies a poetic, creative withering. The quotation in the text is from 'Le sens du vide', Main d'oeuvre, 419.

131 'D'un autre ciel', Plupart du temps, 114.

132 Sable mouvant, 25.

133 'Chair vive', Main d'oeuvre, 522.

134 'Enfin', ibid., 395.

135 'En marchant à côté de la mort', Flaques de verre, 106.

136 Plupart du temps, 243.

137 See, for example, the poems 'Au bout de la rue des astres', 'Lumière', 'Et maintenant' (Main d'oeuvre, 52, 225 and 532, respectively). It is also very interesting to read, in two separate letters to Emma Stojkovic (PR:MF), of Reverdy's linking of loss of faith and the phenomenon of cloud ("Un homme parfait sur la terre, il n'y en eut qu'un. C'était un Dieu. Il ne reviendra pas. Ce serait parfaitement inutile. Mais je n'ai plus la foi. Là encore, une fois de plus, le nuage", p. 87); and of his confession of the constant and fatal presence of the cloud ("Le malentendu, c'est dans la ligne de mon destin -- toujours l'ombre d'un nuage dans le ciel de la plus radieuse journée", p. 95).

138 See, for example, 'Astres nouveaux' (ibid., 227), where Reverdy declares that "entre nous deux se dresse un voile" or 'Le poids des hommes' (ibid., 417), where there is "rien à voir/Un voile plus épais sur l'esprit".

139 Cf. 'Période hors-texte', La Peau de l'homme, 157-8.

140 'Les graines de la liberté', Flaques de verre, 121.

141 Le Livre de mon bord, 218.

142 Cf. 'Le dialogue secret' (La Peau de l'homme, 193), where Reverdy tells us "dehors les yeux sont en éveil, pour déséquilibrer les attaques nocturnes. Puis il faut repousser la croûte épaisse du brouillard".

143 See the following, for example, to appreciate this characterisation: 'Maison hantée' (Risques et périls, 140): "le cloître oppressant du brouillard"; La Peau de l'homme, 73 (viscosity); 'La vie m'entraîne' (Main d'oeuvre, 451): "un lent brouillard perfide/Piège tendu entre les arbres". Jean-Pierre Richard claims that greyness and fog are related to Reverdy's dislike of firm linearity and preference for "le fantomatique [qui] représente chez lui un mode favori d'apparition" (op. cit., 26). Although Reverdy once speaks of his ultimate adaptation to la brume légère (Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 42), Reverdy's 'preference' is,

in our view, manifestly involuntary, indicative of the anguish they represent. Cf. Roger Cardinal, 'Pierre Reverdy and the Reality of Signs', in Order and Adventure in Post-Romantic French Poetry, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, pp. 213 and 216, n. 26.

144 One only has to think of the positive revaluation of the conception of the colour black embodied in the contemporary negro slogan 'Black is beautiful' to realise just how contrastively 'negative' is Reverdy's connotation of the colour.

145 Cf. Note éternelle du présent, 122: "Il revient peut-être aux peintres qui marqueront certainement notre époque d'avoir les premiers utilisé le noir pur sur la toile [...] Ils ont vu là, je suppose, l'équivalent de la phrase négative en poésie [...] On sait bien que cette phrase négative et ce noir ont une puissance d'expression sourde dont personne aujourd'hui ne se passe sans se priver".

146 Grey is often associated, in fact, with dust, collapse and ruin. See, for example, 'Les graines de la liberté' (Flaques de verre, 121): "les feuilles grises des projets".

147 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 42.

148 'Bande de souvenirs', Main d'oeuvre, 471.

149 Ibid., 449.

150 Plupart du temps, 13.

151 See 'Dans le vent' and 'Les battements du coeur' (Main d'oeuvre, 307 and 369, respectively).

152 Note éternelle du présent, 122.

153 Title of poem, Main d'oeuvre, 444. Cf. ibid., 533 ("L'espace devient noir ...").

154 Title of poem, ibid., 427. Cf. 'Main-morte' and 'Ni feu ni flamme' (ibid., 392 and 421, respectively).

155 'Sujets', ibid., 501. Cf. Guiney's analysis of this poem and this, its closing line (La Poésie de Pierre Reverdy, pp. 105-9).

156 See 'Vivre tard' (Main d'oeuvre, 425): night is the time for work, creation being a "travail de nuit". Other notions implied here are explored in the text of the present paragraph.

157 Cf. ibid.

158 The poem 'Vivre tard' is from Cale sèche, a collection of his earliest poems (1913-1915). Aragon, in his 1918 'Notes sur Les Ardoises du toit' described Reverdy as a "poète de la crainte, du silence, de la nuit", perhaps the first true poet of night's signs (PR:MF, 24). The poet Jacques Dupin is also a powerful poet of the night, but a poet who is capable of positively metaphorising night, darkness and blindness in

a systematic, quasi-symbolic manner. Jaccottet, too, is capable of proclaiming what Reverdy cannot utter (except in different metaphorical terms): "c'est le plus sombre de la nuit qui est clarté", he declares in 'L'aveu dans l'obscurité' (Poésie, p. 83).

159 Main d'oeuvre, 468.

160 Cf. 'Sous l'oiseau sombre' (ibid., 51): "La nuit vient battre la vitre éteinte de ses ailes. La nuit qui en veut au calme du dormeur. La nuit qui tourbillonne à l'horizon du rêve".

161 Cf., for example, 'Gardiens' (Plupart du temps, 49), where "la nuit est pleine de dangers", and 'Le fil de feu' (Main d'oeuvre, 414) where "la nuit lourde [est] pleine de cruautés".

162 Cf. 'Tendresse' (ibid., 332) and 'Ni feu ni flamme' (ibid., 421).

163 'Voyages sans fin', ibid., 175.

164 Plupart du temps, 294.

165 'Santé de fer', Main d'oeuvre 428.

166 'De la main à la main', ibid., 432.

167 'Hommes de main Hommes de peine', ibid., 518.

168 This is not, of course, to limit the potential of the expression "vol de main" which might refer to any form of natural human contact or communion, rather than to an antinatural gesture of illumination. However, the juxtaposition of the night/ink and light/hand's flight clusters is strongly suggestive of the direst of disasters for Reverdy, namely the present incapacity of poetry to solve the overall existential problem he is experiencing.

169 Ibid., 529.

170 Morten Nøjgaard points out, moreover, in his book Elévation et expansion. Les deux dimensions de Baudelaire (Odense U.P., 1973), that in Baudelaire, too, the sky is devalued, "la force ascendante s'épuise et cède à l'attraction du gouffre (la chute)" (p.56). It is this Baudelairean slippage and falling through the increasingly negatively connoted vertical plane that, broadly, characterises Reverdy's obsessions now.

171 Though not exclusively. However, despite the fact that any such comment must remain speculative, there seems little doubt that Reverdy's Solesmes experience played a significant role in this negative devaluing of an originally powerful positive figure of all forms of hope, possibility and salvation.

172 See 'Dans les champs ou sur la colline' (Plupart du temps, 222) and 'Convoitise' (Main d'oeuvre, 340), where we read of "le ciel vert/Le ciel dur/Le ciel qui pèse ou qui fuit".

173 See 'Solitude' (ibid., 87) and 'Au bord des terres' (Flaques de verre, 73).

174 Cf. 'Projets' (Plupart du temps, 238) or 'Lumière rousse' (Main d'oeuvre, 114).

175 'Convoitise', ibid., 340.

176 'Main-morte', ibid., 391.

177 'Rive noire', La Liberté des mers, 72-3. The élan, the rising, surging movement often found in Reverdy's poetry, thus meets with blockage (cf. Main d'oeuvre, 171) or is exhausted (cf. ibid., 370) or worn away (cf. ibid., 410).

178 Ibid., 201. Renée Riese Hubert ('L'élan vers l'humain', HPR:ELA) notes that the Reverdyan sky becomes lower and heavier and argues that "[ceci] rend futile tout élan vers le haut" (p. 101). The argument, however, attaches too religious a sense to the sky (i.e. what holds Reverdy down is his 'guilt') and overlooks that fact that, if the sky is generally devalued, it always retains, as we argue, an imaginative appeal.

179 See, for example, 'Coin obscur', Plupart du temps, 348. Anna Balakian in her often perceptive book The Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York Univ. Press, 1965) justifiably selects Reverdy's poem 'Son de cloche' (Plupart du temps, 190) as a good example of his sensitivity to the phenomenon of disintegration, but is somewhat confused in her linking of this imaginative-emotional factor to what she feels is a crucial stage in the modern image formation process, namely that of 'dehumanisation' or 'primitivism' (pp. 104-9). The confusion is largely due to the inadequate delimitation of the term 'image': this again poses problems in the assessment of the (albeit important) notion of the absurd and the irrational element of the poetry (p. 117).

180 Cf. 'Je tenais à tout', Main d'oeuvre, 33.

181 See, for example, 'La ligne des noms et des figures', ibid., 238 ("Le bord de la terre qui craque/Les murs qui se défont/La poitrine qui saigne"); 'Souffle', La Liberté des mers, 59-60 ("Il neige sur mon toit et sur les arbres. Le mur et le jardin sont blancs, le sentier noir et la maison s'est écroulée sans bruit. Il neige.").

182 Sable mouvant, 18-21. Hubert Juin, in 'Le vertige du réel' (PR:MF, 279), suggests that, with Reverdy's realisation of the Nietzschean truth of the death of God, Reverdy "inscrit les litanies de l'absence essentielle, plus rien ne tient le monde ensemble". To make this close a correlation, however, is to neglect the fact that images of collapse, ruin and instability abound in Reverdy's work from the beginning (cf. Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 31).

183 Plupart du temps, 110.

184 For this particular technique of what has been termed 'contrapuntal' poetic closure, see our earlier discussion in Chapter II, especially n. 71a.

- 185 Plupart du temps, 269.
- 186 'Horizontal et tout est dit', Main d'oeuvre, 154.
- 187 See, for example, 'Le sang troublé' (Plupart du temps, 88) and 'Le coeur tournant' (Main d'oeuvre, 327).
- 188 'Passant', ibid., 455. This is the first poem of Cale sèche.
- 189 For a full discussion of equilibrium, see our final chapter.
- 190 Le Livre de mon bord, 168.
- 191 See, for example, 'Allégresse' (Plupart du temps, 134): "On ne sait où naissent les vents/Ni quelle direction ils prennent/La maison tangué comme un bateau"; 'Mouvement interne' (ibid., 328); "La chambre roule -- ce bateau dont le mât craquerait s'il faisait plus de vent".
- 192 'Au large', Main d'oeuvre, 47.
- 193 'Les bornes de l'oubli', Flaques de verre, 126. Pierre Schneider (op. cit.) relates the motif of wind to that of slippage and marine disaster: it is the mind that works against such forces.
- 194 Cf. 'Le coeur soudain' (Main d'oeuvre, 344) and 'Vers la foi' (Flaques de verre, 41), respectively.
- 195 As suggested elsewhere, the Solesmes crisis was by no means just 'religious', but was rather an all-embracing spiritual crisis bringing about a capsizing involving "tous les désastres du métier", as Reverdy puts it in the opening poem of Sources du vent, 'Chemin tournant' (Main d'oeuvre, 81).
- 196 See, respectively, 'Temps de paix' (ibid., 438), 'Naufrages sans bouées' (Flaques de verre, 15) and 'Le poids des hommes' (Main d'oeuvre, 417).
- 197 Ibid., 428.
- 198 Ibid., 529. The metaphoricity of such motifs is typically and wittily underlined by Reverdy in a poem such as 'Détresse du sort' (ibid., 17): despite the marine disasters, "nous sommes encore assez loin de la mer"! This kind of smiling, ironic poetic self-reflexiveness is particularly to be found in Reverdy's 'short stories'.
- 199 Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 31. Roger Cardinal, in 'Pierre Reverdy and the Reality of Signs' (Order and Adventure in Post-Romantic French Poetry, Oxford: Blackwell, 1973, p. 214), notes in connection with this passage that "this undertone of mute desperation, this shifting of the ground underfoot, can be felt as a distinctive pulse in his work".
- 200 For Jean-Pierre Richard, Reverdy's obsession with the viscous is the point of departure, the premier moment of his entire imaginative parcours (op. cit., p. 13).

- 201 'Les cornes du vent', Plupart du temps, 16.
- 202 Cf. 'La coupe sombre', Main d'oeuvre, 367.
- 203 'L'âme en péril', Flaques de verre, 111.
- 204 'Le dialogue secret', La Peau de l'homme, 192.
- 205 Cf. ibid., 33 ("ce grand corps ignoble et mou").
- 206 Reverdy thus speaks, for example, of the "sirop de la fatigue" (Main d'oeuvre, 389) or may declare: "Tout est plein de sirop et de quiétude molle. Et trop pur, trop lourd dans cette lumière et le revers qui brille" (Flaques de verre, 60).
- 207 "Hommes agglutinés dans la pâte difficile à décoller de la misère", we read in La Peau de l'homme (p. 192).
- 208 'La rive noire', La Liberté des mers, 77.
- 209 'Repos', ibid., 98-100.
- 210 In the poem 'De la pierre à l'eau', the sea is actually compared to quicksand (Main d'oeuvre, 142).
- 211 Ibid.
- 212 Apart from the poems referred to, attention might also be drawn to 'Le poids des hommes' and 'Aube sinistre' (ibid., 417-18 and 426, respectively).
- 213 'Piéton' and 'Course' (Plupart du temps, 268 and 239, respectively).
- 214 'O' (Plupart du temps, 70), 'Les bornes de l'oubli' (Flaques de verre, 126), 'Les jockeys mécaniques' (Plupart du temps, 255) and 'Crève-cœur' (Main d'oeuvre, 465), respectively.
- 215 Nor is Reverdy 'capable' of provoking a deliberate 'holing' of reality, of bringing about a violent, bloody déchirure in the fabric of reality, as with a poet such as Jacques Dupin. Presumably the images of hole, trap, abyss and so on induce an inhibition in the creative imagination. Reverdy's poetry of course contains images of exploitation of mines and so on, but the hole seems imaginatively linked not to the mine but to the void as a frighteningly sterile zone related to death and nothingness beyond poetic solution.
- 216 Plupart du temps, 69.
- 217 See, respectively, 'Train de vie' (Main d'oeuvre, 525): "Une fugue ondulée dans les plis du ravin/Un trou de mort caché sous les épines/Et le sort de l'amour percé de part en part"; 'Excédent de rigueur' (Plupart du temps, 139); 'De l'autre côté' (Main d'oeuvre, 177): "Les coeurs troués de larmes"; and 'Espoir de retour' (Plupart du temps, 120-1).
- 218 Au soleil du plafond, 77.

219 'Pointe', Plupart du temps, 196.

220 'L'âme et le corps superposés', Flaques de verre, 61.

221 'La tête pleine de beauté', ibid., 134.

222 'Enfin', Main d'oeuvre, 396. 'La tête pleine de beauté' was first published in 1928 in review. 'Enfin' appeared in 1940 in Plein verre.

223 See, for example, the same poem, 'La tête pleine de beauté', which, after initially articulating the dire vision of an inner abyss, proceeds to swing attention round to what remains possible ("Et il y a pourtant l'esprit de l'ordre, l'esprit régulier, l'esprit commun à tous les désespoirs qui interroge ...", Flaques de verre, 134). Such imaginative factors of vacillation and equilibrium are highly significant and form the basis of our concluding analysis (Chapter VI).

224 'Espoir de retour', Plupart du temps, 120-1.

225 See supra, Chapter II.

226 Such images are thus far from evoking the previously examined figure of rich dark veins of underground mines waiting to be exploited. The mine is, as it were, the poet's inner space positively connoted as rich potentiality, the void or abyss being this same inner space negatively connoted, its richness vanished, its empty, un-nourishing poverty having penetrated into every interstice.

227 As we shall stress later (see the concluding section of this chapter, for example), the creation of the poem (and, concomitantly, the self's being) offers only a temporary solution. As André Frénaud has put it, "alors c'est fini ... Le poème est là ... Mais aussitôt le vide, notre désert parfois passionnément agité. De nouveau 'la vraie vie ... absente'. Le passage de la visitation est si rare. Le poète si souvent est réduit au silence" (op.cit., p. 245).

228 Cf. "Un tas de gens" (Main d'oeuvre, 160): "Aucune lumière ne perce/Un homme s'est perdu/Le chemin de traverse ne mène nulle part/Là ce n'est qu'un trou noir".

229 Cf. 'Espoir de retour', Plupart du temps, 120-1 (quoted above). In a note in Le Livre de mon bord (p. 140), Reverdy speaks of the void created by despair itself. Perhaps ironically he echoes here the logic evinced in a note in Le Gant de crin (p. 143): that it is precisely in man's void that God reveals himself. At the time of writing the former note, however, Reverdy himself, having traversed the Solesmes crisis, must have fully understood the anguishing impossibility of remedying the problem of the void in the way suggested by the latter note. Moreover, as suggested, Reverdy's 'sense of the void' (cf. Main d'oeuvre. 419) seems by 1948 to extend to the ultimate sensation of irreparable finality, death, nothingness -- an anguish beyond cure.

230 'Toujours là', Plupart du temps, 146.

231 'Bonne chance', in Mercur de France (Aug.-Sept. 63). The poem is dated January 1951.

232 'Danse de terre', Main d'oeuvre, 446.

233 See, for example, ibid., 24, 391 and 474; Plupart du temps, 180, 239 and 276; Flaques de verre, 104; La Peau de l'homme, 158. In poems such as these, the poet may feel the emptiness of the world, the sky, 'everything' in fact, the emptying of the self in time (cf. the parallel between se vider and se dévider, emptying and unravelling), the emptiness of time itself, and so on. All such experiences relate intimately to and prefigure the absoluteness of the poet's ultimate experience of void as described.

234 'Le sens du vide', Main d'oeuvre, 419.

235 Cf., for example, 'Attente' (Main d'oeuvre, 351): "Et mon désir glissait sur la route du temps/Aride au bord du mystère des gouffres/ Mon coeur jeté aux crevasses du doute".

236 It is worth noting that Reverdy is sensitive to the disturbing idea that our whole life, everything we have and are, slips away from us, regardless of the effort of retention. Whereas this is perhaps banal, to really live with such awareness is to be constantly aware of precisely the movement towards nothingness whose imaginative significance we wish to underscore. In this connection, see the passage from Le Gant de crin: "Car tous nos sentiments, nos idées glissent et nous échappent. Et je ne parle que de ceux qui agissent avec grand soin; quant aux autres ... " (p. 173).

237 'Course', Plupart du temps, 239.

238 Main d'oeuvre, 118. In this somewhat obscure poem we see that earlier mentioned link between a delirium that is a negative force and a delirium as a force leading to a vision of otherness (cf. Chapter IV).

239 'Feux sous l'hiver', ibid., 360.

240 Le Livre de mon bord, 206. Cf. also Le Gant de crin, 167.

241 See, for example, En Vrac, 128.

242 Cf. supra, this chapter, n. 83.

243 Le Livre de mon bord, 62.

244 Main d'oeuvre, 436.

245 See, for example, Le Livre de mon bord, 174-5.

246 'Troupeau de file tout seul', Plupart du temps, 379-80.

247 See, for example, 'Etat présent' (ibid., 306): "Mais derrière on ne voit plus rien/Il n'y reste peut-être rien".

248 As we have shown, blindness may result from the hostility of the world which thus prevents a relatively impotent self from 'seeing' what he seeks. Dust, thorns, darkness and dazzling whiteness, these are some of the phenomenal factors that impose blindness (cf. ibid., 82, 353 and 368). Other poems do not speak of specific impediments, but indicate the poet's terrible incapacity. "Ses yeux regardent fixement sans rien voir", "Les yeux ouverts ils marchaient sans rien voir", two early poems declare ('Remords', Main d'oeuvre, 502 and 'Excédent de rigueur', Plupart du temps, 139). Of course, the line of demarcation between looking and seeing nothing, on the one hand, and, on the other, ascertaining that there is nothing to be seen, is fragile. But the early poems point rather to the first dilemma, whereas the middle and later period poems generally evoke the second, more intense of the two dilemmas.

249 Main d'oeuvre, 417.

250 'Agonie du remords', ibid., 355 and 'Porte entr'ouverte', Main d'oeuvre, 289, respectively.

251 'Sourdine', ibid., 422.

252 See 'Porte entr'ouverte' (ibid., 289), 'Excédent de rigueur' (Plupart du temps, 138) and 'Autres jockeys, alcooliques' (ibid., 265), respectively. We should remember, too, that many other poems reveal the same stress patterns as they apply rather to the poet's incapacity to see. "Et l'on ne voit plus rien" (Plupart du temps, 368); "Derrière on ne voit plus rien" (Main d'oeuvre, 467). This time, however, the fact of nothingness tends to be objectified, its applicability amplified (cf. Rizzuto, op. cit., p. 45), by Reverdy's typical use of the pronoun on. Let us note, finally, that the significance of this ne plus sensitivity relates to the important Reverdyan notion of vacillation or swinging that we shall consider in our final chapter.

253 'Bonne chance', Mercure de France (Aug.-Sept. 63).

254 It is a technique that is also more marked from Reverdy's middle period on.

255 Obviously the negatives differ (ni/ni/et ni) and Mallarmé draws his particular strength from the formal irregularity of the final negative. Moreover, in Mallarmé's case the 'classic' negative intensification serves an essentially positive intention. In Reverdy this does not occur.

