

Derniers Vers

JULES LAFORGUE

Derniers

Vers JULES LAFORGUE

Edited with an Introduction
and Notes by
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INTRODUCTION

ALAIN-FOURNIER was at first so enthusiastic about Laforgue's poems that he went to the extreme of reading them by electric light. On January 10, 1906, he wrote to Jacques Rivière:

Je viens d'acheter les *Poésies complètes de Laforgue*. J'ai étrenné hier soir l'électricité avec le *Sanglot de la Terre*. Que c'est beau, même cela. Je lis méthodiquement; je trouve que ce n'est presque plus moi; et pourtant j'y trouve tout ! même du Maeterlinck. (Par instants, c'est frappant). Mon extase dure, plus réfléchie, aussi attendrie. C'est toujours une grande amitié. J'ai eu, il y a quelques mois, l'envie bête de lui donner des conseils.

Dans ses « derniers vers », il y a parfois des pages entières qui sont le dernier mot, sur tout, de la poésie.

Alain-Fournier's was not an isolated enthusiasm. Both Pound and Eliot, for example, stressed the importance of Laforgue's poems, particularly those written during the last year of his life. Pound called him "the most sophisticated of all French poets," and Eliot, in his Introduction to the Faber selected edition of Pound's poems, acknowledged that the poetry he wrote in 1908 and 1909 "was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue," whom he called "if not quite the greatest French poet after Baudelaire . . . certainly the most important technical innovator." Martin Turnell, with the characteristic panache of the early contributors to *Scrutiny*, went even further by claiming that "from a technical point of view . . . the *Derniers Vers* is the most important single poem published in Europe since the seventeenth century."

Yet many readers found it difficult to adapt themselves to the new idiom and the apparently perverse turn of phrase and thought. It is hard to resist the idea that this difficulty with the *Derniers Vers* arose not only from the poems' obscurity, but from the fact that they were rarely published, or even referred to together, until Claude Pichois made his selected edition in 1959. A definitive edition of Laforgue's work as a whole is still needed. Whereas, however, the manuscripts of the bulk of Laforgue's work are at present inaccessible, the manuscripts and papers relating to the *Derniers Vers* are in the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet and can be consulted.

The *Derniers Vers* of Jules Laforgue consists of twelve closely related poems written and published in the second half of 1886. Laforgue died in August 1887, and as far as is known these are the last poems he wrote. They represent the successful resolution of artistic problems that had occupied him throughout the previous five or six years, so much so that it seems reasonable to discuss the special circumstances of the poems, as well as the way in which Laforgue came to write them.

Throughout his life he had tried to discover a way of writing a poem the impact and character of which would be analogous to painting and music. Poetry was art, not communication. Even as early as 1881, just after Laforgue had left Paris to take up his appointment as French reader to the Empress Augusta of Germany, he had written to his friend, Charles Henry: "Je songe à une poésie qui serait de la psychologie dans une forme de rêve, avec des fleurs, du vent, d'inextricables symphonies avec une phrase (un sujet) mélodique dont le dessin reparait de temps en temps." The letters in volumes IV and V of the *Œuvres complètes* show that this desire was confirmed during the early years in Germany: he read art journals in French, German and English; he wrote articles and reviews for *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*; he contemplated a series of articles on the Old Masters, and on Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites; and, in attendance at court, he was able to visit the art galleries and museums of many European capitals. The excellent though fragmentary notes on painting and aesthetics in *Mélanges posthumes* make it clear that the early taste for Impressionist painting, acquired in Ephrussi's studio in

Paris, became, as Laforgue travelled about Europe, both more mature and more sophisticated. Thus his reaction against the shallow historicism and moral complacency of Taine, whose lectures he had heard in Paris, was not for Laforgue simply the rebellion of an anti-bourgeois outsider or intellectual: it was rather the reaction of a poet who was not only sensitive enough to respond to Impressionist paintings at a time they were scarcely known, but who also understood both the philosophical implications of the new art, and its significance for the poet. Art was preferred as a supremely important human activity, as a bulwark against industrial society and its values, as an answer to biological determinism, and as a spiritual substitute for the weakening sanctions of religion and morality. To this extent Laforgue was in the same position as the Pre-Raphaelites in England. But in order to write poetry which was similar to Impressionist painting, Laforgue had to liberate himself from conventional prosody, just as the painter had to liberate himself from the "classical" rules of composition. This he did consciously, in stages which are marked by the three volumes which preceded the *Derniers Vers*: *Le Sanglot de la Terre* (which was not published during his lifetime), and *Les Complaintes* and *L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune* (which were published in 1885 and 1886 respectively).

Of these stages, that represented by *Les Complaintes* is the most important, since it was a period of deliberate experiment. In poems which depend upon a free use of colloquial expressions and the rhythms of popular songs, Laforgue broke away from the formal Alexandrine and from the "language of poetry." As he followed the routine of the court and moved each year, with monotonous regularity, from Berlin to Baden-Baden, to Coblenz, to the castle of Babelsburg at Potsdam, and back to Berlin, he certainly had plenty of time in which to experiment, and to put his inventive genius to the test of new forms. But *Les Complaintes* were not an end in themselves: the experiments led naturally to the more sustained accomplishment of the *Derniers Vers*.