256 Cf. supra, this chapter, n. 145.

257 La Liberté des mers, 101-4. My emphasis.

258 En Vrac, 90. The titles of certain poems echo this consciousness: 'Rien' (Main d'oeuvre, 230) and 'Mais rien' (ibid., 303), for example. And, of course, in Reverdy's verse poetry the discontinuous syntax, the rhythmic isolation of individual imaginative elements (as in the Sylvia Beach poem quoted above), serves to create a similar effect of stress and 'monolithic' presence.

- 259 Le Livre de mon bord, 174.
- 260 Le Gant de crin, 90.
- 261 Ibid.
- 262 See ibid., 122 for this and above quotations.
- 263 Le Livre de mon bord, 175.
- 264 En Vrac, 112. My emphasis.
- 265 Ibid., 140
- 266 Le Livre de mon bord, 257.
- 267 Ibid., 161
- 268 En Vrac, 101.
- 269 Ibid.
- 270 See Lettres à Jean Rousselot, 43.
- 271 The Dada movement tended to point to a similar consciousness and, although Reverdy of course pointed the way to a renewal of poetic sensibility and practice, his work, like that of Tzara interestingly enough, always remains under the sign of this dark awareness. His whole career is nevertheless one of defiance, though never the jubilant defiance we may find in some Surrealists.
- 272 Rizzuto, speaking of Reverdy's sensation of end, prefers to argue what we have already suggested, namely that, potentially at least, "for Reverdy, the world ends every night", his "composite style" merging "an apocalyptic vision with an equally profound sense of routine and trivial reality" (op. cit., 110). Whilst this is true and important, our argument here leads elsewhere.
- 273 See, respectively, 'Pente douce', 'Dernière heure', 'Crève-cœur' and 'Chair vive' (Main d'oeuvre, 386, 228, 465 and 522, respectively).
- 274 'Chambre noire', Plupart du temps, 233.
- 275 See La Peau de l'homme, 20.
- 276 See 'Ma pièce', ibid., 185.
- 277 Main d'oeuvre, 228.
- 278 Plupart du temps, 386.

## Chapter VI

### Vacillation, Equilibrium and Tension

Our final chapter is concerned to examine, initially, the main characteristics of Reverdy's conception of change and vacillation and to show to what extent these significantly appealing motifs may be said to exercise, along with the later discussed motifs of equilibrium and tension, a governing control over Reverdy's imagination. It will finally be shown in particular that perhaps the greatest degree of equilibrium lies less within the thematics itself of Reverdy's creative work or indeed between thematics and poetics, important as such modes of equilibrium are, but rather, in the poetry proper, between the largely negatively biased thematics and the transcendent aesthetic factors that serve to structure and express the latter.

#### I. The Parameters of Change

Whilst the rotation of the earth constitutes for Reverdy a profoundly disquieting factor, imaginatively linked as it is to the world's instability and provoking sensations of vertigo and nausea, it also has another level of imaginative significance that relates intimately to the major points of discussion of our final chapter. For Reverdy, the rotation of the earth is automatic, natural and 'perpetual'.<sup>1</sup> "La terre tourne", but as if there were "une machine à part qui fait tourner la terre".<sup>2</sup> It turns mechanically in the Reverdyan optic, both upon its axis like a wheel and carrying within it "la matière vive et tout le temps",<sup>3</sup> and in its act of orbiting - although Reverdy is drawn less to the idea of the earth's own orbiting than to the fact or impression of other objects (sun, moon) circling the earth.<sup>4</sup> At all events, what stands out in all this as being of crucial importance, as we shall now seek to demonstrate in the first part of this chapter, is the fact that,

because rotation is mechanically, automatically and perpetually produced, Reverdy is sensitised to two apparently antagonistic but in effect tensely interlocking notions which, despite their seeming banality, exercise a deep fascination over Reverdy's imagination owing to their basic existential significance. The first of these two notions is that of a recurrence, resulting from rotation, which involves a certain level of repetition or sameness at once tiresome and appealing. The second is that of change and vacillation, growing out of the notions of rotation and recurrence and, equally, involving varying degrees of appeal for the Reverdyan imagination.

#### The Experience of Sameness

In its purest state of expression, recurrence does not necessarily imply for Reverdy, and certainly does not stress, any element of utter repetition and redundancy of phenomena, but rather the simple fact of the re-occurrence or resumption of certain basic and broadly identifiable existential conditions and factors. Rotation thus guarantees both a diurnal and a seasonal recurrence which Reverdy frequently evokes in his writings. "Et puis la nuit revient/Un oeil bleu la surveille/Derrière le volet une lampe qui veille", we may read;<sup>5</sup> or else, in 'Celui qui attend', we discover that "c'est bien l'automne qui revient/Va-t-on chanter/Mais plus personne/que moi/n'y tient/Je serai le dernier".<sup>6</sup> In neither case is recurrence here felt to be associated with some bland repetition, some dull sameness. Similarly, when more specifically designated 'qualities' are given to recurrence, when it is the evening coolness or "la douceur du repos qui revient chaque soir",<sup>7</sup> when laughter and clarté flood back into being or "le calme et le silence renaissent et [...] tout reprend de justes proportions dans la campagne"<sup>8</sup> -- when any such recurrence is produced, the poet tends to leave open the question of recurrence-as-sameness versus recurrence-as-change, by insisting upon neither dimension

in particular. What seems to appeal most essentially to Reverdy in such frequent evocations of the phenomenon of recurrence is, in fact, precisely this dual feature of change combined with an approximate sameness. The world seems to come full circle, bringing with it a particular condition or quality which, whilst broadly identifiable with other such conditions or qualities experienced, nevertheless cancels, replaces, changes what has immediately preceded in the poet's experiential continuum. Whilst the notions of recurrence, resumption and rebirth, expressed in their simplest form as an act of 'coming back' or 'return',<sup>9</sup> may be said to purely imply, to latently contain, both the notions of sameness and change, Reverdy is also, as we shall now seek to show, commonly drawn to evoke and stress either feature, now sensitive to the imaginative force of recurrence-as-sameness, now -- and in fact much more commonly -- appealed to by various aspects of recurrence-as-change. If, therefore, to the question "[est-ce] une autre direction ou la même aventure", Reverdy's response may often remain half-cocked and ambiguously open, there are many texts that plainly reveal his alternating attraction in one specific direction or the other.

Reverdy's often acute consciousness of what he appreciates to be, from a certain point of view, the sameness of basic phenomena and experience, is sensed even from the slender evidence of a number of his poems' titles: 'Toujours le même', 'Comme chaque soir', 'Toujours la route' and so on. Such sameness or repetition may stem directly from Reverdy's sense of the rotational recurrence of the world's phenomena, as he quite overtly demonstrates, for example, in 'Avant l'heure': "Une matinée/Une autre nouvelle/Mais la journée amère/Qui reste pareille".<sup>10</sup> This is the case too in 'Sujets', where we read that "le monde revient toujours au même endroit/Avec les mêmes sens/Le même nombre aussi",<sup>11</sup> but we appreciate here Reverdy's sensitivity not only to a sameness resulting from diurnal,

seasonal rhythm, but also his intuition of the basically constant quantitative and qualitative levels of the world's substance. The world turns and returns, ever retaining its same meanings/directions, its same fundamental mathematical structure, despite the many different equations balanced during each cycle. Despite any becoming they may go through, things continue to give off the same substantive sign -- "les cyprès font le même signe/En blanc la route les souligne", Reverdy tells us, in 'L'ombre du mur' <sup>12</sup> -- and, in consequence, the poet's dealing with the world may reflect this felt fact, his own 'numbering' of the world, as it were, producing basically "le même numéro". <sup>13</sup>

From such facts alone the poet may be, not surprisingly, led to experience a certain ennui, one that tends to cling all the more because of the poet's necessarily limited field of profound interest. <sup>14</sup> Not only, therefore, may the world itself be deemed to repeat itself, offering within the diversity of its patterns and phenomena, a rather drab qualitative and quantitative sameness, but the poet complicates matters by attributing a character of monotony to the only persona of his poetic dramas <sup>15</sup> -- and one that reveals, in any case, the poet's obsession with what often amounts to "peu de chose", with even a single matter "[qui,] la plupart du temps, suffit à absorber [s]es principales facultés". <sup>16</sup> This is not to suggest that this peu de chose and this self-centredness do not provide for the creative artist an impassioning adequacy, <sup>17</sup> even a fullness, of substance, but merely that they entail nevertheless an element of dreary sameness that may be anguishing despite its creative and ontological desirability and necessity. "Aller à sa propre recherche, c'est recommencer tous les jours le même petit bout de chemin", Reverdy tells us in Le Livre de mon bord. <sup>18</sup> Paradoxically, however, it is this very self-dedication, this appreciation of the potential wealth of

sameness, this understanding that a maximum may be obtained from the minimal data of the self's (and the world's) sameness, that constitutes him as a poet, assures his strength, his constant uniqueness of tone and his greatness.<sup>19</sup> Sameness, whether it be that of world or poet,<sup>20</sup> is, therefore, in the Reverdyan optic a most necessary and accepted phenomenon of poetic creation, despite the potentially self-defeating ennui that anguishingly accompanies it. However, as we shall now seek to show, the Reverdyan concept of sameness by no means excludes from the poet's imagination the rich significance of change which manifests itself in a number of ways. It will be seen, in particular, moreover, that, just as sameness reveals itself to Reverdy both in what at times may be felt to be the drearly recurrent or circulating facts of primary existence and in the secondary zone of art where a basically constant mode of distillation of such experience is evident, so does change reveal itself at both the primary and secondary levels of being. According to this optic, notions of relativity, vacillation and compensation assume particular importance as 'secondary reflections' of primary change, whilst the notion of poetic 'change', whose function it is to transform the 'monotonous' minimal data of the self, to allow a blossoming forth of the poet's "peu de chose dans l'infinie diversité de ses combinaisons",<sup>21</sup> will be more fully discussed (and, indeed, its reality demonstrated) in our subsequent analysis of the questions of equilibrium and tension.

Before proceeding to a full analysis of Reverdy's conception of the significance of change, it will be useful to comment on what might appear to be a conflict or even contradiction between the Reverdyan notions of sameness and that of change, but what is in fact a complementary dovetailing relationship between the two notions. Reverdy's idea of sameness derives essentially from the poet's conception of the basically unchanging

framework and data of raw existence and artistic creation. World and self are seen, moreover, from a largely depressive point of view and sameness is thus, despite its creative necessariness, an essentially negative factor for Reverdy -- a factor which is, conspicuously and significantly, absent from the motif of the recurrence of 'positive' elements such as freshness, sweetness and 'just' equilibrium of which we have already spoken. A certain tension is thus set up between the Reverdyan ideas of sameness and recurrence, just as between the ideas of sameness and change. What we must appreciate, however, is that, whereas a tension exists, no basic conflict or contradiction occurs. The idea of pure recurrence readily embraces both notions of sameness and change, and sameness itself provides, in effect, a basic framework within which change may come about. To view the world as a zone of vacillation, compensation and relativity is, in effect, merely to refocus one's vision of it, to place it in a new, but complementary perspective. When Reverdy speaks, therefore, of "ce désordre épanoui dans les mêmes limites que les jours précédents"; <sup>22</sup> when he tells us forthrightly in conclusion to a poem whose very title, 'Le circuit de la route', evokes notions of circular or rotational recurrence, that there is "rien de pareil/Rien ne revient"; <sup>23</sup> when, as we have seen, Reverdy, speaking of the poet's magical and kaleidoscopic explosion of his minimal corpus of data, declares that "il entre peu de chose dans l'infinie diversité de ses combinaisons", <sup>24</sup> then Reverdy is drawing attention precisely to the marriage of the two optics of sameness and change. Within the context of a recurrence, a rather drab repetitiveness and a constant framework, change and transformation -- primary and secondary change, that is -- may operate. From one angle of inspection the world, whether it be réel<sup>1</sup> or réel<sup>2</sup>, is viewed by Reverdy as a zone of sameness; from another angle it is held to conform to the laws of change: fluctuation, vacillation,

simultaneity, compensation and so on. What we may finally bear in mind as we proceed to an analysis of such aspects of change, is that they all attain their full significance at that notional, imaginative point of intersection with Reverdy's conception of sameness whose significance they complement and implicitly expand.

### The World as Change and The Question of Relativity

Despite the appeal to his imagination of an aura of fundamental but monotonous sameness shrouding poet and world, Reverdy clearly feels most powerfully the world's functioning in terms of change. Such a change is constant, unceasing and ubiquitous, an outer, objective manifestation of the world's continuous spatio-temporal becoming, of the shifting, unstable and live movement of form and matter in time. "Tout change dans l'escalier tournant de l'atmosphère", Reverdy may declare, as in 'Le magasin monumental'; and elsewhere, as in 'Le flot berceur': "Et tout change de place".<sup>25</sup> Every day "le soleil déplie son papier de couleur toujours neuf",<sup>26</sup> revealing by means of its infinitely recurrent gesture a newness and a changedness that, on this cosmic scale, are hardly distinguishable from sameness. Every moment the poet is aware of the fact that "Quelque chose change/A présent".<sup>27</sup> Change is everywhere, in all things, taking place always now and therefore at all times. "Le spectacle change au moindre mouvement", Reverdy announces in 'Lueurs des crépuscules'.<sup>28</sup> The merest of provocations in a world full of the endless pulsations of its energy, may bring about fundamental alteration. An 'imperceptible movement' of one object of attention and suddenly, astonishingly, "tout est changé": a minor transformation has contagiously infected the whole world, caused its reality to shift and modify strangely in its entirety.<sup>29</sup> Such changes may be utterly objective, coming about quite independently of the self, but to a greater or lesser extent they inevitably relate to the

perceiving, participating subject that is the poet. Even if the change occurring in the world is beyond his control, it affects the poet's 'harvesting' of the world: with every slight modification, with every moment of awareness of the world's becoming, the poet "change de moisson", whether it be for better or for worse.<sup>30</sup> This does not imply for Reverdy by any means a conception of the changing and becoming of the world as involving the poet's pure exposure to the endless disorderly and whimsical changes of an objectively functioning world. The poet's own act of creative/ontological domination of the world may check any such movement. His special changing may stem any negative effect of the world's changing. On the other hand, because of both the idea of the self's participation in reality, in the world's change, and that of the poet's own act of creative mutation, Reverdy is very sensitive to the more general question of the relativity of the world's reality which we shall now treat.

There are two matters leading out of the above considerations that preoccupy Reverdy and whose significance we should appreciate before turning to an elaboration of certain important motifs of change that repeatedly manifest themselves in his poetry. The first of these two matters pertains to what we may term the objective relativity of the world's reality; the second, pertaining to the fact that reality depends, from the human point of view and at both the primary and secondary levels of its being, upon the poet, complicates the first by adding to the world's given relativity a second, unnatural and antinatural relativity. Both dimensions of relativity are equally significant to Reverdy.

In the first instance, the objective world, being a world forever becoming, never static or stabilised, is a world whose very reality resides precisely in this element of constant change. "La substance n'est jamais identique", Reverdy maintains in En Vrac, "ce qui est constant c'est sa

transformation, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'y a rien de réel en soi mais un mouvement dont la perpétuelle continuité est la seule réalité".<sup>31</sup> It is clear, however, that even if the reality of the world may thus be deemed relative inasmuch as it resides in this perpetual transformation, this does not of course mean that, for the mind and senses of the materially sensitive Reverdy, individual 'things' or 'states' cease to exist and that he is not appealed to and affected by 'things' and their 'states'. What it does mean, however, is that Reverdy remains deeply aware of the fact that, although reality may be felt to be absolute, total, complete in the poet's experience of a given state of a thing, it remains in effect incomplete, because the definitive, absolute state is somehow illusory and transitional.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Reverdy's awareness of reality's relativity means that he is sensitised to the profound significance of change as a mode or agent of being. The poet is indeed the one who understands that, if the world may change, if reality is already 'naturally' relative, then the nature of truth is much more open and unstable than might have been thought -- particularly given the complicating, yet poetically exhilarating facts that reality must also pass through the poet and that change is not the exclusive prerogative of the objective world.

As far as the poet is concerned, therefore, reality is also dependent upon man's consciousness of it, a consciousness which Reverdy already deems to be "le principe même du relatif".<sup>33</sup> Reality varies according to the intensity, quality and combination of individual sensory perceptions, as well as according to the degree of mental perception and 'involvement' of the sensing subject in his 'given' perceptions.<sup>34</sup> This latter question of 'involvement' is of particular importance to the poet in Reverdy and, in effect, means that there are three modes of relativity affecting the world: first, reality's natural becoming condition; second, the poet's

changing mode and level of consciousness; third, the poet's own desire and will to 'involve' himself in reality by transforming it and therefore re-creating it according to a privileged, but authentic and 'just', relative artistic vision. Reality, for Reverdy, is thus determined by self-world relations which are in turn determined by a changing world and a both naturally and antinaturally changing self. On the one hand, the world perpetrates its changing effect upon a perceptually and emotionally changing self. "La girouette au coeur change à tout bout de champ", Reverdy tells us by means of an image that once more reminds us of man's exposure to the imposed will of the unstable world.<sup>35</sup> And in a note in Le Livre de mon bord we read of an almost vegetal factor governing our mental, emotive and sensory response to the world's relativity: "Un peu plus, un peu moins de chaleur et de lumière et tout change, l'esprit, la sensibilité. Par toute une partie de notre être secret nous réagissons aux circonstances du dehors comme les plantes".<sup>36</sup> This is a shrewdly revealing remark by Reverdy because it suggests just to what extent he is aware that, whether it is the world that is changing before the self or the self whose relationships with the world are changing, such change is fundamentally and crucially if not quite imposed then at least certainly beyond the control of the self -- a dual relativity that is almost utterly chaotic, utterly anarchic. The third mode of relativity, on the other hand, whilst inevitably bound to the relativity associated with primary self-world relationships, involves a creative act of domination, an imposition of the self's will upon such relationships and the establishment of a new reality whose relativity depends upon the poet's chosen act of a chosen (or intuitive) transformation. The poet thus accepts and re-applies the logic of natural change and relativity in order to change the world into a relative reality that, as much as possible, is his, within his grasp, knowable, appreciable. From a

situation in which the changing effect of a changing world is felt upon a changing subject, the poet moves to establish a situation in which the creatively transforming subject manufactures his 'just' and equilibrated poetic effects out of the given facts of a dizzying primary relativity.

We shall now examine briefly a number of relevant and important motifs of change as they appear in the poetry of Reverdy and as they otherwise inform his consciousness. We shall thus be able to observe, firstly, the extent and variety of the appeal of such motifs to Reverdy and, secondly, the depth of specific significance that attaches to each in its general conformity to the logic just elaborated. It should be noted, moreover, that, while these motifs point principally to the changing and becoming of the world's reality and the corresponding 'vegetal' changing of the self, an element of poetic self-reflexiveness may often be incorporated within them.

#### Fluctuation, Simultaneity, Sequence and Compensation

An interesting and quite commonly occurring image of change in Reverdy's poetry is that of fluctuation. As with 'rotational' and indeed other images, Reverdy often finds his inspirational point of departure in the materiality of the day/night rhythm. Here, however, the stress is, rather, either upon the rocking, tidal and oscillatory movement of phenomena, as when, in somewhat sensual images, 'honeyed' hair is caught in the light of "la marée montante du matin" or "les chants [sont] conservés dans la gorge/Dans la marée basse ou montante de la nuit";<sup>37</sup> or upon the related throbbing, pulsing movement of fluctuation, when "la lumière monte et décline", "le soleil monte et redescend" or "la lueur [...] baisse et remonte/On dirait un sein qui bat".<sup>38</sup> Reverdy thus draws attention to the crucial factor of material change via the natural rhythms of the rising and falling/birth and death/dawn and setting of phenomena. Moreover,

these phenomena, which may in themselves intrinsically please or afflict according to their various imaginative connotations, thus tend to create, because of their own inherent fluctuating movements and because of the relationship the poet has with them, a corresponding rocking or fluctuating movement within the poet, in the sense that he is emotionally caught between the poles of dawn, arrival and presence, on the one hand, and ebbing, disappearance and absence on the other. The Flaques de verre poem 'Les blancs déserts de l'immortalité de l'âme' offers us almost a set piece of such imaginative consciousness, evoking precisely the emotive and spiritual fluctuation that the world's own changing reality represents and thrusts upon the poet, who is thus, at a certain level of experience, inescapably imprisoned within this unstable, pendulous movement. "A l'est", Reverdy announces, "se lève sur une bande de ciel radieux l'âpreté splendide du désir. Sur l'ouest se couchent les tentatives ridées, toutes les désillusions fumantes, encore mal éteintes, les chagrins malmenés, les désespoirs sans nombre".<sup>39</sup> The dawning and setting, the ebb and flow of the world and its phenomena are thus imaginatively tied to a parallel and at least partly corresponding ebb and flow of possibility and desire which prevents any definitive and congealing emotional stasis from coming about and ensures instead that the poet fluctuates continually between the zones of hope and despair, having and loss. In the following and closing poem from Flaques de verre, 'La tête pleine de beauté', Reverdy again succeeds in evoking basically this same effect of fluctuation, although this time insisting on the degree of paradox, 'contradiction', fluctuation and change of the mind's functioning in both its primary and creative responses to the world's quiet 'revolution'. Addressing the (poet's) mind, Reverdy declares:

Toi, parure des ciels cloués sur les poutres de l'infini.  
 Plafond des idées contradictoires. Vertigineuse pesée  
 des forces ennemies. Chemins mêlés dans le fracas des  
 chevelures. Toi, douceur et haine -- horizon ébréché,  
 ligne pure de l'indifférence et de l'oubli. Toi, ce  
 matin, tout seul dans l'ordre, le calme et la révolution  
 universelle. Toi, clou de diamant. Toi, pureté,  
 pivot éblouissant du flux et reflux de ma pensée dans  
 les lignes du monde. <sup>40</sup>

Within the framework of, and in creative response to, the world's own  
 relativity, the poet's mind, full of its ups and downs, its high emotion  
 and pure detachment on the one hand, and on the other its own oscillating  
 relativity, manages nevertheless to operate a pivotal, equilibrating effect.  
 This it does at once by virtue of its embracing of natural relativity and  
 via its miraculous, creative 'central' control of such relativity in the  
 laying down of a poetic domain, itself relative, offering a special, par-  
 ticular form of reality, a relativity wherein other relativities may yet  
 find some form of equilibrium and justesse.

Another Reverdyan motif associated with change and relativity and  
 certainly worthy of some attention, is that of simultaneity. Reverdy's  
 sensitivity to the presence of phenomena around the self, to their being  
 there in peripheral relation to his centrality and self-centredness, is  
 already long-established. What Reverdy's awareness of the fact of simul-  
 taneity brings to this sensitivity involves a kind of proliferation within  
 the poet's consciousness of the being-there of an individual phenomenon.  
 When, in the tellingly titled poem 'Un seul instant', Reverdy speaks of  
 "tous ceux qui meurent/Dans le lointain/Au même instant/Tous ceux qui  
 pleurent", he is articulating, simply yet powerfully, his perception of  
 the simultaneity of varying states, 'presences' and events that somehow  
 collectively compose a single given moment of time. <sup>41</sup> When Reverdy con-  
 trasts "la journée délicieuse et bleue [qui] s'engloutit dans la rue qui  
 dévale, traînée par les ruisseaux qui rient. Et les trottoirs dressés

tristes à la même heure"; or, speaking of the cloud-horses of 'Les jockeys mécaniques', declares: "Ils meurent/Les chevaux ne sont plus que des bruits de grelots/En même temps que les feuilles tremblent/En même temps que les étoiles regardent/En même temps que le train passe en crachant des injures" -- on these occasions, <sup>42</sup> Reverdy is not pointing to the change in state and form of individual phenomena due to time's erosion. Here, temporal relativity is replaced by spatial relativity, the poet recognizes that the world changes according to what aspect or fragment of it is perceived and appreciated. Different, yet related aspects or fragments of reality are thus juxtaposed and indeed 'occur' in infinite variety throughout the world. Here one element is appreciated, "tandis qu'un peu plus loin ...", as Reverdy sometimes puts it, the world is seen "sous un autre angle" as another element emerges to function simultaneously, somewhat contrastively and yet collectively, with the first. <sup>43</sup> Reality, then, according to the Reverdyan logic of simultaneity, is quantitatively relative and changing, constituted in fact as a mosaic of realities, both individually and collectively relative. <sup>44</sup> Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, according to the same logic, reality is also qualitatively relative, vacillating, throbbing and fluctuating as it is in accordance with the affective and creative responses of the poet who is plunged into the midst of this simultaneity. Whilst such a notion may perhaps at first sight appear tritely familiar, for the poet the implications of simultaneity are of great significance. Simultaneity is a mark of the proliferation of relativity, a mark of the multi-coloured, mosaical composition of reality at any and every given moment of time. Furthermore, simultaneity is a mark of Reverdy's own exposure to simultaneous occurrences of contrasting and vacillating quality, of varying intensity of allure or repulsion. Finally, and of equal though less

evident significance, simultaneity, like sequence, is a textual marker of an aspect of poetic functioning. The presence of the motif of simultaneity in the poetic text reminds us that the latter, whilst functioning sequentially or according to linear time from a certain point of view, also functions simultaneously, so that all the poem's elements may be said, from another point of view (and all this will of course depend on the poem's syntactic and metaphorical structuring, on the flashes of light each element is capable of transmitting back and forth to other elements in the poem), to function with a possibly marked degree of simultaneity which is thus at any time capable of telescoping the poem's sequential movement and re-establishing its ability to function almost as a painting does, as a vast network of forces interlocking and engineering simultaneously a collective impact.<sup>45</sup>

Many of Reverdy's poems offer themselves to us as manifestations of a sequential eventing process that does not involve mere externally referential notation, but implies rather a building and binding-together of a dynamic network of interrelated 'occurrences' that finally constitute the poem. Let us first of all witness two poems to become cognizant of the veritable pullulation of metaphorical eventing that is often to be found throughout Reverdy's poetic universe.<sup>46</sup> In 'Les murs des villes', for example, we read:

La chaîne de feu entoure la tête  
 Les yeux au carré où joue le soleil  
     Les cheveux brûlés  
     le jour qui s'éveille  
     Tout est installé  
 Le bruit rampe à travers le chemin qui s'enroule  
 Un oiseau retombe au milieu des échos  
 La feuille se retourne  
 La bête s'étonne  
 Rien n'est revenu<sup>47</sup>

Or elsewhere in a much later poem titled 'Au bas-fond':

Vierge et fière sur la lande animée  
 Elle tamise l'argent des branches  
 Elle sèche les oiseaux qui chantent  
 Sous les voûtes des ponts tournants  
 Elle coupe court aux bruits qui mentent  
 Elle tresse les nattes du vent  
 Elle tisse la nuit qui l'enroule  
 Elle émiette le pain noir  
 Elle étanche le sang qui coule  
 Sur la piste étoilée des larmes défendues <sup>48</sup>

Such examples could in fact be multiplied almost indefinitely. What Reverdy is pointing to, amongst many other things of course, is that objects of the poet's consciousness are there, in the world (of the poem), placed in a particular ever-becoming setting, <sup>49</sup> whose possible congealment is avoided by a dynamics of paradigmatic and contiguous interrelationships of phenomena caught in their shifting and unstable eventing processes. If, then, Reverdy is attracted by the idea of the poem's overall statique, its general equilibrium arising from both its self-containedness and the harmonious, 'just' functioning of its component parts, he is equally fascinated by two other factors: firstly, the dynamics of individual things revealed through their events and, indeed, the world as a whole revealed through the sequence, juxtaposition and simultaneity of events with their phenomena; and, secondly, the correlate of such a dynamics, the inner, ostensibly linear becoming of the poem, its passing by, its processing towards a summum, a point of completion and closure where the parts become the whole, where the fragments may look in upon themselves in their finalised state of interlocking occurrences.

Many poems of Reverdy, both verse and prose, reveal a strong inclination to mark off the stages of the poem's 'sequential' passing (both into itself and to an end that demands another beginning) and to lay a consequent stress upon at once the specific moments at which individual

events occur and the qualitatively changing sequence into which they are thus inserted. The most commonly employed markers of this order are words such as puis, alors and enfin, often combined with et. Mais, pourtant and cependant abound too and complement this minimal anti-anecdotal structuring,<sup>50</sup> but will be examined shortly in a context of broader, though related significance. "Puis le signe du ciel", we may read, "le geste qui ramasse et tout disparaît dans le pan de l'habit, du mur qui se dérobe";<sup>51</sup> or else: "Et alors, à cause du vent, les fleurs de la tapisserie et des étoffes remuèrent".<sup>52</sup> Reverdy pinpoints in many instances such as these the unobtrusive moment of significant occurrence, the fusion of the facts of there-ness and then-ness. Things are there, in space, but also in time and the poet's vacillating consciousness of them reveals them in the endless particular states of their stream of becoming what they are and in the process of their 'sequential' interlocking with other things and events.

The overall structuring of many of Reverdy's poems indicates in fact not just an occasional focussing of attention upon eventing and sequence, but a repeated and even intensifying evocation of such factors. In the Coeur de chêne poem 'Nuit et jour', for example, we find the following marking off of what is both a process of the constantly changing interaction of poet, world and time and a process of sequential juxtaposition and binding together of imaginative constructs that ultimately form the poem:

Alors le pavé creux résonne  
                   les chevaux marchent d'un pas égal  
Et tout dans le quartier semble marcher d'un bloc  
                   Vers le même signal  
                   Même les arbres  
                   Même le parapet  
                   Et les groupes de marbre  
                   les passants réveillés  
                   les portes des maisons

les rêves envolés  
Et l'air de la chanson

Enfin la part du ciel qui devient noire et tombe  
 C'est l'endroit que l'on voyait le mieux  
 Sous le balcon

Et puis la nuit revient  
 Un oeil bleu la surveille  
 Derrière le volet une lampe qui veille <sup>53</sup>

Reverdy's 'Nuit et jour' thus orchestrates, via the points of articulation alors, et, même, enfin and et puis what is, on the one hand and overtly, a continuous/discontinuous sequence of perpetually changing events and their objects of consciousness, and, on the other hand and perhaps somewhat less overtly, the sequence of the poem's own mode of assembly of disparate and changing elements of consciousness into its special unifying context. In effect, the poem's own eventing, its own coming to pass, binds together into a relatedness such elements of the poet's shifting and vacillating consciousness of the world's ever-changing events. Many poems might serve to further exemplify the basic points under discussion. One might mention in particular 'Les vides du printemps' where many of the markers of occurrence and sequence are placed in a position of significant stress at the beginning of verses; <sup>54</sup> 'L'homme sacrifié' where the phenomena that are there from the outset of the poem ("Il n'y a que ...") become caught in various fluctuating movements that help to explain and release them and that gather themselves around the markers of sequential passing/poetic coming to pass: enfin, et (four times), puis and alors; <sup>55</sup> and, finally, 'On peut bien mieux', from La Guitare endormie, the closing part of which finely demonstrates in addition the element of intensification often associated with such sequences of occurrence (and strengthened here by Reverdy's use of binary and ternary rhythmic units):

Tout ça pour faire mieux comprendre mon malheur  
Quand les coquelicots vivants de la prairie  
 Se mettent à saigner sur la maison d'en face  
Quand les vitres de leurs lueurs percent la nuit  
 Et qu'un rêve obscur me tracasse  
 Plus personne ne part  
 Et dans un tourbillon  
 La voiture vide qui passe  
 Ecrase le bruit qui se tasse  
 Dans le cirque noir d'à côté  
C'est alors le passage inexplicable d'un pas trop lourd  
 sur le pavé  
 Alors que la lumière craque  
 Alors que le circuit du jour est achevé  
 Que le coeur et l'esprit s'écartent  
 Pour gagner le repos chacun de son côté <sup>56</sup>

Another crucial and highly recurrent motif of change and vacillation in the poetry of Reverdy is that of compensation. What it points to is precisely that point of articulation in the imaginative discourse of a poem where the swing in level of consciousness occurs, where the shift in the state of the self or world is most acutely felt. As in the case of sequence and occurrence, Reverdy repeatedly uses certain common markers -- mais, pourtant, cependant -- to signal such swinging or pendulous movement which may, moreover, flow in either a 'positive' or a 'negative' direction, thus heralding quite unpredictably either an upswing of possibility, continuing, hope and so on, or alternatively a downswing towards obstruction, lack and frustration. In the latter case, for example, the poet may be wrenched away from possible access by a sudden sense of difficulty or impotence ("C'est la girouette qui grince pour indiquer la route au vent des ailes/Mais le nom de l'enseigne qui y est écrit on ne le voit pas"); <sup>57</sup> or such incapacity may unexpectedly strike in the midst of an apparent fullness ("On entend tous les bruits mais les yeux sont éteints"). <sup>58</sup> The poet thus finds himself, his world and their relationship seriously, perhaps drastically changed, swung suddenly away from an at least adequate condition towards one that imposes upon him impairment and deterioration. "On cherche quelques autres mots", Reverdy tells us in 'Après-midi', "mais

les idées sont toujours aussi noires, aussi simples et singulièrement pénibles"; <sup>59</sup> or, in 'L'angoisse', we read that, "de la rue, monte un murmure paisible. Le soir est tiède. Alors l'espoir renaît. Mais les murs trop étroits se serrent"; <sup>60</sup> or, again, in 'Le sommeil du coeur', Reverdy declares: "Et sa poitrine libre respirait un air frais qui changeait le décor. Mais, dans sa mémoire persiste un mauvais souvenir". <sup>61</sup>

The pattern here is always essentially the same, despite the varying of its emotional detail: from search, peace and rebirth, from hope, freshness and freedom, the poet finds himself suddenly caught in a movement of negative compensation that instantaneously modifies and even reverses the previously operative self-world relationship, causing the poet to veer sharply towards experience of darkness and pain, constriction and anguish.

Similar though surprisingly perhaps even more frequent than the movement of negative compensation or downswing, is the reverse movement, the compensatory swing out of the thick of a thematics of darkness, death and nothingness towards light, continuing and, at least, some fragile, minimal something. "La terre est partagée par un mince ravin", Reverdy reveals in 'Excédent de rigueur', "le ciel est encombré par de mauvais chemins/Les larmes sans raison roulent de tous côtés/Mais un autre soleil continue de briller". <sup>62</sup> Here, as so often in Reverdy's poetry, the sun's continued presence, its tenuous re-emergence, initiates and marks an emotional and spiritual upswing. The poet's world may be shrouded in a grey atmosphere, as in 'Nord-ouest de direction', danger and fatigue may reign, "mais, au soleil, le monde change"; <sup>63</sup> the poet may be oppressed by his "maison de terre ingrate et toujours sans soleil", "mais un feu plus loin dresse ses branches", a continuing, other fire offers its spectacular and compensatory growth in a world that had seemed to possess, horribly, 'Ni feu ni flamme', as the poem's title proclaims; <sup>64</sup> lack, death and utter

discouragement may beset the poet seemingly beyond hope, as in the poem 'Tendresse', but an astonishing continuing and sufficient recuperation comes about: "mais toujours le réveil plus clair dans la flamme de ses mirages".<sup>65</sup>

The importance of the highly recurrent motif of compensatory change, whether it involve a positive or a negative swing, cannot be stressed enough. Its presence in the poetry of Reverdy, combined with that of the other motifs of change and vacillation examined, constantly undermines any impression of static, congealed self-world relationships and insists rather on their quantitatively/qualitatively, spatially/temporally forever becoming nature. Of course, the movements of negative compensation in a poetry already characterized by a generally dominant thematics of negativity, may be deemed less crucial and less significant; but the reverse movements of positive compensation or upswing must be appreciated fully for what they are, namely crucially significant fragments of a continuing, though often only barely continuing, thematics of possibility and hope, attainment and accomplishment -- a thematics that often resides in the interstices of Reverdy's work, expressed in a muted, understated and self-effacing fashion. In circumstances of seemingly total absence and nothingness, Reverdy is thus able to glean a minimal something that may lead to a greater fullness or be obliged to constitute it in itself: "Il ne reste plus rien", Reverdy states in 'Barre d'azur'; "pourtant/L'espoir qui nous soutient/L'objet que l'on tient dans la main".<sup>66</sup> Death may appear certain, beyond all dispute, yet suddenly, miraculously, a minimal though crucial movement of compensation is articulated and the emotional tone shifts with delicately dramatic significance: "La cendre des yeux morts pourtant toujours ouverts".<sup>67</sup>

### Vacillation and Equilibrium: A Joint Logic

In the previous pages we have had occasion to elaborate various recurrent Reverdyan motifs of change such as fluctuation, simultaneity, sequence and compensation. Other related notions such as Reverdy's obsession with the fact of the movement of things, his fascination with the pulsing, beating or dancing rhythms of phenomena and the passing by or processing of things before the self, have of necessity been touched upon with only the most fleeting of critical gestures. All, however, are more or less powerful and common motifs of change and relativity and all, as already suggested, are characterised to a greater or lesser degree by a mode of change to which the Reverdyan imagination is extremely sensitive and which involves a rhythmic, yet unpredictable vacillation or alternation. Thus, when Reverdy tells us that "on retrouve le meilleur temps" or, in contrast, that "le remords se ranime", or when he speaks of "tout ce que le matin redore/Au détour de la nuit féroce et tourmentée", <sup>68</sup> we realise that a kind of swinging movement is explicitly or implicitly being set in motion between two poles of experience. Similarly, when we read of the coming and going movements of phenomena or the vast 'narcotic' rhythm of the seasons; <sup>69</sup> when Reverdy declares his sensitivity to subtle changes in reality afforded by time's rhythms, the delicate moment when "l'heure passe aux couleurs", the vaster, contrastive sweep from the lilting gaiety of the past to the funereal present, the persistent alternating patterns occasioned by rotation <sup>70</sup> -- on all such occasions Reverdy's imagination is fed by the notion or sensation of a form of change that involves an alternating, pendulous movement between various conditions and extremes which seem unable to endure, but instead pass to, swing to, are succeeded by, other conditions, intermediate initially, then extreme as the pendulum moves through the full arc of its swing. It is to a concise

but fuller assessment of the parameters of Reverdy's conception of vacillation or 'swinging' that we shall now devote our attention by way of conclusion to our general discussion of the question of change.

Vacillation, it should be stressed from the outset, whilst involving the world through the latter's multiple and endless formal becoming as well as its patterns of recurrence, rotation and fluctuation, may be said to even more fundamentally characterise the activity of the poet with the ceaseless "variations barométriques du caractère" to which he is condemned and upon which he must also learn to thrive.<sup>71</sup> The poet is that crucial, central phenomenon, that "tribunal où siègent alternativement le coeur et l'esprit", that thinker who would like to dream, that dreamer who would like to think, that self split asunder and bearing within himself "un moi pour la vie et un moi pour la mort. Un moi noir et un moi blanc. Lumière et ténèbre".<sup>72</sup>

He, the poet, then, is the very seat of alternation and polarisation, the ground upon which the ceaseless vacillation of perception and emotion, will and imagination, must take place. Each day brings with it a myriad of major and minor oscillations, a series of swinging movements strictly speaking beyond calculation. "Il y a pour l'âme", Reverdy explains in yet another pertinent entry of Le Livre de mon bord, "des aubes et des crépuscules sans nombre chaque jour".<sup>73</sup>

Vacillation is thus an ever-present factor which determines that the self-world relationships of the poet remain in constant flux, that his primary experience of the world, even when put to creative use, is constantly modified, never quite stable (in the sense either of offering a set equilibrium or of coming to a rest at a given, even maximum, point of travel in the vacillating movement), always open to change in either direction, always being swung to and fro by the conflicting magnetism of his polarised being. Of special interest and relevance in this regard

is a note Reverdy makes in En Vrac of a dream which figures just such a condition:

Je rêvais que j'étais sur une longue planche en bascule sur la rive d'un grand fleuve bordé de sable éblouissant, et à chaque bout de la planche, c'était moi, tantôt en l'air, tantôt en bas. Mais à l'un des bouts, c'était moi déjà mort, à l'autre encore moi, mais vivant. Et tous les deux à chaque montée et à chaque descente, de rire aux éclats et de pleurer alternativement.<sup>74</sup>

What Reverdy's dream confirms in particular is, firstly, the polarisation of his experience, his felt being, his imaginative consciousness; and, secondly, the fact that from this polarisation results a kind of libration unable to find its point of definitive stability and thus condemned to move endlessly from pole to pole. We should note, moreover, that upswing would seem to be a movement towards the positive pole and is associated with life and joy, whilst the downswing is negatively connoted. Although the dream lacks explicitness in this regard, the life/death polarisation whose significance Reverdy so simply understates in a very early Lucarne ovale poem ("Un peu jouir/Un peu pleurer/Ma vie"),<sup>75</sup> seems to clearly represent the broader polarisation and dialectics of contact, having and being/blockage, loss and nothingness which we have elaborated in the course of this study.