The letter to Charles Henry which has already been quoted refers to a poetry which would be psychology in the form of a dream. This is probably not such a loose expression as it sounds. What distinguishes Laforgue's attitude to poetry is his desire to

write poems which express the total apprehension of his sensibility: his total awareness, both physically and intellectually, of the world in which he lived, as well as the feeling to which this understanding gave rise. In Paris, he had been impressed by popular theories of evolution which seemed to discredit the bourgeois belief in a stable society, and also by the psychology of the unconscious, as he came across it in Hartmann's book, *La Philosophie de l'Inconscient*, translated into French by Nolan in 1877. The notion of the unconscious, with its assumption of a fundamental reality which lay beneath and was different from the pattern of life in society, liberated Laforgue's imagination by giving him sufficient reason for believing that art which derived from the unconscious would be more valid than that which "reflected" life by the supposedly realistic reproduction of superficial detail. Unfortunately, however, the poems which resulted from these first deliberations (which expressed in part, but too nakedly, his feelings of loneliness at being in Paris by himself for the first time) did not satisfy even Laforgue himself, since they were too derivative and too intense. When he went to Germany at the end of 1881, he suppressed these particular poems, but continued to read widely. And he continued to puzzle out for himself those philosophical questions which were bound to be important to any thinking individual set apart for one reason or another from the society in which he lived. Since religious belief seemed impossible to him, the chief problem was whether or not value or meaning could be found in any of the normal activities of life—work, love, marriage, reproduction, thinking, making. In Laforgue's early work this question is proposed in a painfully explicit manner. And even the *Derniers Vers*, though they are far more subtle, are informed with the anguish which derives from the necessity, or apparent necessity, of giving entirely negative answers; that is, the anguish of the nihilist. It might seem that Laforgue had to work these matters out before feeling free to write the kind of poem in which the "subject" would be absorbed within the structure of the whole. At any rate this is what happened. The adolescent concern for the truth, and the heavy feeling of alienation from other people, give way

—though they are never forgotten—to a more mature feeling for art, and to the desire to write a good poem.

The interest in psychology which led away from formal poetry towards the *Derniers Vers* was not simply a matter of epistemology. In a note which was published in the Edition de la Connaissance (II, 41) he speaks of

La rage de vouloir se connaître — de plonger sous la culture consciente vers « l'Afrique intérieure » de notre inconscient domaine.

Je me sens si pauvre, si connu tel que je me connais moi, Laforgue en relation avec le monde extérieur. Et j'ai des mines riches, des gisements, des mondes sous-marins qui fermentent inconnus. Ah ! c'est là que je voudrais vivre, c'est là que je voudrais mourir. Des fleurs étranges qui tournent comme des têtes de cire de coiffeurs lentement sur la tige, les pierreries féériques comme celle où dort Galatée de Moreau surveillée par Polyphème...

The problem that Laforgue attempted to resolve was what kind of poetry would be appropriate for "l'Afrique intérieure" de notre inconscient domaine." His line of experiment was exactly the same one as led novelists to the technique of the stream of consciousness, which created the illusion of expressing reality more accurately or honestly than narrative or descriptive writing. Thus Laforgue came to write a series of tone poems with words, in which associations and feelings were woven together without the interference of logic or artificial organization. This in turn gave him greater artistic liberty. It permitted him to give play to the desire for originality which his evolutionary attitude to life and literature implied, so that the verbal virtuosity, which seemed in the early poems to be mere searching after effect, is made appropriate to the Impressionist purposes of the *Derniers Vers*. It permitted him to express the unresolved complexity of experience as it impinged upon a particular sensibility, and to explore—with a style that had been created for the purpose—"des mondes sous-marins qui fermentent inconnus."

Laforgue wrote the *Derniers Vers* during the last few months of his five-year stay in Germany. Though it was the crucial period of his life, few of his friends appear to have realized his serious purposes. This was partly because he had successfully concealed

himself behind the pose of the conventional fin-de-siècle dilettante, to the extent that until he published *Les Complaintes* in the summer of 1885, even his closest friends in Germany, like Lindenlaub, did not know he was a poet at all. Just as they did not know of his readings in philosophy, any more than of his rising at six each morning to write his novel, so they did not appreciate that the nihilism, which for them (Bernstein, for example) was a fashionable social or anti-social attitude, was for Laforgue something felt in the most fundamental way, as it was felt by Astrov in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, by many characters in Turgenev, and many in Proust. For Laforgue, nothing could compensate for the loss of, or lack of faith; nothing reduce the sensitive individual's inevitable alienation from the bourgeois society in which he was obliged to live, or mitigate the oppressive notion of biological necessity that seemed to deny value and make all thinking men atheists. His pessimism is the same as that of Hardy or Strindberg, and the resultant irony is also the same: it is the irony that disguises, and yet ultimately conveys, deep feeling. It is the irony, in other words, of Prufrock.