The remaining aspect of vacillation with which we shall deal concerns the relationship between the instability of the downswing/upswing alternation and certain aspects of the question of equilibrium which will constitute a major topic of discussion in the following pages. Reverdy is indeed very conscious of the inherent lack of stability of the movement of vacillation whether it be associated solely with world or self, or with the relationships existing between them. The balançoire, the bascule, is for Reverdy a fundamentally unstable entity whose movements, whilst perhaps theoretically predicated on the idea of an attainable equilibrium, are

chancy, precarious, capricious. The swing may be slow to manifest itself, so that only "lentement la mort regagne son allure", <sup>76</sup> but the movement towards the opposite pole, after a conflicting upswing has reached its point of maximum travel, is at once restored, so that vacillation never quite ceases to exercise its effect. More often than not, however, the swing takes place at a more rapid rate which, if capable of offering sudden pleasure as when "des immeubles [sont] repeints d'un seul coup de soleil", <sup>77</sup> may commonly disturb and aggrieve. "Les rêves à peine construits et détruits", Reverdy observes, lamenting a sudden, violent reversal of circumstance which so often besets him, as again, for example, in 'Avant l'horloge': "Au bout de l'avenue tous les êtres périssent/On entendait chanter il n'y a qu'un moment". <sup>78</sup>

In the midst, then, of such prevalent notions of the instability, the capricious uncertainty and the possible suddenness of the movement of swinging or vacillation, it may be strange to find oneself obliged to speak of the notion of equilibrium. As we shall soon see more fully, however, it is a notion that exercises considerable fascination over Reverdy's imagination. At the moment we are concerned with two of its aspects only. What interests us firstly is the way equilibrium, unable to manifest itself as a fixed condition or point in the process of vacillation, seems nevertheless to emanate paradoxically from this very process. Reverdyan equilibrium in this sense embraces the notion of alternation and, without ever being able to establish itself as a stilled, halted state, manages to accept that in the very continued movement between poles resides a shifting, non-static equilibrium. Moreover, in this regard, it is very interesting to note Reverdy's confession of his actual dislike and even scorn for a stable, untroubled, unvacillating state of happiness, even if it were available. "Je hais le malheur franchement", he admits in an En Vrac entry, "mais la

seule idée d'un bonheur constant et sans ombre, outre qu'elle provoque en moi un certain écoeurement, il se pourrait bien aussi qu'au fond je la méprise".<sup>79</sup> What Reverdy clearly prefers is the equilibrium of vacillation or alternation itself, the stimulation of the precarious, shifting, uncongealed relationships between poet and world.<sup>80</sup>

The second and equally interesting aspect of equilibrium that concerns the question of vacillation relates to the fact that, both in Reverdy's conception of the emotional dynamics of life and in the correspondingly vacillating and unstable thematics of his poetry, the smallest of fragments operating a shift in emotion or perception may in fact assume a relative force and significance that is capable of qualitatively offsetting and somehow imaginatively counterbalancing a vastly disproportionate quantity of experience, emotion and perception with which it lies in contrast. In *En Vrac*, once more, Reverdy shows himself sensitive to this crucial fact as it applies to life: "En la prenant telle qu'elle est, en l'aimant et la détestant alternativement selon la quantité de bien ou de mal qui passe sur les plateaux de la balance, on arrive, en fin de compte à enregistrer presque le même poids, car un peu de bien pèse d'autant plus après beaucoup de mal, et un peu de mal est facilement supportable pour assaisonner beaucoup de bien".<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in Reverdy's poetry, this kind of improbable balance is commonly achieved. Very rarely, however, is it achieved by the 'spicing' of a positive thematics with some negative affect or percept, but, on the contrary, by the embedding within a varyingly intense negative thematics of some perhaps minute fragment of joy, hope or continuing, whose sudden emergence in the poem and redirection of the poet's consciousness manages to create a tenuous imaginative equilibrium -- but an equilibrium purely dependent upon vacillation and alternation, however minimal, for its fragile and precarious existence. To posit equilibrium

as being available, is therefore, in neither of its two aspects considered, to suggest a suddenly curious cancellation of the logic and appeal of vacillation and change. On the contrary, in both cases this mode of Reverdyan equilibrium depends crucially upon vacillation and would cease to be possible without the polarisation and contrastive dual magnetism vacillation implies. Moreover, it should be finally stated that other modes of equilibrium and in particular that offered by art via its neutralising and transcendent power, will be seen to relate closely to the ideas just elaborated. It is to them that we shall now devote our final attention.

## II. The Tensions of Equilibrium

Tension and equilibrium are notions that appeal powerfully to Reverdy's imagination and they are qualities that characterise in often subtly different ways his attitude towards life as well as his theory and practice of poetry. Wherever we choose to explore Reverdy's imagination and consciousness, we encounter, both in the form and content of his writing (whether purely creative or prosaically discursive), a combination of the qualities of tension and equilibrium. This entry from Le Livre de mon bord is a highly characteristic example of the phenomenon with which we are about to grapple: "La subtile escrime contre sa propre pensée. Ne jamais perdre de vue la pointe dangereuse qui nous menace, qui nous tente, où nous allons nous enferrer";<sup>82</sup> or again, this note from En Vrac, twisting and turning in its effort to embrace two seemingly opposing notions, partly self-qualifying yet finally forthright in its taut paradoxical resolution: "Le propre de l'homme ne serait-ce pas plutôt, à partir d'une certaine zone, de se vouloir, en même temps qu'homme, surhumain?"<sup>83</sup> And the poetry, too, displays similar features. Sometimes this is so in the space of single verses such as "La cendre des yeux morts pourtant toujours

ouverts" or "Un reflet de fleur dans la prunelle de la vieillesse",<sup>84</sup> where tension and equilibrium may be felt at both the thematic and formal levels of expression. At other times it is within clusters of notionally packed and intricately balanced verses such as these from 'Comme chaque soir' that the forces of tension are articulated: "J'ai gagné ce matin la liberté/Je vais pouvoir prendre ma pauvreté/pour une grande fortune/Jusqu'au nouveau désir/qui nous rend malheureux";<sup>85</sup> or else in the full text of a poem like 'Le bilboquet' with its tautly professed and yet retiring, inscrutable significance whose dark negativity, it is arguable, is only offset by the quasi-occulted act of poetic domination and transmutation itself:<sup>86</sup>

J'ai trouvé des boules et des tuyaux et une  
tête de bois, la bouche ouverte; et la foule riait.  
Sur la barrière, la foule riait. Elle était venue  
là pour rire.

Et moi, moi qui ne savais pas pourquoi j'étais  
venu; avec ma boule, ma tête, et mes tuyaux, peut-  
être plus bizarre à moi seul que tous ces objets  
réunis, je n'osais plus m'en aller.

Our first task will be to examine and characterise the notions of tension and equilibrium that, in our view, inform and crucially control Reverdy's broad consciousness and, more importantly, his creative work. Here we shall present an argument that it will be our task to support and confirm in the second part of our exploration where we shall establish or briefly reaffirm, as needs be, the systematic relevance of our argument with respect to Reverdy's view of man's natural condition, his aesthetic doctrine and his creation proper.

Reverdy's entire written opus, from his poetry and contes to his long-elaborated aesthetic theory and psychological-cum-philosophical notes, is characterised by a tension and an equilibrium to whose significance he is, in fact, most sensitively attuned. Moreover, as we shall see, tension

and equilibrium are two sides of the same coin, involving two modes of looking at the same essential situation. When, for example in En Vrac, Reverdy speaks of artistic attainment as demanding "[la] plus haute tension des plus précieuses facultés", <sup>87</sup> it is clear that Reverdy has in mind a tensely sprung and dynamic relationship of the poet's faculties, yet one that succeeds in securing their essential equilibration, no doubt not a static condition but one that is tautly elastic, allowing a form of balanced interlocking to come about in conditions of instability. If, therefore, we shall seek initially to separate the two notions, we shall do so only to see better how the various component aspects of tension and equilibrium dovetail one with the other.

To begin with the element of tension in Reverdy's imagination, we might initially characterise it as involving a perception of the very polarisation and vacillation of which we have just been speaking. That is to say that it points to the elements of change and relativity, conflict and opposition, inherent in the world's natural phenomenality and complicated by Reverdy's own relative and vacillating perception of it. Tension is thus a sign of distance between, whether it be distance between things or states of the world themselves, or between the poet's experience of the world and his creative conception of it. Tension, for Reverdy, posits a continually changing and multi-faceted problematic (or 'series' of problematics), inasmuch as it results from the perception of disparate, polarised and divergent elements and, furthermore, creates a climate of often intense strain and even anguish stemming both from the fact of distance and divergence, and from the difficulty of attempted convergence or reconciliation. It is here, moreover, that we may best broach the question of equilibrium. For it is evident throughout Reverdy's work that tension as problematic, with its perception of divergence, vacillation and so on, is not acceptable

to Reverdy, who strives in fact at all times to transform problematic into dialectic, to temper divergence and distance with relationship and nearness. In short, to incorporate tension into equilibrium. For if tension is necessary, indeed inevitable, stemming directly from the natural mode of being of world and self, equilibrium too is necessary, though, as we shall see, more in the sense that it is needed and sought after by Reverdy than in the sense of its inevitability. In other words, although, as we have seen, a certain degree of equilibrium may be associated with the facts of fluctuation and vacillation, even such equilibrium depends at least partially on the will and desire the self applies to his perceptions and sensations, and, most certainly, equilibrium in the purely poetic sphere depends to an even greater extent upon the poet's (albeit perhaps intuitive) effort to ensure equilibration, however tense it may be.

In effect, Reverdyan equilibration demands a putting into relation and counterbalance -- of things, states, percepts, affects -- , a replacement of a purely oppositional problematic by the reconciliations and resolutions of dialectic. Equilibrium thus counteracts the tensions of hiatus and imbalance by postulating a degree of nearness. It tends to minimise the fact of the distance between the various extremes of swinging or vacillation by insisting upon the fact of perceptual, emotive or imaginative movement between extremes, the fact that pendulous movement offers in itself a kind of minimal stability within instability, a kind of dynamic equilibrium made up of forces of divergence and vacillation. Whilst tension is thus an expression of the distance and conflict between phenomena and states of being, tension cannot be separated from Reverdy's conception of the act of equilibration which involves essentially a reversal of perspective from negative to positive, an effort of resolution rather than a subsiding into acceptance of the disturbing aspects of the facts of instability,

vacillation and hiatus. Equilibrium thus embraces tension and all that it implies and, indeed, may even be said to pull tighter and tauter the thread that separates phenomena, emotions, conditions of being, by minimising the extent of hiatus and vacillation between polarised elements. Reverdy argues on one occasion that both in life and art "il s'agit de trouver l'équilibre dans l'instable", but he goes on to suggest that, whereas in life "on ne souhaite qu'un équilibre adapté le plus exactement possible au temps qui passe", in art "l'ambition est d'atteindre à une sorte d'équilibre absolu défiant le temps".<sup>88</sup> It should be noted, however, that art's special equilibrium is not deemed assured or assurable, but merely ideally desirable and perhaps temporally absolute and we shall in fact argue that, if Reverdy's poetry is in various ways imbued with an element of equilibrium, this equilibrium is crucially dynamic, fragile and tensely eked out in conditions of apparent imbalance. As Reverdy says, moreover, with respect to equilibrium in both realms, of life and art, "le rapport entre l'instabilité et l'équilibre est ce à quoi l'on pense le moins".<sup>89</sup> And indeed it is, hence, partly, our present discussion. In conclusion to this general argument, then, let us say that equilibrium, for Reverdy, resides not in a state, not in being in a state of rest, congealed relationship or definitive stabilisation, but rather in the possibility of joining or counterbalancing, of establishing a frequently paradoxical and poetically 'magical' link or balance between opposing and unequal elements. In this way, the relationships between such elements are often very tensely articulated and equilibrium is thus extremely tenuous and delicate. In Reverdy's poetry this can be seen to be particularly so, both at the level of pure thematics and in the equilibrating relation between content and form, thematics and signifying structure. We shall now proceed to a brief discussion of such matters

in their specific and important application to Reverdy's conception of his natural condition, his aesthetic theory, and by far most significantly, his creative work.

### The Natural Condition

Man's natural condition is, according to Reverdy's conception of it and as we have seen increasingly throughout our study, fraught with difficulty, frustration and anguish which, astonishingly, do not entirely deprive him of pleasure whilst at the same time provoking him to seek elsewhere than in this natural condition a delicate transcendence and tense equilibration of its effects. Man's natural condition is precisely that realm of being wherein the world's instability and change, along with his own ever-fluctuating and conflicting effects of heart, mind and senses, are most acutely experienced. This does not mean that equilibrium is entirely impossible at this level of being -- we have already heard Reverdy speak of the odd possibility of counterbalancing with a small positive weight the force of a vastly excessive negative one,<sup>90</sup> and we have just borne witness to his expression of the desire for a flexible, highly relative equilibrium salvaged from the midst of instability.<sup>91</sup> Any equilibrium available, then, in the natural condition, is, for Reverdy, one that is inherently unstable, constantly adapting itself to the dynamic, becoming state of the world and man's relationship with it. A common and most telling tendency of Reverdy when dealing with basic existential factors, is to evoke rather tersely the possibility of some viable equilibrium by ensuring merely recognition, rather than marriage or resolution, of given extremes of consciousness. The self finds himself therefore exposed in his natural condition now to one extreme state -- pain, loss, enslavement, death -- , now to another -- joy, victory, freedom, vitality -- , yet the only equilibrium he can hope to achieve would seem to lie within

the unstable, vacillating movement between such states. For in such a condition "il y a les salles de festins, les salles de bal, il y a aussi les salles de torture"; <sup>92</sup> the self is agonisingly and confusingly exposed to "des grimaces de joie aux rides de douleur", <sup>93</sup> he is, "sans être battu ni vainqueur/A moitié libre et esclave"; <sup>94</sup> his fateful condition decrees that "[il s'] attarde/Pour perdre/Pour gagner/Au hasard des chemins/Ce qu'il faut pour pleurer/Ce qu'il faut pour sourire/Et attendre le sang/Du jour au lendemain", <sup>95</sup> his unstable natural mode of being obliging him to "savoir vivre et mourir/Dans la même tempête/D'un même glissement", <sup>96</sup> to eke out between the conflicting pressures of joyous vigour and desperate deprivation an equilibrium that is most fragile and often only implicitly voiced. This, one might say, is the equilibrium of pure chance, of dual and unpredictable possibility, an equilibrium that demands risk and appreciates the intrinsic value of what Reverdy terms in his prefatory poem 'La liberté des mers', "l'angoissante incertitude", <sup>97</sup> the paradoxically inestimable worth of 'golden' uncertainty that, besetting us with incessant strain and tension, may nevertheless succeed in providing us with that magical, minimal something that will restore some sensation of equilibrium to our natural condition. <sup>98</sup>

Moreover, even when Reverdy expresses overtly, as he may well do, a specific relationship between the polarities of his existence, the tensions of such resolutions are often extreme. The conclusion to one of Reverdy's earliest poems, 'Marche forcée', from Poèmes en prose, bears classic witness to this, exposing as it does a lucid yet anguishingly paradoxical Weltanschauung that converts despair into strength and equates fatigue with rest: "Cependant, chaque jour qui te désespère te soutient. Mais va, le mouvement, le mouvement et pour le repos ta fatigue". <sup>99</sup> For a man who was obsessed with the problems and frustrations of hiatus,

vacillation and the movement towards death and nothingness in his effort of attainment and stabilisation, the temptations of paradoxical resolution of such problems must have been great. This is by no means to suggest that such resolution was inadequate or contrived, but on the contrary that, in order to cope at all with his natural condition -- and this may be said to apply also to Reverdy's aesthetic formulae as to the 'victory' of his poetry --, simplistic solutions had to be eschewed in favour of complex, even seemingly enigmatic and contradictory solutions which alone are able to mitigate Reverdy's sense of dilemma and offer a measure of equilibrium, albeit most tense. For this to be possible, the mind of Reverdy the man and the poet, whether it applies itself to his natural condition or to a purely creative solution of the latter, must be capable of an immense suppleness and power of equilibration in its astonishing and "vertigineuse pesée des forces ennemies".<sup>100</sup>

#### The Image: A Matter of Justesse

The tensions of equilibrium are to be found to no less an extent throughout Reverdy's aesthetic theory and in order to elaborate them we shall engage in a succinct analysis of the principle features of Reverdy's understanding of the act of poetic creation as it relates in particular to his highly influential conception of the image's constitution. Although initially our analysis here will reveal an occasional element of overlapping with our earlier discussion of Reverdy's poetics and his conception of the mind, we have preferred to present his theory of the image in its entirety in order to allow a full appreciation of the extent to which it is structured in vital conformity with the principles of tension and equilibrium that concern us.<sup>101</sup>

Poetic language and the image in particular have for Reverdy a dual function. Not only do they permit a desired closing of the natural

gap between phenomena, but they allow a humanisation of the world by the poet to come about, a humanisation which, as we have already seen, leads to the attainment of that especially prized measure of consubstantiality of self and world. "L'homme commence à l'image", Reverdy explains in En Vrac, "qui est l'instrument primitif presque unique d'humanisation de l'univers. Les choses ne sont que ce qu'elles sont -- il n'y a pas dans les choses autre chose que ce qu'elles sont, sauf l'homme qui s'y est introduit et les rend humaines et se les approprie par l'image". <sup>102</sup>

And in 'La fonction poétique', a text written at approximately the same time, Reverdy offers a further clarification, pointing to the essential nature of consubstantiality via a humanising verbal and especially metaphorical transmutation: "[L'image] est l'acte magique de transmutation du réel extérieur en réel intérieur, sans lequel l'homme n'aurait jamais pu surmonter l'obstacle inconcevable que la nature dressait devant lui". <sup>103</sup>

In this way a tense and miraculous resolution of the self-world dialectic is achieved via a putting into intimate relation of the phenomena of the world and the poet who makes them his own, introducing himself into them in order to fully appropriate them. Natural hiatus and unrelatedness are thus magically, tensely attenuated and counterbalanced by the poet's process of humanisation and bringing together in which any anguishing natural relativity is replaced by a self-controlled, a poetically controlled relativity, a form of reality that is truly with and of the poet.

The role of the mind in the formation of the image, as again with regard to poetic creation in all its aspects, is considered by Reverdy to be crucial, though once more the precise manner of its functioning is characterised by paradox and tension, and the notional equilibrium Reverdy posits in the mind's specifically poetic mode of operation is tautly articulated. <sup>104</sup> As we have seen earlier, on the one hand Reverdy is

drawn to an appreciation of the degree of rationality, control and discipline affecting metaphoric formation. Creation and the fabrication of the image demand in this perspective what Reverdy thinks of as an outgoing, wilful gesture of penetration and grasping.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand Reverdy is sensitive to the fact that in the act of creation and the constitution of the image, the operation of the mind is not governed exclusively by a process of cold intellectuality and dry selection, but is in effect based on a two-way movement involving both active seizure and appropriation, assimilation and 'passive' approval.<sup>106</sup> The creative functioning of the mind is thus "une forme spéciale de la pensée", the poet's fecund dream which shows that the creative 'image-ining' act is not only welcoming and passively embracing, but equally orientated towards penetration and active seizure.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, pushing still further this argument of the poet's somewhat passive receipt of his creative and metaphoric data and rendering even more taut the relationship between creative control and freedom, Reverdy may stress the spontaneous, unforeseeable character of the image's arrival.<sup>108</sup> If, therefore, Reverdy is able to say that the image is produced by "un acte d'attention volontaire", he must equally say, in order to conform to the matrix of his imagination, that the image shuns artificial engineering, contrived fabrication: "Il ne s'agit pas de faire une image, il faut qu'elle arrive sur ses propres ailes".<sup>109</sup> In this perspective the creation of the image can no longer be limited to some notion of stiff mental constraint. Reverdy at times explicitly argues the image's uncontrollability.<sup>110</sup> The operation the mind engages in is one of subtle but fundamentally chancy speculation.<sup>111</sup> In the drawing-together or nearing process involved in the creation of those relationships constituting the image, the role played by chance, by the arbitrary, seeks to establish itself as of equal importance with that assumed by choice,

seizure and control. In this way, as we have seen, art becomes, in the delicately nuanced words of Reverdy, "une forme de jeu de l'amour et du hasard".<sup>112</sup> Once more the Reverdyan imagination tends to construe the act of the image's constitution as carrying with it a certain notion of partially passive receipt. The arrival of the anomalous, "l'absurde et l'irrationnel", is not specifically summoned.<sup>113</sup> The poet's mind, as we have shown, may thus initiate a general volitional drive, a certain 'intentionality' directed towards the unformed image. But the mind must wait for the image to form and reveal itself, before converting its attente into activity. The fertile offerings of chance are essential and arrive of their own accord.<sup>114</sup> The mind, however, available as ever, goes forth to meet any such offering and to appropriate it in a flash of intuitive insight (a gesture whose theoretical feasibility was questioned by André Breton because of what was thought to be its remaining implication of a certain degree of control and consciousness).<sup>115</sup> There is, in fact, as we shall show, a non-specifiable point of equilibrating contact between the two movements and it is at this central, pivotal point that Reverdy decrees the resolution of the mind's functional dialectic (between appropriation and assimilation, freedom and control)<sup>116</sup> to occur -- just as it is here that the image, indeed all appropriated/assimilated artistic reality, finds its zone of functioning, wedged in by raw nature or its idolatrous imitation on the one side and the purely fantastic on the other.

The act of verbal and metaphoric transmutation must, in fact, in order to achieve the aura of validation and equilibration Reverdy requires of it, retain the qualities of "le magique et le merveilleux",<sup>117</sup> whilst at the same time allowing the mystery and inexplicability of such magicalness to remain within the bounds of the appreciable, the intuitively comprehensible.<sup>118</sup> If secrecy and hermeticism are viewed negatively,

however, this does not mean that what is poetically magical, irrational and anomalous must not be allowed to exercise its persuasive influence over the creative mind. On the other hand, if the unjustifiable and the absurd move too far away from the appreciable and threaten to lose their aura of justesse, then the poet moves, both in the relationships posited by the image and in his art in general, towards the dangerous and dis-equilibrating zone of the fantastic, the brutal, the excessively and gratuitously surprising.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, Reverdy insists that the creative work paradoxically craves a newness, an aura of surprise.

Poetic language generally, Reverdy observes, "pour garder sa vigueur et sa puissance comme facteur d'émotion, est [...] constamment obligé de se renouveler et de conserver une certaine distance entre ses propres termes et les objets de la réalité";<sup>120</sup> and Reverdy similarly refuses overt comparison, blatant simile, because of his desire to foster a certain distance between the two 'realities' of the image.<sup>121</sup> To preserve this latter distance, as also the distance between the language of poetry and the things of raw reality or, indeed, the phantasmagoria produced by totally undisciplined and disequilibrated creation, is a fundamental aim of a poet such as Reverdy. His acute sense of the most distant relationships linking things is perpetually at stake, as the poet binds together in a new and revelatory "surréalité", elements that are 'more or less', 'very', or preferably the 'most', distant from each other.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, Reverdy may even be categorical: the greater the distance, the greater the surreality.<sup>123</sup>

Like the image, art is, in the final analysis, somehow centrally placed -- drawn between the nearing pull of primariness and the distancing, denaturing tug of pure fantasy -- and the questions of nearing and distance are as important there as in Reverdy's conception of the image. In the

case of the latter the poles are, of course, its two explicit or implicit component parts or 'realities', as Reverdy often terms them. But the image itself is neither of them. It is a locus for the touching of separates, what we have heard Reverdy call "un troisième terme", "un troisième milieu", <sup>124</sup> where, without imitation or comparison, <sup>125</sup> a reconstitution and drawing together of two disparate realities may be accommodated and something new may come into being. As with art, its central location allows it to lunge excessively in neither direction, for it must continue to reside at a point of reconciliation of the nearing and distancing processes -- with respect both to the question of its constituent parts and the question that art in general treats, that of the tension between the natural and the fantastic. If, then, distance is most desirable, it is to be understood that this is so only to the extent that no disequilibrium occurs and a sense of justesse is preserved. As far as art is concerned, this justesse is felt by Reverdy to entail a precarious equilibrium between the opposing pressures of dream and reality, the poet finding himself obliged to realise his tenuous salvation "dans une position difficile et souvent périlleuse, à l'intersection de deux plans au tranchant cruellement acéré, celui du rêve et celui de la réalité". <sup>126</sup>

To allow the balance to tip in one direction is to slacken off the necessary tension in favour of banal imitation or evocation of primary reality; to veer in the other direction is to risk plunging into the clear but dangerously isolating waters of dream, <sup>127</sup> into a purely gratuitous and deceptive functioning of mind and sensibility. <sup>128</sup> And as far as the image is concerned, on the other hand, justesse and tensely articulated equilibrium are no less significant. In the relationships posited by the image, Reverdy comprehends fully the necessity of surprise, distance and absurd magicality, but, as we have also seen, he appreciates no less that

the strength of the image, dependent as it is upon the tenseness of the relationships between the 'realities' brought together, will drain away if a sufficiently compensatory effect of nearness is not simultaneously felt. The strength Reverdy desires for his images will stem therefore neither from an excessive opening nor from a stultifying closing of the image's 'compass points'. The point of greatest strength will be one of extreme tension, the point at which the distance between the image's two components is such that a compensatory nearing must be intuitively observable and beyond which the fantastic or the hermetic would lie. At this point of maximum tautness the necessary justesse is present, perhaps in immediate appearance only tenuously existent, yet offering upon further scrutiny and absorption the greatest degree possible of mysterious revelation. <sup>129</sup>

The motif of justesse, with its intimately fused notions of appropriateness, authenticity, truth and precision, can be seen, therefore, to be deeply embedded in Reverdy's aesthetics. It is, in effect, the ultimately determining factor in the establishment of the relationships of the image and it affects decisively Reverdy's whole creative gesture, "la puissance et la liberté de l'imagination n'ayant pas, en définitive, de plus sûr appui que la justesse". <sup>130</sup> A process of braking, equilibration and validation is engendered, <sup>131</sup> whose full significance becomes evident only at a point of intense straining beyond which relationship is reduced to non-relationship, tension and poise to slackness and imbalance. A truly powerful image will offer, in Reverdy's view, a maximum distancing and polarisation which will be rendered optimal by the fact of its inherent justesse. There will be a maximum straining away from the banal relationship to the point where all slackness has been taken up and the image may be considered justement assise, as it were, without transgressing into the realm of the phantasmagorical and thus snapping the appreciability of the

relationship. In art as in the image, the attainment of such a tautness "suscite l'harmonie, l'équilibre et cette impression de structure logique qui, précisément, dans une oeuvre émeut sans duperie".<sup>132</sup> The data borne on the winds of chance have been intuitively sifted, admitted, at the optimal relational point where contact binds revelation and mystery into a necessary whole whose authenticity is beyond dispute. The image is neither 'real', as a stone may be said to be, nor is it 'true' according to any ordinary understanding of the term. Art itself performs, like the image, a magical tight-rope walk between what we have seen to be, aesthetically, two voids: truth as raw nature or its idolatrous imitation or evocation, and utter falseness.<sup>133</sup> The dangers of disequilibrium are doubly menacing. Error of judgment is implicitly associated with spiritual imprisonment.<sup>134</sup> Justesse alone provides that freedom sought by the poet or artist -- a freedom not from responsibility, measurement and decision, but one which embraces them in an understanding of their unique and paradoxically liberating properties. Justesse is thus linked to the notion of 'artistic truth' and as such is to be prized "avant toute chose".<sup>135</sup>

#### From Thematic Tension to A Truly Poetic Equilibrium

As we can now see from this preceding section, questions of equilibrium and tense, paradoxical relationship lie at the heart of Reverdy's theory of the image and, indeed, of art in general, in whose sphere creative attainment requires "[la] plus haute tension des plus précieuses facultés".<sup>136</sup> His aesthetics thrives upon dialectic and tensely expressed resolution and its subtle paradoxes and reconciliations are the very things that make it whole and give coherence to its logic. In the closing pages of this study we shall proceed to examine a different and final mode of expression of the tension and equilibrium that characterise Reverdy's consciousness, this

time in the poetry proper. Here we shall divide our analysis into two parts, the first comprising a brief discussion of the central problem as it applies to the thematics of Reverdy's poetry; the second concentrating upon the relationship between a largely negatively coloured thematics and the poeticity or formal art of Reverdy's poetry, which, allied to the aesthetics underpinning it, produces an effect of poetically transcendent equilibration with respect to any thematic negativity that may prevail.

There is hardly a single poem in the whole of Reverdy's opus that projects a constant impression of joy or even mild contentedness. His is not a poetry either of overt exhilaration or of a contained tenderness in the face of his experience of the world; and Reverdy's attitude towards the very act of poetic creation, to the extent that it also forms part of his poetry's thematics, never reveals a relaxed amusement or an exalting playfulness. At best, Reverdy's poems manifest a nervous and precarious equilibrium of the positive and negative aspects of their individual thematic composition. At worst -- and more commonly by far --, the burden placed upon small positively connoted thematic fragments in the poet's effort of stabilisation and compensation, is considerable, so that any final emotional balance sustained is tension-ridden and fragile in the extreme.

The poem 'Allégresse', from La Lucarne ovale, comes as close as any to achieving an expression of real jubilation on the part of the poet.<sup>137</sup> However, the opening mood is one of nervous strain in the face of the poet's ominous and only half-comprehending reading of the elemental signs the world is flashing at him: "L'air sent la mer/L'hiver à une pareille altitude m'effraie/On ne sait où naissent les vents/Ni quelle direction ils prennent/La maison tangue comme un bateau/Quelle main nous balance" -- a situation which is only barely improved by the poet's terse account of

his rescue of a drowning woman. It is at this point of bare salvation, however, that a movement of contagious invigoration makes itself increasingly felt as the woman's returning life and beauty transform, correspondingly, the poet's emotional state. The latter is, however, never stable -- "Je me mis à pousser des cris et à pleurer/Puis j'écrlatai de rire", Reverdy confesses upon the mysterious disappearance of the woman -- , though the poet finally re-establishes a condition of inner warmth and calm after the explosive catharsis of his wild cross-country scamper: "J'ouvris la porte et me mis à courir/A travers champs à chanter à tue-tête/Quand je rentrai le calme s'était fait chez moi/Et le feu qui s'était éteint fut rallumé". Essentially, the poem has described an act of at least tenuous recovery involving a pendulous, equilibrating movement away from the initial strain to a time of release and almost rebirth by way of the most fortuitous of incidents. In the poem 'La peau du coeur' of the same collection, La Lucarne ovale, the measure of tense equilibrium achieved is much the same, though on this occasion the movement from strain to release is typically reversed.<sup>138</sup> The poem describes, in effect, a tight arc from communion, contact, rare joyful laughter, singing and the enchantment of expectation ("On descendait à travers bois en riant/ ... /Par instants/On aperçoit du monde/Des maisons ne sont pas bien loin/Et on ne nous abandonnera pas/... / En allant au-devant de ceux qui revenaient/On chantait/Autre chose plus loin nous attendait"), to increasingly disturbing images of fear, distance, loss, solitude, abrupt closure and effacement. A time of togetherness ("Autrefois nous étions face à face"), shared pleasure and real anticipation has slipped by, has been negatively transformed and the poet can now only hope to salvage a few last drops of its original succulence to set in counterbalance with the dryness that has replaced it. In poems such as this that move contrastively from a past condition of possibility and

having to a present one of frustration and absence, the effect of real equilibration, whilst ostensibly the same, is somewhat attenuated and tends to produce an air of improbability, almost, and correspondingly heightened tension.

Even more delicately fragile and tensely expressed is the kind of emotional equilibrium that is conveyed in poems such as 'Le bilboquet' or 'Honteux à voir' from Poèmes en prose.<sup>139</sup> Here the positive substance of the poem is reduced to a stark minimum, so that the trajectory finally drawn by the poem achieves the most incredible of slight yet significant reversals, the most quantitatively unbalanced of gestures of emotional equilibration. 'Des êtres vagues' is a fine example of this, as also of the tautly professing<sup>ed</sup> and yet retiring, somewhat inscrutable significance of many of the poems of Reverdy's first published collection:

Une honte trop grande a relevé mon front. Je me  
suis débarrassé de ces encombrantes guenilles et  
j'attends.

Vous attendez aussi mais je ne sais plus quoi.  
Pourvu que quelque chose arrive. Tous les yeux  
s'allument aux fenêtres, toute la jalousie de nos  
rivaux recule au seuil des portes. Pourtant s'il  
n'allait rien venir.

A présent je passe entre les deux trottoirs;  
je suis seul, avec le vent qui m'accompagne en se  
moquant de moi. Comment fuir ailleurs que dans la  
nuit.

Mais la table et la lampe sont là qui m'attendent  
et tout le reste est mort de rage sous la porte.<sup>140</sup>

The self, like others in effect, finds himself poised on the threshold of a potentiality whose dangers only become fully apparent at the moment of venturing forth and full exposure. There has, indeed, been a stripping away of the cumbrous and the impedimentary, but this has entailed a baring of the self whose exposure seems only to lead to a heightening of shame and implicit fear. But waiting and exposure are essential to the poet's

purpose for they alone can seemingly bring about that readiness for the movement from nothing to something that may conceivably be realised via in-coming and/or out-going gestures. The need for something is in fact evidently pressing. If it will not come, present itself as an event, then it must be sought, a journeying must be undertaken -- even if it is the anxiously defiant running of the gauntlet described here, an experience of things which seem barely, if at all, inclined to mitigate the self's fundamental ostracism. Any positiveness attached to the movement evoked would appear so often to abort and the journeying is then transformed into desperate flight. However, unexpectedly, paradoxically, though not unusually, a recovery of another minimal something is finally accomplished and the dialectic between various forms of blockage and frustration and the improbable attainment of some astonishing transcendence, is resolved in an atmosphere of the utmost tension. As so often is the case, it is the hinging mechanism mais that allows this swinging round towards the minimal equilibrating adequacy of table and lamp, and the door, so often an agent of obstruction, is suddenly shown to possess a dual efficacy. Moreover, it is important to observe that for the Reverdyan imagination this minimum, these fragments whose replacement value is in itself only dimly intimated, assume by implication and of necessity a certain air of totality -- witness the 'Verlainian' dismissal of "tout le reste" with the resultant concentration upon those elements, at once fragmentary, reduced, compensatory and whole, that are, there, now.<sup>141</sup> In this way a nervously proclaimed minimal fullness emerges from the shadows of utter negativity to set against the latter its countervailing force.

The poem 'Honteux à voir' provides our final example of this Reverdyan pattern of tense imaginative equilibrium squeezed out of a lopsided emotional substance:

Il serait bien monté sur le mur qui longeait la route, un mur couvert de mousse, en pente. Mais ses guêtres! ses guêtres qui l'en empêchaient à cause des gens et des épines!

Pourtant les chiens grognaient plus fort et il avait déjà brisé sa canne. Alors le long du mur inaccessible il se mit à courir et, tournant dans la petite rue déserte, il se sauva.<sup>142</sup>

Beneath the concealing layer of its simple enigma and retiringness, the poem offers a revelation, albeit fragmentary, of the poet's most authentic being-in-the-world. In the opening paragraph we become aware of the both implicit and explicit existence of certain factors engendering an aura of incompleteness and impossibility that clouds (and interferes with) the zone of possibility simultaneously though mutely elaborated via Reverdy's use of the conditional tense.<sup>143</sup> The wall running alongside the road constitutes an effective continuous blockage to movement away from the conditions of a road which presents itself, as we have seen, as a classic locus of being and doing, the ever in-between place of tense and perilous journeying. All phenomena apprehended are, in the context, and with the possible exception of "petite rue", negatively connoted -- even the covering of moss on the wall manages to suggest the difficulty involved in climbing up, the later overtly stated inaccessibility of the wall, the rarity of its use. From the outset, in fact, the notion becomes unobtrusively strong of forces directed against evasion, possibility and accomplishment, and the image of prevention clearly pertains to factors that speak tersely of a disquieting antagonism between self and others, self and world. As the second and final paragraph opens, the elements of shame and fear are heightened by a consciousness of deteriorating conditions and increased vulnerability, though it is at this point of negative intensification that the pressure of menace is matched by the increased urgency of the efforts to find a solution, to turn impossibility and blockage into issue

and salvation. Such a salvaging of something from ruin, such an eking out of tenuous positiveness in the midst of an array of negative motifs, is not always achieved at the level of an individual poem's thematics, though usually the poet secures some minimal continuing, at least, some holding of the self in reserve, in a vacuum, as it were. Here, if such a precarious equilibrium and continuing become finally available, they do so, in fact, only via an act of withdrawal, a running that is a running away. The movement is from larger space with its exposure to people, dogs and thorns, to inconspicuous space with its deserted, empty quality. It is a shift towards smallness and isolation that, despite any ironical overtness<sup>144</sup> and despite the fact that such a gesture of withdrawal is also that keeping of the self for something else, becomes inevitably imbued with shame (at its being observed as such) -- and a shame that reduces any impression of salvation to its scantest positive value. The turning and opening available do not, cannot, therefore, solve the question of the frightening contingency of events, but, indeed, rather epitomize it. A stark minimum (albeit an imaginatively, emotionally essential minimum) of tensely articulated continuing possibility may be engineered, but the brittleness and instability of such equilibrium are apparent: risk and threat continue to thrive, ready to blossom in any changed context, either directly upon the ground of any salvaged fragment or, otherwise, immediately beyond its threshold at the moment of the self's renewed advance towards the horizon of potential contact and accomplishment. Given, too, the fact that the kind of barely equilibrating salvation achieved here is set in the volume's overall context of a fitfully pulsing negative/positive alternation where negativity threatens constantly to swamp the desperate acts of significant but half-obsured continuing struggle, the degree of tension associated with any measure of equilibrium

must be understood to be almost impossibly high.

To the extent that the tensions of equilibrium are embedded within the thematics, within the emotional constructs of Reverdy's poetry, equilibrium can be considered to be, as we have shown, most commonly no more than highly fragile, unstable and scantily adequate. Although there are occasional poems such as 'Allégresse' which achieve a more exultant, if still nervous tonality and a happier degree of emotional compensation evidently difficult to maintain for more than the span of a brief interlude, the poise, no matter how exhilarating, remains tense and highly strung. Most ironically, however, Reverdy's non-acquiescent feat of equilibration is, it is arguable, most strongly felt by virtue of the very existence of those poems in which the spectre of nothingness and failure is most visible -- strongly felt, but pushed out of sight, wedged into the metaphoric and syntactic interstices of Reverdy's act of transformation of the banal and the natural. The equilibration we are concerned with here is one between thematics and poeticity, the signs and semantic flavour of emotion and the signifying process more precisely responsible for the coveted aesthetic emotion; what interests us primarily now is the fact that Reverdy frequently does not so much speak of survival, equilibration and transcendence, as demonstrate or enact, via his poetic production, the rejection and domination of a nothingness that had threatened to crush him. The greatest paradox and the greatest feat of transcendent equilibration thus lie in the existence, and especially the manner of existence, of Reverdy's poems. Antinatural attainment is constantly obscured by the very traces of natural being and consciousness out of which such attainment has been spun. We must understand thoroughly that wherever there is, within the imaginative thematics of the poem, a surface pullulation of 'negative' being, at the same time equilibration and

'positive' being are quietly and deftly derived from the fact of the re-created, figurative form of that negativity. The poet may indeed be condemned to what he sees, hears and feels at the primary level of his existence, but the what of this equation implies not only the simple agglomeration of its component parts, for it includes within itself a how. It is this how -- this how the poet attends to what he feels -- that accounts for the poet's magical transformation of emptiness and torment into a countervalent form of at least minimal fullness and beauty, into that 'light and happiness' in which Reverdy considered Matisse's art, and in consequence his true being, to be steeped.<sup>145</sup> If, then, on the one hand, the poem may constitute a vast problematic, a vast mosaic of frustration and failure, it offers itself equally, via its figuration, its very poeticity, as a superb gesture of resolution and success, an incredible "critique d'or de la misère",<sup>146</sup> demonstrating precisely how freedom may be achieved, precisely how the poet is paradoxically able to "prendre [s]a pauvreté pour une grande fortune".<sup>147</sup>

This kind of dual mode of feeling and being is in fact evoked by many of Reverdy's poems. In the poem 'Santé de fer', for example, from Le Chant des morts, we recognize that, on the one hand and as we have suggested earlier,<sup>148</sup> the poet's being is diminished to little more than a locus of disintegration and skeletal decay, from where he may do no more than transmit a desperate signalling of his wrecked condition: "Ma place est au niveau des cercles désunis/Appels désespérés/Signaux de ma détresse/Voile désemparée/Carcasse de la nuit".<sup>149</sup> On the other hand, however, as the same poem actually tells us, the poet may manage an at least occasional transcendent equilibration of such a condition by means of his poetic riding of "la vague qui parfois soulève ma nature/Et rejette une épave à l'approche du soir". Such a piece of poetic flotsam, one of Reverdy's

miraculously salvaged épaves du ciel,<sup>150</sup> at once maintains and strains away from the immediate daily contact, the terre à terre contact, with nature and its emotivity. "C'est le carré chantant d'une source limpide", as Reverdy puts it, a perhaps finally sub-transcendent locus of limpid being and melodious form -- sub-transcendent because the poem is caught, poised, between the distress of its elements of natural being and the 'singing limpidity' of figurative being, the latter straining away from and just transcending the former. But, as we have pointed out and must now insist, the poet does not achieve equilibration and transcendence merely by telling of their occurrence. It is the how, the manner of telling that finally convinces us that any such process is occurring. It is the reality of the demonstration that finally persuades. The process of (sub-)transcendent equilibration must be spoken, not just spoken of, for it resides most authentically within the imaginative, creative vision underpinning the poetry's abundant modes of figuration. Reverdy's poems are clearly not characterised by the often flat articulation and discursive logic of his notebook entries. 'Santé de fer', like so many of them, emerges out of the blue, thrusting upon us its initially, unrooted elements. Its discursive-thematic development is metaphoric and elliptical, proceeding via the accumulated flurries of its at once separate and loosely dovetailed or apposed fragments. In this way the poem is able to create an inner coherence and offer a series of richly obscure revelations by means of an imaginative interplay of imagery and syntax whose degree of poetic écart is constantly shifting. The poet's place may be "au niveau des cercles désunis", his condition that of the capsized vessel splintered into its corpse-like debris and flashing its final and futile signals of distress. But such a state is astonishingly counterbalanced and overcome by virtue of its being so articulated, so imagined, so woven into the fine

fabric of its complex and 'just' figuration.<sup>150a</sup>

Many, many examples could be given of this tense equilibrium between Reverdy's negatively charged thematics and a virile, magnificently restless imaginativeness. All would serve to demonstrate the tensions of being and nothingness, having and deprivation, that haunt Reverdy's poetry. All would point to the poignant paradox inherent in the dual fact that Reverdy is, perhaps more than any other modern poet, a poet of failure, a poet obsessed with non-attainment; and that he yet manages to achieve and to seize so much, to create, out of a primary experience largely hovering between drabness and anguish, that "critique d'or de la misère" of which we have spoken, a form of luminous and visionary being enabling survival in the midst of a dark nothingness. There is, however, no space here and, indeed, it is not our essential purpose, to elaborate and discuss in detail the many aspects of Reverdy's means of figuration.<sup>151</sup> What we may usefully offer, nevertheless, in order to bring out rather more fully some of the most characteristic elements of Reverdy's poetry capable of achieving this poetic mode of equilibration, is a somewhat extended discussion of one final poem whose strong negative flavour is constantly compensated by the ever-changing impact of the poem's multiple equilibrating figurative effects.

The very fine poem 'Coeur à la roue', from that powerful collection of Reverdy's middle period, Ferraille, lends itself particularly well to our purpose of rapid encapsulation of significant aesthetic or stylistic features of his poetry:

- 1        Pourquoi s'étendre si longtemps dans les plumes  
              de la lumière  
       Pourquoi s'éteindre lentement dans l'épaisseur froide  
              de la carrière  
       Pourquoi courir  
       Pourquoi pleurer
- 5        Pourquoi tendre sa chair sensible et hésitante  
       A la torture de l'orage avorté

Pas à pas je compterai ma vie rebelle  
 Mot à mot je lirai cette lettre cruelle  
 Et sur les épines du soir  
 10 Sous les pointes rougies du ciel à pile ou face  
 Je jetterai mon sort vide dans le fossé  
 Et les désirs  
 Et les retours  
 Et les noeuds trop serrés de la distance  
 15 Je laisserai sur le tranchant du vide toutes les croix  
 Tous les reflets perfides de l'espoir et de la chance

Dans les moindres nuances de la voix qui résonne  
 Dans les frémissements de ta peau sous le vent  
 Les plissements de ton visage sous les aiguilles de la  
 lune  
 20 Les trous de ton esprit heurté par le danger  
 Et surtout les émotions cachées qui se dispersent  
 une à une  
 C'est la mort

Le craquement des fibres dans la nuit  
 Le bloc taillé dans la chair qui durcit  
 25 Cette statue intérieure que moi-même je sculpte  
 Cette forme abritée qui devient nette et dure  
 Ce repli dans le coeur qu'on ne verra jamais  
 Ces lignes dans l'esprit plus clair que tu méprises  
 Le cristal rigoureux que la passion irise  
 30 Le rendez-vous manqué

Rien ni fera d'un pont à l'autre la lumière  
 Rien ne fera jouer les gonds rouillés de l'épaisse  
 portière

Il suffirait d'un geste à peine dessiné  
 D'un mouvement de lèvres sans murmure  
 35 D'un regard sans intention trop arrêtée  
 Il suffirait de rien  
 Mais rien ne suffira  
 Dans la nuit de velours  
 Masque du vide <sup>152</sup>

As the title of the poem anticipates somewhat, the central thematic thrust of the poem depicts, albeit elliptically and with a certain measure of obscurity, <sup>153</sup> both the poet's baneful and tortured experience of the world in which he finds himself and the equally painful sense of frustration and deprivation which greets his creative response to such natural exposure and ordeal. <sup>154</sup> The repeated questioning of the opening stanza <sup>155</sup> shows the poet at the edge of despair, on the point of succumbing finally to the pressure of a torment at once inflicted (by the poet's natural

condition) and chosen (by dint of the act of poetic creation); it implies the previously felt senselessness of the logic that governs all his being and doing, whilst conveying at the same time his compulsive, though despairing need to be and do, to submit to some insane inner imperative that obliges him to "tendre sa chair sensible et hésitante/A la torture de l'orage avorté". The second and third stanzas convey vividly the cruelty, the anguishing danger and the aura of death besetting the poet on all sides, in every detail of experience, and against which he no longer feels able or willing to oppose his dogged rebelliousness. Death and the forces of laceration, dispersal and treacherous chance have asserted their omnipresence and the poet is seemingly set in his intention to cast off what amounts now to nothing more than the empty skin of his existence, to dismiss forever from his view the 'treacherous' mirages of lingering desire, hope and salvation. The fourth stanza, richly obscure in its imaginative referentiality, succeeds in setting before us a series of self-reflexive images destined to conjure up rather more specifically the act of artistic creation in terms of its anguishing and rigorous demands. The whole stanza, moreover, lies somewhat in apposition to the notion of death thrust at us by the last line of the preceding stanza and is further governed by the terminal notion of failed endeavour, so that the cutting, sculpting, forming activity of the poet, his creative effort of self-formation by means of an intricate marriage of the forces of spiritual hardness and sensory, emotional volatility, is horribly shrouded in the same aura of death and failure that hovers over the disintegrating structure of his natural existence. Here, in fact, the emotional atmosphere of the poem reaches a new high point of tension as Reverdy manages to present simultaneously within the same series of images the notions of creative achievement and self-structuring on the one hand and, on the

other, disintegration, death and non-achievement. With the closing two stanzas the negative impact of the poem's thematics is felt in its greatest intensity. The verses forming the fifth stanza, taking their lead from the closing and climactic verses of the two previous stanzas, stress the poet's sensation of impasse and impossibility. He is condemned to imprisonment and darkness, to lack of access and non-attainment of objectives (whether these be purely human or phenomenal, purely in the realm of primary emotion, or whether the emotional 'separation' be of a more poetic, aesthetic order) and the condemnation seems unequivocal, quite beyond reprieve. True, the final stanza opens by flashing out the tantalising message of a seemingly continuing possibility: the merest something might conceivably transform impasse into attainment. But the possibility is clearly a purely theoretical one, a flash of light that is immediately snuffed out and whose absurd theoretical presence only serves to accentuate the actual degree of failure experienced, the poet's real sensation of despair before the smoothly lined walls of night's void into which he is slipping. Nothing in fact is possible any longer and indeed, ironically, the wracking emotional torture experienced by the poet can find in this nothingness the only image finally adequate to his desperately reduced reality. <sup>155a</sup>

In the thick of this vast accumulation of foregrounded negative factors, it would seem quite out of the question to speak of elements of equilibrium, attainment or even the barest survival. And yet, as we discover throughout our reading of 'Coeur à la roue', equilibrium, transcendence and attainment are everywhere, paradoxically in every fragment of the poem's huge negative mosaic of despair and defeat. It is to an elaboration of the principal aspects of this backgrounded and therefore less obtrusive mode of poetic equilibration that we shall give our final

and particular attention.<sup>156</sup>

The structural organisation of the first stanza of 'Coeur à la roue' exercises a significant influence on the poem's initial thematic impact. Great emotional intensification is achieved by means of the repeated, anaphoric questioning which in fact reaches a climax that offers both a certain clarifying release and a continuing suspension due simply to the absence of definitive response to the questioning. The stanza is, moreover, strongly felt to hold together, to present itself as a completed block of meaning, by virtue of its cumulative, anaphoric structure which nevertheless avoids lapsing into monotony by varying and sub-grouping its rhythmic effects.<sup>157</sup> Reverdy's images, of course, as we might expect, also make a notable contribution to the degree of equilibrium achieved between poeticity and semantics, perhaps the most effective one of this first stanza occurring at the outset, in that crucial opening verse where the poet seeks to establish his poetic margin, to mark off his poetic situation or context from everything that is now destined to lie without. The use, in particular, of an image the justesse of whose internal relationships is appreciable and which yet maintains an air of enigmatic fascination,<sup>158</sup> allied to Reverdy's use of the anomalous anaphoric series of unanswered questions, ensures that there is no mundane discursive or anecdotal entry into the poem's signification and that the mystery of the poem's strange emergence is preserved. Only when the aesthetic context is firmly guaranteed -- after the opening metaphor and the reifying image of the first two verses -- , does Reverdy offer some 'clarification' of the emotional significance of such imagery, though it should be noted that, even then, such clarification comes in the form not only of additional, albeit simpler questions, but also by means of the personification and reification of a further metaphoric surge.

The second stanza presents an immediate personalisation of the poem's semantic thrust, a further gesture of clarification which had earlier been refused and whose refusal had contributed to Reverdy's initial concern to firmly establish a purely poetic context.<sup>159</sup> However, as we may observe from the third and fourth stanzas, the question of identity, of the relationships between je and tu, retains an air of obscurity, of finally unresolved enigma, which operates, throughout the poem, not only a certain thematic tension, but also a tension whose value is unmistakably aesthetic, destroying as it does any effort of definitive thematic appraisal or discursive reduction.<sup>160</sup> The metaphors of the second stanza, proliferating wildly, combine with a variety of syntactic features to constantly undermine the negative emotivity and offer in its place the countervailing positive emotivity of a pure aestheticalness. The images here create no immense individual impact, being all fairly readily within the grasp of our appreciation, but their frequency, the variation of their composition and manner of impact (via techniques of animism and reification, with different degrees of observable grounding between comparant and comparé) and the fact that they leap from one to the other without any evident measure of interrelation or logical enchaînement -- all these characteristics join together to create a collective and intensified metaphorical impact which is immensely appealing despite the compulsive oppressiveness of the 'message' conveyed. The aesthetic appeal of the stanza's structuring is no less considerable, the perhaps primary function of the latter involving in fact a rhythmic distribution and binding together of elements whose metaphoric disparateness tends somewhat to push them apart. The linking of verses, by various means, moreover -- grammatical and lexical parallels and repetitions especially -- , into groups of two or three to create binary and ternary rhythms, is a

particularly noticeable and powerful technique. Verses 7-8 are thus bound together, despite their paratactic disposition, by adverbial structure and tense, as well as by rhyme; anaphora is responsible for the syndetic tripartite structure formed by verses 12-14 and links the final two verses of the stanza into a suitably intensifying and climactic single rhythm. Moreover, whilst the entire stanza is composed of verses with widely differing metric and structural patterns,<sup>161</sup> Reverdy compensates further this irregularity and disparity, and helps to tie the stanza into an exciting unified block of poetic effects, by resorting to other means of union and intensification such as the use of the et in verse 9 (a use which is of course also echoed later), the suspenseful inversion of verses 9-11, the repeated use of the future tense in the various rhythmic units and the bridging of the syntactic hiatus between verses 14 and 15-16 via the use of rhyme.

The third and fourth stanzas are also most noteworthy for the aesthetic allurements of their rhythmic and structural features. Verses 17-22 constitute in effect one vast inversion the elements of whose binary and ternary rhythmic units lead smoothly into one another with increasing intensity and anticipation until the suspense is broken by the explosive impact of the final, stabbing and discordantly short verse "C'est la mort". The verses of the fourth stanza, on the other hand, despite the symmetry of their grouping -- two phrases introduced by the definite article, the opening one possessing no verb but merely an adverbial completion, the second a relative clause; four incomplete verse-phrases of essentially alexandrine metre introduced by demonstrative adjectives and terminated by relative clauses; two final verses again introduced by definite articles, the penultimate verse matching the second verse of the stanza in its suspended relative clause, the closing verse, like the opening one, without

any finite verb form -- , form an extensive paratactic structure that is a classic illustration of this characteristic Reverdyan practice and whose effect is particularly heightened by the semantically suspended nature of each verse. Reverdy's technique here, whilst cumulative, does not offer the same relatively straightforward pattern of intensification we have already encountered, although, unquestionably, a certain tension and expectancy, present from the outset (because of the inherent ambiguity of the opening verse and its ambiguous relationship with the closing verse of the preceding stanza), <sup>162</sup> are built up with Reverdy's persistent partial suspension of meaning via the use of incomplete sentences, <sup>163</sup> and may be said to find some semantic release in the final verse of the structure. Of equal aesthetically equilibrating value is the fact that, although the stanza offers an accumulation of images, <sup>164</sup> their paratactic structuring tends to present them in the form of a great paradigm and almost in palimpsest-like fashion, so that each new verse gives a certain impression of superimposing itself upon the preceding one, erasing it and replacing it, offering a new choice of perspective and dimension with respect to the same problematic -- and yet the poem equally, finally, preserves them all, permits us to view en profondeur the multiple faces of a problematic, as also, simultaneously, the multiple faces of Reverdy's process of semanticising such a problematic. <sup>164a</sup>

The third and fourth stanzas both show, moreover, Reverdy's sensitivity to other poetic effects whose aesthetic force counteracts, subtly but indisputably, the negative thematics they carry along. A minor but sure contribution in this regard is Reverdy's use of rhyme and his sensitivity to phonetic resonances that may develop within a given group of verses. Reverdy's rhymes and consonances, irregular and, it might appear, almost raggedly distributed, never offer any impression of lulling. They

work, rather, to promote a certain degree of intensification and crescendo (as with verses 19 and 21), often mitigating the fragmenting effect of any discontinuous syntax by setting up a loose infrastructure of criss-crossing sonorities (as with verses 23-30). On the other hand, Reverdy's abandonment of rhyme in verse 22 is equally effective by dint of the jarring climactic stridency which rivets our attention to the verse. This sensitivity to the aesthetic and 'structural' value of sound is also commonly observable outside Reverdy's use of rhyme. We can readily observe it both in the third stanza, where a certain sensuousness is brought to the fore, at the same time as the stanza is increasingly bound into a compact unit, by the persistent use of the sibilants /s/ and /z/; <sup>165</sup> and in the fourth stanza, where the initial sensation of strain, brittleness and snapping ("Le craquement des fibres dans la nuit") is repeatedly echoed by the hard plosiveness of the occlusive /k/.

We may finally note also certain features of Reverdy's use of imagery that are particularly relevant in the context of the third and fourth stanzas and whose aesthetic function is yet another sure factor of that special equilibration under discussion. What we may observe first of all is the rich abundance and the shifting, restless nature of the imagery Reverdy employs, and particularly here in the fourth stanza. Furthermore, Reverdy's technique of forming the image and, indeed, the very 'level' of metaphoricity of a given image, vary quite perceptibly: for example, the intensity of the image of verse 19 ("Les plissements de ton visage sous les aiguilles de la lune") is indisputable, but the logic and appreciability of the image may be said to depend as much on the assumption of a cosmic hostility and hypersensitivity on the part of the poet, as upon any relationship existing between needles and the moon (needles or darting thin rays of light, we may assume); the metaphoric

process may be somewhat simplified by the fact of reification, as in verse 20 ("Les trous de ton esprit heurté par le danger") or even more so in verse 21, though it may remain complicated, as still in verse 20, by what may be seen to be a related aspect of the metaphor ("Les trous de ton esprit ...": thus the idea of a dangerous jolting leading to damage and holing), even if we can see simultaneously that this is in fact but one possible equation we may draw; or, as in verses 23 and 30, what we may take to be metaphors, partly lured as we are into positing certain possible appositional interpretations, we may equally appreciate not as metaphors at all, but as direct, though somewhat visionary 'observations' (that is to say that the poet is recording an experience of cracking fibres and missed encounter, which, whilst related by the poet and relatable by us to the surrounding images, may be said to stand essentially as non-metaphoric images of themselves, of their own inner forces, metaphoric only implicitly inasmuch as such forces may represent the reality of so many circumstances) -- this time the hiatus between stanzas, and the parataxis allow us to refuse appositional interpretations and to accept the verses as separate statements, essentially uncluttered by their predecessors. All these examples, at least partially and in different ways, point to a common and aesthetically important feature of Reverdy's imagery, namely the fact that we may frequently experience some difficulty in assessing not only, occasionally, the ground between comparant and comparé in an individual image; or, more importantly, the relationship between metaphors syntactically thrust together and yet held apart (as in the fourth stanza); but, most importantly of all perhaps, the general referential context or 'ground' of certain images which thus tend to refuse to reveal precisely what they are metaphors of. In this last instance, amply illustrated by the whole of the fourth stanza, Reverdy's metaphors assume,

by maintaining a purity which allows them to reveal and to hide,<sup>166</sup> to point in this direction and yet, at the same time, in that, a measure of semantic openness or polyvalence, which is their most precious aesthetic function.<sup>167</sup>

The fifth stanza, whilst forming a beautifully elegant metaphoric and binary rhythmic unit in itself, is in effect ultimately linked semantically and structurally to the sixth and closing stanza whose final negative thrust it prefigures by means of the anaphoric emphasis of a definitive future impossibility and nothingness ("Rien ne fera ...") fit to match the present, already elaborated sensation of torture and intuition of death. The two metaphors of the stanza reveal, moreover, some of the aesthetically functional qualities of Reverdy's imagery just discussed. The first, already somewhat elliptical with respect to its syntax, also manifests a kind of semantic ellipsis to the extent that we are unable to say precisely to what fact of experience the image applies, that is to say, once more, what it is a metaphor of; the second image is not, strictly speaking, a metaphor in itself, but only implicitly, with reference to the preceding verse or to the overall thematic context of torture, dying and failure. In this way both images retain an aesthetically pleasing purity, almost a visionary quality, not precisely without referential context (inside or outside the poem), yet not thoroughly rooted in one.<sup>168</sup> They tend to become, as it were, pure images of themselves, of their own forces, of, in this case, the 'prymaeval' forces of separation, imprisonment, impossibility, lack of attainment and darkness; and it is because of this fact that their aesthetic-emotional value is so enhanced. The sixth and final stanza, after this impressively categoric negative assertion (of verses 31-2), begins, as we have suggested earlier, by executing a change in psychological-emotional rhythm which

turns out to be purely apparent, purely theoretical. The whole stanza depends for its effect upon its finely balanced structuring. The first three verses, whilst constituting in themselves a tripartite structure whose purpose is to intensify the pure theory of possibility, form part of the stanza's overall binary rhythm. This rhythm, sparked by the repetition il suffirait and marked above all by the contrast between conditional and future tenses and the syntagmatic inversion suffirait de rien → rien ne suffira which, in turn are signalled by Reverdy's typical use of the swinging mechanism mais, operates an emotionally crushing (yet aesthetically pleasurable) reversal, an ironic return from fanciful theory to emphatically bleak reality. That such a final articulation of the poet's emotional reduction be conveyed by means of two powerful and delicately linked metaphors eminently capable of producing within us a very real sensation of "cette émotion appelée poésie", <sup>169</sup> is not only fitting but indeed representative of the imaginative equilibrium Reverdy works to attain between content and form, consciousness and art, throughout his creative work.

#### Disaster and Celebration

In conclusion of this examination of the factors of equilibrium in Reverdy's creative work, it should be affirmed that any equilibrium achieved in the context of the poetry, whether it be purely at the level of a poem's thematic forces, or an equilibrium between thematics and aesthetic form and emotion, may be said to be dynamic, full of tension and paradox. This is perhaps particularly so with the latter mode of equilibration which, although more finely transcendent, offers, as in the case of 'Coeur à la roue', no simple, fixed state of transcendent ease or relaxation, for Reverdyan equilibrium is only available through the multiple tensions inherent in the fact of the poet's inevitable need to present

content and form simultaneously, each dependent on the other. Two levels of being and doing are thus woven inextricably together and their simultaneous emergence is signalled by the same poetic elements. Reverdyan equilibrium does not, therefore, so much involve an oppositional relationship of content and form, for form itself can only succeed in achieving its positively valued aesthetic-emotional equilibrium with the largely negative psychological-emotional forces of the poem, if it succeeds simultaneously in making the presence of such forces powerfully felt. For this to come about, it is not sufficient for Reverdy to insist at the level of discursive aesthetic theory upon the factors of poetic achievement and ontological transcendence available in poetry. It is not finally adequate to merely speak of such factors, even in the at times self-reflexive elliptical 'discourse' of the poetry itself. The Flaques de verre poem 'La tête pleine de beauté', for example, does not achieve the most profound and thrilling of equilibriums just by speaking occasionally and compensatingly of the poetic mind as lumière, parure and pureté, but rather by Reverdy's speaking or articulating the poem by means of its multiple poetic effects.<sup>170</sup> As Reverdy indicates in a revealing note in En Vrac, it is astonishingly possible to have written "un poème où tient tout mon malaise" and yet, by virtue of even some single purely poetic effect, to experience an inner transformation and illumination whose equilibrating and compensatory force is quite exceptional.<sup>171</sup>

The way of the Reverdyan poem may indeed be a "chemin perdu", but that does not by any means prevent it from becoming at the same time a "piste d'envol",<sup>172</sup> a zone of soaring transcendence of its otherwise restrictive negative dimensions and one in which the poet is able to reach what Reverdy calls, with a fine sense of irony and paradox, "les hauts degrés de la famine".<sup>173</sup> In attaining such a high level of being able

to offset the seeming imbalance of the poem's emotional or thematic charge, all poetic effects such as those elaborated in our analysis of 'Coeur à la roue' have their contribution to make.<sup>174</sup> As Reverdy's above-mentioned En Vrac note shows, even a single poetic effect may be thought capable of producing an amazing nullification of the excessive weight of the poet's malaise. But it is clear that the more such equilibrating factors proliferate and pool their poetic energy, the more strongly the poem's aesthetic-emotional impact will be felt and the greater will be the positive charge of the aesthetic equilibrium thus generated. If we might be allowed to slightly modify a verse from a Plein Verre poem in which Reverdy evokes the element of chance in creation, the fine balance that can produce, "quand l'or coud fil à fil/Le désastre ou la fête",<sup>175</sup> we should say that Reverdy's poetry is paradoxically one that is precisely capable of articulating, simultaneously, both "le désastre et la fête". And we should add, in conclusion, that it is this very simultaneous articulation of existential disaster and aesthetic celebration, from which, moreover, the tenseness of Reverdyan equilibrium results, that constitutes both the most precious and the most characteristic imaginative feature of Reverdy's poetry.

Notes to Chapter VI

- 1 Cf. 'La bonne piste', Flaques de verre, 76.
- 2 See, respectively, Main d'oeuvre, 192 (poem's title) and 'Le reflet dans la glace Fête foraine', Plupart du temps, 353.
- 3 Cf. 'Epine' (Main d'oeuvre, 143): "La roue tourne sous l'eau". Things such as the water of the earth are there, at the surface (rim) of the wheel whose turning movement continues relentlessly and, as it were, unnoticed beneath. Also caught up in this wheeling movement is the fact of time, for the earth's axis not only 'contains' all of the earth's matter, but also all of the earth's time. Moreover, implicit in this motif, but expressed usually in Reverdy through his notion of world as a circular prison, is the idea of the wheel being an instrument of torture (cf. 'Coeur à la roue', ibid., 372).
- 4 Cf. 'Spectacle des yeux' (ibid., 150): "La lune roule dans la piste"; and 'La tête rouge' (Plupart du temps, 373): "à la ligne des dunes où roule le soleil". Man's movement with the earth, in the earth's turning, is almost always seen, at least implicitly, in the context of the earth's turning on its axis, though in relation to other objects -- almost always the sun.
- 5 'Nuit et jour', ibid., 338.
- 6 Main d'oeuvre, 28.
- 7 See 'Le flot berceur' and 'Le soir' (Plupart du temps, 361 and 175, respectively).
- 8 See 'Profil céleste' (La Liberté des mers, 122-3) and 'Quel tourbillon' (Main d'oeuvre, 53).
- 9 It is worth noting that Reverdy is in fact particularly conscious of man's tendency to find himself returned to what is felt to be his original point of departure (cf. Plupart du temps 43 and 263, for example), a movement that mimics that of the world's circular returning to the 'same place' (cf. Main d'oeuvre, 499).
- 10 Plupart du temps, 247.
- 11 Main d'oeuvre, 499.
- 12 Plupart du temps, 204.
- 13 Ibid., 211 (title of poem).
- 14 Cf. 'Bêtes' (ibid., 199): "L'ennui ne te quittera pas".
- 15 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 134: "Le poète n'a qu'un seul personnage -- lui-même -- foyer de l'univers. Il y a de quoi s'ennuyer dans la vie".

- 16 See ibid., 73 ("Le poète est un kaléidoscope. Il entre peu de chose dans l'infinie diversité de ses combinaisons") and ibid., 134-5 ("La passion est une recherche exclusive. Elle n'est pas dans le nombre des objets à atteindre mais dans la constance et la force que l'on met à les conquérir. Un seul, la plupart du temps, suffit à absorber les principales facultés d'un être toute sa vie"). Cf. also Julien Lanoë (La Nouvelle Revue Française, (Nov. 31), p. 812), who argues that "c'est l'unité du but [et non pas du ton] qui fait toute la monotonie de ses ouvrages".
- 17 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 73.
- 18 Ibid., 151.
- 19 Cf. En Vrac, 36 and 130. See also Le Livre de mon bord, 82, where Reverdy recognizes that the authenticity and promise of a writer depend upon his ability to "rester toujours et même devenir de plus en plus ce qu'il est". That ennui is an essential mark of emotional authenticity is also stressed by Jacques Rigaut when he remarks that "ce qui distingue l'ennui des autres états affectifs, c'est son caractère de légitimité" (quoted by Nadeau in Histoire du surréalisme, p. 179).
- 20 These samenesses are in fact mirror images of each other, in the sense at least that the world is thought and felt to be the same by the poet, whose experience is thus rooted in an element of sameness that, in Reverdy's case, is amplified by the fact of the poet's necessary self-centredness.
- 21 Le Livre de mon bord, 73. My emphasis.
- 22 'Cristal', Flaques de verre, 57.
- 23 Plupart du temps, 350.
- 24 Le Livre de mon bord, 173. The word 'kaleidoscopic' is used guardedly, to convey the notion of infinite readjustment of the minimal, but is not intended to convey any idea of ill-considered and inauthentic jumble. Cf. supra, Chapter II, n. 17.
- 25 Plupart du temps, 293 and 360, respectively.
- 26 'Cabaret', Main d'oeuvre, 508.
- 27 'Autres jockeys, alcooliques', Plupart du temps, 264-5. Reverdy's emphasis.
- 28 Main d'oeuvre, 168.
- 29 See 'Convoitise', ibid., 341; and cf. 'Coeur à la roue' (ibid., 373), where, again, the idea of a complete modification of the world's reality resulting from the merest of 'gestures' -- whether human or objectively phenomenal, the principle remains the same -- is strongly implicit.
- 30 'Au point du nord', Flaques de verre, 60.

31 En Vrac, 190. This is a theme which Reverdy has cryptically elaborated at a much earlier date, in Le Livre de mon bord, where we read: "Réalité -- tout en perpétuelle transformation. Cette transformation seule réalité" (p. 181).

32 In effect, in poetry, each felt state does become absolute in that it is rendered permanent, though it remains relative because 'modified' by its imbrication in all other component affects of the poem.

33 Ibid., 222.

34 Cf. ibid., 241 and 190.

35 'Tête déserte', Main d'oeuvre, 423.

36 Le Livre de mon bord, 222. See also ibid., 224, where Reverdy speaks of the pleasure experienced "devant un spectacle insolite, éblouissant -- qui ne dure pas d'ailleurs car le lendemain cette féerie s'est muée en quelque chose de lamentable et de triste -- un peu comme les déchets d'un splendide festin".

37 Main d'oeuvre, 411 and 402, respectively (two untitled poems).

38 'Vendredi treize', 'On peut bien mieux' and 'Sentinelle' (Plupart du temps, 220, 298 and 208, respectively). Cf. also, for example, 'Sans air' (Main d'oeuvre, 302) and 'L'âme ardente' (Flaques de verre, 93).

39 Ibid., 132.

40 Ibid., 135. André du Bouchet, in his essay 'Envergure de Reverdy', remarks perceptively that Reverdy's work in many respects "va sous le signe du flux et du reflux" (P. 309); and Gaëtan Picon speaks of Reverdy's tendency to 'establish' an emotional dialectic in his work (op. cit., 244).

41 Main d'oeuvre, 116. Eric Sellin ('The Esthetics of Ambiguity: Reverdy's use of syntactical simultaneity', in M.-A. Caws, About French Poetry from Dada to Tel Quel, Detroit: Wayne State Univ., 1974, pp. 112-25) stresses the importance of simultaneity in Reverdy, but purely from a stylistic point of view (cf. infra, our analysis of 'Coeur à la roue'), whereas it is important to stress also what this implies imaginatively and emotionally for Reverdy.

42 See 'Recueil de temps', Flaques de verre, 49 and 'Les jockeys mécaniques', Plupart du temps, 255, respectively.

43 See 'Faux site', La Liberté des mers, 39 and 'Pas plus loin', Plupart du temps, 346 ("Le monde vu d'un peu plus loin/Sous un autre angle"), respectively.

44 Cf. our above discussion, 'The World as Change and The Question of Relativity'.

45 The more the reader has 'traversed' the poem sequentially, the more sequence tends to be, as it were, 'replaced' by simultaneity.

46 The term 'eventing' is used here deliberately, for, though somewhat obsolete, it evokes well the notion of each verse presenting an 'event', an occurrence, the whole poem thus presenting itself as a series of events, as a place where things are 'coming to pass' and where the poem's components are 'eventing' also. Guiney is sensitive to the idea of the poem as "le registre de 'ce qui passe'", but finds it difficult to appreciate Reverdy's own reconciliation of the dual fact of the poem as Gestalt and a locus of dynamic internal elements (op. cit. 172). Mario Maurin, however, seems more aware of the idea that the poem itself is sequence, passing, eventing. "Le moment de passage", he declares, "est précisément, chez Reverdy, celui du poème" ('Le moment du passage', PR:MF, 66). His argument is only implicitly of structural significance, perhaps, but he is sensitive to the idea that movement, change, vacillation -- which are also the becoming of the poem, in our optic -- are constant features of Reverdy's work. Certainly, for Jean-Joel Barbier to declare that in Reverdy "la durée est remplacée par la simultanéité" ('Paradoxes et classicisme', HPR:ELA, 72), is to observe the importance of simultaneity, but it is to neglect not only the necessary mode of our traversing of the poem, but also Reverdy's own (frequent) indication of its structuring.

47 Main d'oeuvre, 88.

48 Ibid., 408.

49 That is to say that the setting becomes, changes, from line to line, from object to object, event to event, within a given poem (and, of course, from poem to poem).

50 The term 'anti-anecdotal' is used to remind us that Reverdy is as concerned as Matta with the 'désintégration du donc': despite 'sequencing', "l'anecdote disparaît devant l'ensemble nouveau obtenu" (Note éternelle du présent, 124).

51 'Les musiciens', Plupart du temps, 323.

52 'Tumulte', ibid., 331.

53 Ibid., 338. My emphasis.

54 See ibid., 81-2.

55 See Main d'oeuvre, 304-5. It might be noted too that in Reverdy the gap between passer and se passer is minimal. Eventing is, in itself, a form of passing, a bringing of change, a constant erasure and replacement of what was (happening). Robert Greene (The Poetic Theory of Pierre Reverdy) well appreciates the simultanéiste dimension of Reverdy's poetry, "its various elements [...] coexisting to form an organic, ateleological whole" (p. 15), but tends to limit the idea of 'development' (or as we term it here, sequential structuring -- other modes are possible, as we show in our final analysis of 'Coeur à la roue') to one of a purely anecdotal, discursive order (Reverdy's idea, of course), which leads him not to deal with those other ideas we express here.

56 Plupart du temps, 298-9. My emphasis.

- 57 'Le nouveau venu des visages', ibid., 301.
- 58 'Le flot berceur', ibid., 360.
- 59 Ibid., 327.
- 60 Main d'oeuvre, 62.
- 61 Ibid., 69.
- 62 Plupart du temps, 138. My emphasis.
- 63 Main d'oeuvre, 54.
- 64 Ibid., 421.
- 65 Ibid., 333.
- 66 Plupart du temps, 349.
- 67 'Feux sous l'hiver', Main d'oeuvre, 361.
- 68 'En attendant', 'Grande veilleuse' and 'Et maintenant' (Plupart du temps, 285; Main d'oeuvre, 526 and 531, respectively).
- 69 Cf., for example, ibid., 316 ("Le va-et-vient du mouvement des branches") or ibid., 377 ("Va-et-vient lumineux/Ressac de la fatigue") and ibid., 403 ("Le narcotique des saisons"), respectively. Cf. also, with respect to the notion of this wild, frenzied, dance-like coming and going, a remark in Le Livre de mon bord: "Cette recherche [du bonheur] qui fait, dans son va-et-vient insensé, la trame même de la vie" (p. 223; my emphasis).
- 70 'Une chance sur deux d'être compris' (Plupart du temps, 286); 'Dernier recueil' (ibid., 130) and Risques et périls, 113 ("un coucher de soleil autrefois éclatant à présent anémié de jaune à son déclin"); and 'Echos sans forme' (Main d'oeuvre, 32): "Et toujours la clarté succédant à son ombre".
- 71 Le Livre de mon bord, 225 (my emphasis). Cf. En Vrac, 207.
- 72 See, respectively, Le Livre de mon bord, 215 (my emphasis); ibid., 172 ("O tête! arrête-toi de penser, je voudrais dormir. O rêveur! arrête-toi de dormir, je voudrais penser"); ibid., 87.
- 73 Ibid., 34.
- 74 En Vrac, 113-4. Brunner (op. cit., p. 77) quotes this passage, but concludes that it demonstrates the impossibility of equilibration or reconciliation of the two poles. Our argument is that Reverdyan equilibration or reconciliation resides precisely in the dialectical, unstable vacillation possible between polarised states and modes of being.
- 75 'D'un autre ciel', Plupart du temps, 114.

- 76 'Main-morte', Main d'oeuvre, 390.
- 77 'Pêcheurs d'étoiles', ibid., 15.
- 78 'Tendresse' and 'Avant l'horloge' (ibid., 333 and 119, respectively).
- 79 En Vrac, 82. Cf. ibid., 116: "Aimer le bonheur, seulement le bonheur, c'est aimer le poulet sans os, le poisson sans arêtes, la rose sans épines".
- 80 In a rare note of its kind in En Vrac (pp. 19-20) Reverdy posits equilibrium as a stable emotional state very occasionally attainable as a zone of respite from the turmoil of high emotion. But, at all events, he firmly declares his faith in the power of alternation, of emotional vacillation, of movement, of insecurity, as a perpetually necessary and desirable pattern for man's existence: "L'homme ne veut pas être troublé ou rassuré, unilatéralement et pour toujours. Définitivement rassuré, il crève d'ennui et d'abêtissement. Constamment troublé, il vit comme en enfer. Il lui faut être ému et le plus fortement, puis calmé, apaisé, afin de reprendre sa force, retrouver l'équilibre et la sérénité d'un moment. Et puis recommencer". Guiney speaks of "cet homme qui aspirait avant tout à un équilibre" (op. cit., 45), but does not explore the imaginative concept of equilibrium itself.
- 81 En Vrac, 168.
- 82 Le Livre de mon bord, 33.
- 83 En Vrac, 57. Reverdy's emphasis.
- 84 'Feux sous l'hiver' and 'Pente douce' (Main d'oeuvre, 361 and 386), respectively.
- 85 Ibid., 481. Brunner shows, somewhat similarly, an awareness of what he calls a "flottement toujours indécis entre deux pôles opposés". This flottement he considers in terms of "question, doute, incertitude", arguing that Reverdy "n'a pas connu la satisfaction de pouvoir s'écrier: enfin, j'ai trouvé!" (op. cit., p. 85). Whereas Brunner is astute in his observation of the importance of factors such as vacillation, uncertainty, questioning and even the difficulty of attainment, to make this composite and conclusive argument is, in our view, inappropriate and, once more, to neglect not only the main thrust of Reverdy's aesthetic theory, but also many elements of his poetry (cf. our section on Attainment and much of the material of our present argument).
- 86 For a fuller discussion of this poem, see our forthcoming article in Australian Journal of French Studies.
87. En Vrac, 214.
- 88 Ibid., 32. Cf. René Guy Cadou (op. cit.), for whom Reverdy's art involved above all "une tentative de stabilisation de toutes les forces et contre-forces qui s'affrontent dans la sensibilité toujours en émoi du poète" (p. 252).

89 En Vrac, 32.

90 Cf. ibid., 168.

91 Cf. ibid., 32.

92 'La rive noire', La Liberté des mers, 70.

93 'Nocturne', ibid., 106.

94 'Espoir de retour', Plupart du temps, 120.

95 Sable mouvant, 50-1.

96 Ibid., 32.

97 La Liberté des mers, 19-20. Here, Reverdy tells of the ethical and, indeed, aesthetic value of uncertainty.

98 See 'Grand caractère' (Main d'oeuvre, 375), where Reverdy speaks of "l'or de l'incertitude". It should be noted too that, paradoxically, the acceptance of risk leads, in Reverdy's eyes, to strength (Le Livre de mon bord, 59: "celui qui est réellement fort -- celui qui a risqué de tout perdre, avant de gagner") and that risk is, interestingly, also intimately related to wisdom (En Vrac, 67: "La témérité est souvent ridicule, mais la suprême sagesse ne peut pas consister non plus à ne jamais rien vouloir risquer").

99 Plupart du temps, 15.

100 'La tête pleine de beauté', Flaques de verre, 135.

101 A good deal of this condensed analysis of the image will be seen to relate to our article in Forum for Modern Language Studies, XII, 1 (Jan. 76), 25-36.

102 En Vrac, 161. Maurice Blanchot, speaking more generally of the artist's capacity to 'image-ine' the world, offers a not dissimilar argument: the 'image' permits man to humanise nothingness -- that primary nothingness of existence which always retains a residual trace of being, which the artist 'cleans' and 'appropriates' (cf. L'Espace littéraire, Paris: Gallimard, 1968, p. 346).

103 Cette émotion appelée poésie, 67. This text is dated 1948, but was published in 1950, six years before Reverdy finally published his many notes in En Vrac, written over a substantial period of time -- his previous volume of notes, Le Livre de mon bord, had appeared back in 1948.

104 Cf. supra, Chapter III, 'Mind' and 'Dream', with reference to what follows. Here we are concerned rather with highlighting the 'tensions of equilibrium' inherent in Reverdy's conception of creation and image-formation in particular.

105 Cf. En Vrac, 5; 'La fonction poétique', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 65; and 'L'esthétique et l'esprit', Nord-Sud, Self Defence,

178. Cf. supra, Chapter III, 'Mind'. The poet-critic Claude Vigée (Les Artistes de la faim, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1960, p. 146) argues, with Reverdy in mind, that the creative act involves intuitive recognition, a seizing "comme par succion" of the flood of images and material pressing in upon the poet. His stress is thus upon the fact of a poetic attentiveness always ready to select, subliminally, what is appropriate.

106 Cf. Self-defence, Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 106. Cf. supra, Chapter III, 'Dream'.

107 Ibid. and cf. also Le Livre de mon bord, 113 and 131; and 'Le poète secret et le monde extérieur' (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 131-2), where Reverdy, speaking of (poetic) reality, declares that "peut-être seuls l'apprehendent et la savourent ceux qui se laissent envahir par elle sans la chercher".

108 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 32-3, Le Livre de mon bord, 156 and En Vrac, 5, for example. Such texts varyingly point to the spontaneity, the explosiveness and 'independent' gushing forth associated with the image's formation.

109 Le Gant de crin, 33.

110 Cf. 'Circonstances de la poésie', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 48.

111 Cf. 'Note éternelle du présent', Note éternelle du présent, 10.

112 En Vrac, 176. Cf. ibid., 238.

113 'Circonstances de la poésie', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 47.

114 Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 94-5, where we read of Reverdy's apt and relaxed wedding of Mallarméan and Surrealist thinking: "L'art commence où finit le hasard. C'est pourtant tout ce que lui apporte le hasard qui l'enrichit. Sans cet apport il ne resterait que des règles". Valéry, too, whilst inclined to laud the conscious application of the intellect, is quite sensitive to the poet's need to equilibrate the functioning of the moi pur and the moi spontané in a kind of attente active (cf. D. J. Mossop, op. cit.).

115 Cf. supra, Chapter III, our discussion of 'Mind' and especially n. 158.

116 The image, like poetry in general, permits "le mouvement prodigieux de l'esprit vers sa libération" (En Vrac, 5), but such freedom does not imply a totally unrestrained freedom of verbal expression, as Reverdy explains in his Nord-Sud essay 'L'émotion': "On ne peut pas tout prendre et se servir de tout sous peine de créer, au lieu d'un art pur un art bâtard. On ne peut tout écrire, employer tous les mots ni toutes les tournures syntaxiques dans une oeuvre de création sous peine d'en faire un inadmissible chaos" (Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 57).

117 En Vrac, 152. Cf. Le Livre de mon bord, 12 and 'Circonstances de la poésie', Cette émotion appelée poésie, 49. Here Reverdy speaks

of man's need for the marvellous and of the poet's strategy of writing specifically to discover those marvellous, unheard-of relationships between things.

118 Reverdy distinguishes quite firmly and significantly between the inexplicability of an image or poem and its incomprehensibility. Cf. Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 111.

119 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 31, for example.

120 'Georges Braque. Une aventure méthodique', Note éternelle du présent, 89-90.

121 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 30 and 36, for example.

122 See, respectively, ibid., 30 and 32, and Le Livre de mon bord, 112.

123 Cf. ibid. and Le Gant de crin, 30.

124 See 'La fonction poétique' (Cette émotion appelée poésie, 59) and Pablo Picasso (in Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 187), respectively.

125 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 31-2, for example.

126 Ibid., 18. Cf. En Vrac, 128: "Toute cette masse de nuages de rêve pour contrebalancer le poids de la dense réalité". Antoine Fongaro, in a mixed study 'La poétique de Pierre Reverdy' (Cahiers du Sud, 327 (Feb. 55), 269), points observantly to the consequences of this aspect of Reverdyan poetic equilibrium: "Le seul fait de maintenir l'équilibre entre la matière et l'esprit exclut toutes les esthétiques qui tendraient à privilégier l'un ou l'autre de ces deux éléments".

127 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 23 and 21.

128 Cf. ibid., 21 and 14.

129 As Reverdy also remarks, for this tense equilibrium to be achieved, the poet finally depends upon the reader. Without his ability to re-create, by discovery or valid personal addition, this now vulnerable strength, the justesse of the image remains latent, the aesthetic emotion it seeks to release lies dormant. The reader's adequacy is therefore, though uncontrollable, crucial. Cf. supra, Chapter V, 'The Abstractions of Triple Attainment'.

130 'Dans l'obscur mêlée', Note éternelle du présent, 123.

131 Pierre Caminade, in Image et métaphore (Paris: Bordas, Coll. Etudes Supérieures, 1970), suggests that the braking is to avoid temptation and vertigo (p. 20) -- which Surrealists tend to welcome. His stress is, in our view, overly negative and neglects the specifically aesthetic logic of justesse, which did not really concern the Surrealists -- in principle, at least, as Sarane Alexandrian intelligently reminds us in his discussion of what he calls Breton's theory of "l'irresponsabilité poétique" (cf. Le Surréalisme et le rêve, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, pp. 147-8).

132 'Dans l'obscur m   e', Note   ternelle du pr  sent, 124. Cf. also Le Gant de crin, 46: "Une oeuvre d'art est un   quilibre de forces, de formes, de valeurs, d'id  es, de lignes, d'images, de couleurs"; and Nord-Sud, Self Defence, 108: "La logique d'une oeuvre d'art c'est sa structure. Du moment que cet ensemble s'  quilibre et qu'il tient c'est qu'il est logique".

133 Cf. Le Gant de crin, 9: "L'amour du vrai pouss      fond en art le nie et le d  truit. Il y a donc une myst  rieuse limite que l'esprit doit savoir atteindre et ne pas d  passer". My emphasis. The poet Jean-Claude Renard (Notes sur la po  sie, Paris: Seuil, 1970, p. 62) remarks pertinently (one cannot but suspect the influence of Reverdy): "La po  sie se tient donc    mi-distance de la fable et de la r  alit   comme le lieu de ce qui reste toujours ouvert et toujours   ventuel. Elle n'est jamais ni tout    fait erreur ni tout    fait v  rit   -- ni tout    fait absence ni tout    fait pr  sence: comme situ  e    l'extr  me bord d'une rencontre et d'une co  incidence pr  tes    se r  aliser mais qui ne se r  alisent pas. C'est pourtant de cette limite qu'elle tire son pouvoir".

134 Cf. ibid., 174: "La vie libre de l'esprit, c'est de d  cider. Chaque fois que l'esprit prend une d  cision juste, il se lib  re; chaque fois qu'il pique dans l'erreur, il se sent encha  n  ".

135 En Vrac, 157. Pierre Caminade devotes a useful section of his book Image et m  taphore to the notion of justesse, as opposed to arbitraire, concentrating upon its presence in contemporary, poetic theory. He particularly relates its function to the question of an art-nature homology in the writings of Roger Caill  ois about poetry and Perse, especially. Surely, too, the notion of justesse is to be quite widely, though in different ways, related to -- for example -- Claudel's conception of 'Temp  rance' ("Elle est la mesure cr  atrice, elle est la forme de l'  tre,/Elle est la r  gle de vie, la pince aux sources de la vie qui maintient l'exacte tension", Cinq grandes odes, Paris: Gallimard, 1970, p. 103); to Char's expansion of the thinking of Heraclitus with regard to the resolution of contraries in 'antiphysical' harmony and poetic truth (cf. Fureur et myst  re, Paris: Gallimard, 1962, p. 72); to Jaccottet's view of the necessity of non-excessiveness, of the desirability of the tensions of contradiction (cf. La Sema  son, Paris: Gallimard, 1970, p. 20).

136 En Vrac, 214.

137 Plupart du temps, 134-5. Speaking not of this poem, but more generally, Emma Stojkovic, in her book L'Oeuvre po  tique de Pierre Reverdy (Padova: Cedam, 1951), nevertheless touches upon the fact that such a poem as this is "un moment tr  s rare de la sensibilit   reverdyenne, une pl  nit   d'all  gresse" (p. 74). The mirth, joy and even laughter available in this poem still remain fragile and somewhat nervously strained, as we shall argue, even in themselves.

138 See ibid., 157-8.

139 Cf. supra for the text of 'Le bilboquet'.

140 Plupart du temps, 39. For analysis of this poem and 'Honteux à voir', see also our forthcoming article in Australian Journal of French Studies.

141 The presence of Verlaine in Reverdy's early work is not by any means limited to such fleeting fragments: a good number of the early poems of Cale sèche (1913-15) show Reverdy wrestling to free himself from certain of Verlaine's (and, indeed, other 'decadent' symbolists') musical rhythms, metrical patterns and general tonality.

142 Plupart du temps, 58.

143 The conditional tense -- a favourite with Reverdy: there are twelve examples of it in the fifty poems of this collection alone -- is mainly responsible for this dual postulation of possibility and impossibility: it may speak of climbing and potential escape, but proposes in point of fact no more than a purely theoretical leap beyond the given space (delimited by means of the imperfect tenses with their stress upon actual conditions and objects of consciousness) whose nature is restrictive not only by abstract definition, but perceived and felt to be so, really and psychologically so.

144 The movement succeeds in fostering an impression of shame without definitive association: a certain ambivalence lingers on through the poem, containing the possible irony that shame may attach at least as much to others as to self.

145 Cf. Reverdy's essay 'Matisse dans la lumière et le bonheur', Note éternelle du présence, 155-88.

146 'Main-morte', Main d'oeuvre, 390.

147 'Comme chaque soir', ibid., 481. Cf. 'Il a la tête pleine d'or ...' (ibid., 401), where Reverdy speaks of that astonishing moment "quand la blessure au ventre/Ecoule son trésor aux franges du ruisseau".

148 Cf. supra, Chapter V. Cf. for this brief analysis our essay in Roger Cardinal, ed., Sensibility and Creation.

149 Main d'oeuvre, 428.

150 The title of Reverdy's 1924 selection of his poems previously published between 1915 and 1922.

150a This is essentially what Sartre suggests when he declares: "un cri de douleur est signe de la douleur qui le provoque. Mais un chant de douleur est à la fois la douleur elle-même et autre chose que la douleur" (Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, Paris: Gallimard, 1965, p. 15; my emphasis).

151 Anthony Rizzuto's study (op. cit.), limited though it is to Les Ardoises du toit, makes a valuable first contribution to the assessment of Reverdy's stylistic means of poetic figuration. A more intensive and chronologically extended study of such means is now needed: the analysis of 'Coeur à la roue' is a modest beginning.

152 Main d'oeuvre, 372-3.

153 This feature is part of the poem's strength, as we shall show. Cf. infra, n. 161, on ellipsis.

154 This becomes more evident in verses 23-30, but, in effect, given that all experience is, for the poet, inevitably destined to form part of his poetry, then all natural torture is bound up with his creative act.

155 I shall use this term to indicate the irregular groupings of Reverdy's verses. The poem thus contains six stanzas (verses 1-6, verses 7-16, etc.).

155a In his book La Connaissance poétique (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966) Jean Onimus concludes his discussion of the notion of la rencontre in modern poetry by two 'illustrations', the second Reverdy's 'Coeur à la roue'. The very brief commentary offered is entirely concerned with thematic or imaginative motifs and stresses the theme of le rendez-vous manqué, the failed encounter. However, I should like to take issue in a minor way with the final comment which suggests that "il y aurait un moyen d'entrouvrir 'l'épaisse portière': ce serait justement de ne pas le vouloir" (p. 105). Certainly, if this implies that Reverdy's only way of attaining any deeply satisfying 'ontic contact' is to operate a disengagement in order to secure a circuitous, transcendent engagement, then I should not oppose such an implication; but it is essential to note that the poem itself only even vaguely articulates such a logic of strategic retreat (cf. Chapter IV) in its opening verses: finally the poem expresses an impossibility that is stifling a purely theoretical possibility, and an involuntary sinking into the velvety void.

156 The reader's need to decipher, to initially establish meaning (rather than the process of meaning or signification), leads to this 'hiatus' between what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded. Clearly the hiatus is not real, not tangible, given the obvious indivisibility of signification and signifiante. I should argue, moreover, that this hiatus is not in fact, in Reverdy's poetry, felt to be great: the presence of form may often be more penetratingly experienced by the reader than with many other poets for whom 'semantic' justesse remains a significant factor.

157 Verses 1-2 have the same syntactic structure and approximately the same metric value; verses 3-4 correspond too, but in an obviously different manner; the final two verses are syntactically unified and offer therefore a new metric rhythm, one that may thus well serve to present the stanza's climax, whilst preserving the individual stresses of its separate components.

158 That is to say that the relation between the aery, volatile and flame-like movements of feathers (in the wind) and light, is quickly acknowledged, but the 'referentiality' (the specific referential, experiential significance) of the metaphor remains ambiguous. Herbert Read, with Reverdy's definition of the image specifically in mind, stresses that for the reader, as for the poet, the image gains its

"emotive power from the presence in the unconscious of a hidden connecting link" and argues that "there is no need, in any poetic analysis, to reveal that repressed connection", such a revelation possibly weakening the image's power -- presumably by drawing its poles too close together and thus slackening the tautness of their relationship (The Philosophy of Modern Art, London: Faber, 1952, p. 135). Cf. Artaud (op. cit., p. 194).

159 In The Appreciation of Modern French Poetry, 1850-1950 (C.U.P., 1976), Peter Broome and Graham Chesters appropriately stress the impact that an opening line may have, for reasons of structure or semantics, upon the establishment of the poetic context and the successful 'launching' of the text. Eluard's simile "la terre est bleue comme une orange" and Mallarmé's often intriguing convoluted syntax are given as examples. Discussing further the idea of structural development, the authors also point to the general tendency of poems to reveal, as does Reverdy's here, "a stage-by-stage deepening, intensification or personalisation of theme" (pp. 45-50).

160 The je and the tu, as we have seen earlier (Chapter I), seem frequently to represent a self viewed from different angles, dédoublé, split asunder emotionally or according to some inner analytic purpose of the poet. Here the notion of failed contact ("Le rendez-vous manqué") seems to apply to a hiatus between je and tu which cannot be bridged, which leads to a preoccupation with death and nothingness -- but the specific associations of je and tu seem fluid: now the implication is of a je sculpting himself, his own form (his tu, his poetic form and being), now the division seems to reflect a related heart-mind hiatus (tu-je), a hiatus between natural emotivity and poetic (spiritual) emotivity -- and, of course, the whole theme of je-tu (non-)relationship is predicated upon the notion of self-other (non-)contact, a notion which is also therefore present, en sourdine as it were, as, perhaps, the basic ground for the poem's overall metaphoric structure.

161 It should be noted, too, that the precise relationship between verses 12-14 and the rhythmic units before and after them, is quite insecure. In some ways the whole tripartite structure resembles what Rizzuto (op. cit., 69-73) terms a 'bridge phrase', a verse that can be linked semantically to the preceding or following verses. However, here, on either side of this bridge structure there is a syntactic break which does not make a relationship impossible but which renders it ambiguous and uncertain. This somewhat Mallarméan stylistic feature, moreover, because it poses neither immense nor insignificant problems for the reader, renders the poem even more aesthetically appealing (in Mallarmé's work it is often linked to a degree of deliberately fostered ellipsis that neither Reverdy nor Breton cared for: cf. Bachat, 'Reverdy et le surréalisme', Europe, 475-6 (Nov.-Dec. 68), 91. Fumet, too, in 'La poésie plastique de Pierre Reverdy' is drawn to speak of ellipsis in Reverdy's imagery, but relates this feature rather to Rimbaud, where he recognises the same immediacy and continuity in the image's formation (Intentions, 22 (1924), p. 7)).

162 Elsewhere in the poem, the significance of the opening verse of each stanza is sufficiently appreciable either immediately (verses 7, 31, 33) or by virtue of subsequent 'clarification' (verses 1, 17), but

neither case is quite applicable here and we feel a very pressing need to go back to see whether a link or clue may be available in the preceding verse(s) -- hence the possibility that verse 22 lies in apposition to verse 23 -- and, in fact, because of the paratactic structure, in apposition to all the verses of the stanza. We might stress here, again, that it is out of this kind of possibility, openness and syntactic-semantic richness that the very aesthetic emotion, appeal and equilibrium are spun. Albert Cook, in his analysis of the poem 'Lueurs' (Kenyon Review, XXI, 2 (Spr. 59), 215-17), is also sensitive to Reverdy's clever use of apposition.

163 Again, a functional difference exists between the relative clauses of the third stanza and those of the fourth: the former are allowed to operate normally, because of the final main clause, whereas the latter, whilst being complete in themselves, cannot function with utter normality because no main clause ever arrives to seal in and complement their own revelations. We might add parenthetically that Robert Greene sees, in Reverdy's use of these "appended relative clauses", a sign of the "unstable quality" of his writing, a sign that he is, indeed, a "poet of nausea" ('Pierre Reverdy, poet of nausea', p. 49).

164 Rizzuto speaks of Reverdy's tendency to move towards a technique of 'pure accumulation of images' (op. cit., p. 93). What is meant by 'image' here is not necessarily 'metaphor'. Our analysis will deal with this question shortly, but we might say here that what Rizzuto really means is that Reverdy tends towards a paratactic grouping of images (verses that may or may not contain metaphors). What it is important to remember, however, is that Reverdy always placed the poem above the component (image or whatever), so that accumulation and paratactic grouping must be understood to imply Reverdy's desire to combine a highlighting and thus asyndetic structuring of individual poetic insights and communications with a syndesis or combining of these same elements -- as with the relationships in individual images, however, the relationships between individual verses are often subliminal in Reverdy's poetry. There is no doubt that they are there, however: Reverdy's practice and theory of structure are equally in evidence; what may appear to be what Cassirer once referred to as disjecti membra poetae reveal an intuitive bonding and form a coherent aesthetic whole (cf. An Essay on Man, Yale Univ. Press, 1962, p. 146).

164a Eric Sellin (op. cit., 116-17) argues the "intentional ambiguity" of Reverdy's syntax (we should stress strongly the instinctive, intuitive nature of any such intention) and suggests that the kind of semantic simultaneity that his poetry engenders is precisely what would permit us to term it "cubistic".

165 The sixteen sibilants here echo, as it were, Reverdy's catenation of the elements of the poet's sensibility.

166 This revealing/hiding stance of the poet has been referred to earlier, but we might bear in mind this statement by Reverdy (Risques et périls, 166): "Sans doute, rien ne nous est caché, rien ne nous est absolument révélé, non plus, de ce que nous avons un si vif besoin de savoir". We might say that poetry (already seen to be hovering between truth and falsehood), in establishing its own reality, shows us that all

reality is capable of a certain (a 'just' measure of) revelation only, that in revealing to us one or more faces of itself it necessarily conceals one or more other faces of itself. This is so 'naturally' -- and it is so 'antinaturally'.

167 Each metaphor tends, therefore, to contain and proffer itself, its own enigmatic forces, whilst at the same time opening itself out upon other adjacent and impinging forces in the poem and offering itself in this combination of simplicity and complexity to the reader's need to appreciate and resolve -- by a re-creation that must remain sensitive to the potential and limitation of the original creation. Georges Limbour, in a rather unspecific comment ('Lettre', PR:MF, 134), hints nevertheless at this aspect of a style he seems to deem allusive and often loosely allegorical: "Chez Reverdy reviennent inlassablement les mots suggestifs, à sens vague mais multiple".

168 We have only to imagine changing verse 32 to something such as "Rien ne fera jouer les gonds rouillés de mon coeur" (or: mon esprit/ma mort, etc.), to appreciate the quality and impact of Reverdy's images here. And we can imagine how different these would be if this ever so slight precision and adjustment were made in every case of metaphoric usage or even very commonly, so that the referential context became constantly appreciable -- as it is, for example, in certain stanzas only here, in particular the second, third and sixth.

169 Title of Reverdy's 1950 essay. Cf. Cette émotion appelée poésie, 7-36. Julien Lanoë, reviewing Ferraille (La Nouvelle Revue Française (Dec. 37), p. 1026), perhaps justifiably maintains that "il n'y a pas d'exemple dans toute la littérature d'un style poétique aussi homogène, d'une floraison d'images aussi nettes et impérieuses, d'une telle plénitude d'accents, d'une tension si longtemps soutenue".

170 Cf. Flaques de verre, 135.

171 See En Vrac, 184. The poem Reverdy refers to is the opening one from Bois vert, 'Hommes de main Hommes de peine', and the poetic effect that offers such aesthetic equilibration is the metaphor of the poem's final verse. C. Day Lewis similarly speaks of "the overmastering emotion we [may] receive from the image", even if "the context is tragic" (The Poetic Image, London: Cape, 1969, p. 20).

172 'Chemin perdu -- piste d'envol' is the title of a poem from Le Chant des morts (Main d'oeuvre, 413).

173 The title of another poem from the same volume (ibid., 410).

174 It should be noted that Reverdy's poetry often employs other, in particular visual-typographical, effects to advantage. Our analysis of 'Coeur à la roue' does not at all attempt or claim to be complete, but rather to demonstrate the main aspects of Reverdy's purely poetic or aesthetic mode of securing equilibrium. It is interesting to note, however, a solid degree of correspondence between my findings with respect to Ferraille and those of A. Rizzuto with respect to Les Ardoises du toit (written 15-20 years earlier). A more general validity would thus seem to attach to Rizzuto's initial work, though much remains to

be done in this field of research. With respect to the visual-typographical impact of Reverdy's poetry, we might say, in parentheses, that Reverdy moved away from his original practice from his middle period on, though, inasmuch as the use of new typographical arrangements corresponded to his quest for new rhythmic and syntactic possibilities, his later poetry's continued concern for rhythm and syntax shows that his earlier work offered just one means of development and exploration. Max Jacob, moreover, saw clearly that in Reverdy's early work the fabrication of such a new 'syntax' (as Reverdy himself viewed it) involved (as we have shown with 'Coeur à la roue') an effort of rassemblement where dispersal (or discontinuity) may be apparent ('Présentation de Pierre Reverdy à Lyre et palette', PR:MF, 18). Rizzuto's shrewd related comment that Reverdy's syntax offers "the simultaneous experience of synthesis and analysis" (op. cit., 152) also puts us in mind of our findings concerning Reverdy's view (and mode of exploration) of the self in Chapter I.

175 'Crépuscule du matin', Main d'oeuvre, 383.

### Conclusion

To begin, as we do in this study of the principal, the obsessive and the determining imaginative factors and patterns in the work of Pierre Reverdy, with an analysis of self and world, is to become immediately aware of the extent to which both Reverdy's conception of the self and his conception of the self's being there, in the world, are characterised not only by notions of fragmentation and dichotomy, but also by notions of at least potential relationship and solidarity. Although poetry forces the (poet's) self into a dédoublement or a détriement that would seem to complicate the abundant natural schisms that already put strain upon his oneness and although such deliberate artistic division may occasionally be experienced as offering little evidence of a desired self-coincidence, Reverdy's general attitude is that poetic creation does offer the chance to overcome the self's original sensation of disunity and recover a sense of his 'simplicity' -- even if it is by means of a poetic explosion and exposure of himself. Similarly, poetry is, in Reverdy's eyes, the privileged and, indeed, sole means of closing the natural breach between self and world and thus preventing the self from becoming permanently sealed into his potentially fateful centrality. For this to become possible, however, it is not adequate to directly evoke or relate the natural, for self-world consubstantiality and a true and deep sense of being and co-being can only come about by means of a transmutation of the natural, a process that must succeed in wedding the aesthetic logics of heterocosmicity and porousness.

The movement whereby the poet may achieve such a transmutational sub-transcendence now may possess an explosive, surging character, now it may necessitate in Reverdy's eyes a more painstaking effort of attention and exploration. It may, moreover, take place either in the

horizontal plane or the vertical plane, drawing to it for its imaginative projection a number of privileged figures and motifs; and, furthermore, the movement is clearly understood by Reverdy to engage the poet in a form of exploration and elaboration not just of the world, but, indeed, rather of the self -- although in his multiple real and metaphorical forms of relation both to the world about him and to the 'other' world that he posits as available. If, then, on the one hand, the movement towards attainment may be colourfully and varyingly metaphorised by the Reverdyan imagination to produce a considerable number of fascinating modes and means of advance towards the zones of special appeal, we may observe equally that images of the frustration of the poet's movement towards the realisation of his poetic and ontological objectives (the dual nature of this search is repeatedly brought home to us) abound in Reverdy's work. People and things repeatedly demonstrate their hostility or else their tendency to recede before the poet's grasp and to refuse the special assembly he would impose, and the poet himself is tempted to withdraw from a contact that is often distressing. Only via a strategic retreat that enables the poet to secure a devious and miraculous engagement and contact with things and people (as well as with himself), can Reverdy finally solve a problem threatening to destroy him. Whilst, therefore, Reverdy's creative work and aesthetic theory certainly bear the clearly visible traces of attainment, it is important to appreciate just how much his thematics is coloured by motifs and images that signal his obsession with the forces not only of frustration, but also of darkness, death, sinking, falling and reduction to nothingness. Indeed, the later collections of poetry, from Ferraille to Bois vert and Sable mouvant are almost swamped by such imaginative forces and the overall impression they thus create is one of a barely

alleviated and seemingly incurable anguish.

The final part of our study, however, shows that Reverdy's work never quite reaches a point of fixed, definitive and complete emotional reduction: always there remains at least some lingering trace of possibility, some dogged and still palpitating sign of vitality in the thick of the most sombre of imaginative motifs, always the Reverdyan imagination seems astonishingly able to eke out via the minimal and the fragmentary an emotional equilibrium in circumstances of apparent extreme imbalance. Equilibrium is, in fact, the most precious of factors for Reverdy and, although seen to be characterised by tension, fragility and precariousness, is a factor that, with those of vacillation and relativity, governs to a considerable degree his conception of the natural condition as well as the structuring of the imaginative or thematic fabric of his creative work. Even more significant, moreover, is the tense equilibrium that Reverdy achieves not just in his thematics, in the vast assembly of imaginative motifs that compose his work (his whole opus or any single poem from it), but between the signs of what is, largely, an existential disaster and a poeticity that constitutes an amazing ontologically transcendent aesthetic celebration of this very disaster.

In any game of chance, Reverdy once remarked in Le Livre de mon bord, the best players are those who are capable of winning with the worst cards. His own work, in fact, offers a classic illustration of the practical application of this logic. In so many ways his poetry is a poetry of failure, a poetry that, despite its occasional pockets of freshness and plenitude, 'happiness and light', often only accomplishes the most fleeting and delicate of equilibriums in its imaginative and emotional structuring. And yet in so many other, antinatural, exclusively poetic ways Reverdy demonstrates his capacity to transmute

failure into success, nothingness into plenitude. Every syntactic, rhythmic, metaphoric and phonetic factor possessing some appreciable degree of 'just' poetic écart, permits Reverdy to snatch a marginal victory where defeat had seemed certain. Seen in this perspective, the whole matter of expression is, for Reverdy, fraught with uncertainty and risk. Indeed, to write at all is to journey à ses risques et périls, to accept the logic and necessity of risk, to appreciate both that the poet's adventure is often painful and anguishing and may even in itself be aesthetically (and therefore ontologically) disappointing, and that, allied to this ever-present risk, is the paradoxical certainty of the poet's immediate re-immersion in feelings of utter emptiness upon attainment of his objective of a poetic plenitude. It is for these reasons that writing is for Reverdy such a "terrible épreuve", for always the struggle to 'write the most beautiful poem in the world' must be renewed, always Picasso's exemplary courage and perseverance are required in the completion of the poet's almost Sisyphean task. But if writing is a 'terrible trial' and even, inevitably, something of a pis-aller, it is equally Reverdy's only road to salvation. Certainly creation itself ironically plunges the poet back into deficiency and desire, certainly Reverdy's poetic salvation comes about in a sense through his continuing commitment to creative work, to his ever-renewed effort to provide 'another explanation of the mystery'. But it is equally true in another sense that, for Reverdy, it is in the created work -- that remains, unlike the rock of Sisyphus, at the peak to which it has been raised -- that the poet may achieve the most significant measure of self-coincidence available to him and that self and world may be joined together and transcend, antinaturally, aesthetically, poetically, their natural hiatus.

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