Until 1886 Laforgue had found no satisfactory way of reconciling his vision of the world with his desire to write poetry—poetry that would be original and yet not rhetorical, artistic and yet not “literary.” In *Les Complaintes*, and also in his short stories, *Moralités légendaires*, which he was still writing during the winter of 1885–1886, he had sacrificed seriousness for originality, an originality which expressed his “decadence” through abuse of language, a wilful distortion of convention, parody of literature, and a thorough disrespect for accepted values. The question was whether the seriousness and the originality might be recombined, and this in turn was bound up with a further more personal question. His artistic determination was part and parcel of his determination as a person, and for several winters he had known that he ought to leave his sinecure in Germany and return to Paris. And in addition he had to decide whether or not to get married.

Several factors coincided in the early part of 1886 to give Laforgue's life new direction. To begin with he had immersed himself in the story of Hamlet, in the story—as it seemed to him

—of a hero oppressed by consciousness, the individual who is at odds with the world that is essentially brutish, so much so that it is impossible for him to trust the “ecstasy of love,” but honourable only to send Ophelia away to a nunnery where she will not be a breeder of sinners. This identification with Hamlet, which is expressed in various ways in *Moralités légendaires*, was confirmed in January 1886, when Laforgue went on a spiritual and literary pilgrimage to Elsinore, and it is no casual matter for Laforgue that the bitterly ironical epigraph for the *Derniers Vers* is Ophelia’s description of Hamlet’s “madness.” In the early months of the same year, 1886, while still working on *Moralités légendaires*, he had begun a new collection of poems, tentatively called *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*. But these deliberately made poems were suddenly abandoned when he found a way of integrating the various aspects of his imaginative experience. In the spring, Gustave Kahn founded a magazine called *La Vogue*, with a first issue that included work by Verlaine, Mallarmé, Villiers de l’Isle Adam, and Rimbaud.

In various ways this magazine and the opportunity it offered led Laforgue to think about the new kind of poem. He was impressed first by the sheer force of Rimbaud’s imagination, whose *Illuminations* he probably read in manuscript in Paris, and this by itself partly rescued him from dilettante insouciance. Secondly, he translated a few poems of Whitman for the new magazine, an exercise which no doubt helped him to get the feel of the free-verse line. Thirdly, during a crucial visit to Paris in June 1886, he discussed with Kahn the possibility of a free-verse poem, the form of which would not be predetermined, but derive naturally from the subject itself, as in a painting. (It may well have been Kahn who encouraged Laforgue to return to Paris for good. At any rate in a letter a few weeks later [July: *L.A.*, p. 192] Laforgue announces that he will do so and [Sept. 21: *L.A.*, p. 221] that he will stay at Kahn’s address until he finds a place of his own.) Fourthly, his musical interests, which had been sustained throughout his years in Germany by his friendship with the brothers Ysaye, had been brought into sudden focus by his meeting with Edouard Dujardin and Téodor de Wyzewa, the editors of *La Revue Wagnérienne*. The *Derniers Vers* are tone poems in the

new style, words and phrases being liberated from mere connotation, exactly as in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Or rather they are symphonic variations on a group of associated themes, like the plays of Chekhov. Whatever the precise incentive, however, the new enthusiasm for a free-verse poem or set of poems led to the complete abandonment (this time against Kahn's advice) of *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*, on which he was working at least until June 1886. In July, he sent Kahn the first of the *Derniers Vers*, "L'Hiver qui Vient," and it was published in *La Vogue* on August 16, 1886.

Part of the impetus behind these new poems was therefore artistic, since Laforgue had at last made or found for himself his distinctive idiom. But there were other important considerations: his decision to leave Germany, and his marriage. From the letters one is left in no doubt whatsoever that for several years Laforgue had wished to return to Paris, and that having published *Les Complaintes* he felt justified in abandoning the post that his friends had found for him. What actually happened, however, is not entirely clear. If he married he could not retain his post at the court. On the other hand, it would no doubt have been embarrassing for him to return to Paris, married, before he had found an alternative way of supporting himself. On the personal issue, the letters are vague and at times misleading. It seems clear, nevertheless, that his final decision to leave the German court was an independent one, based primarily on his ambitions as a writer.

It was in January 1886 that he first met Leah Lee, the Englishwoman he was to marry just under a year later. During the winter, while the court was in Berlin, they went to concerts together; away from Berlin, Laforgue told his brother that he had almost got engaged "par lassitude" and he told Kahn, in a letter dated September 1, that if he did not leave Germany soon "j'en reviendrai infailliblement marié avec quelqu'une qui m'est absolument interdite de par moi, elle, et tout." Nine days later, having resigned his position at court, he wrote to his sister, from Berlin, announcing his engagement. What appears in the letters to be a complete volte-face is no doubt partly explained by the fact that he presumably had not seen Leah Lee while the court was "on

tour" during the spring and summer, so that a decision would have been impossible, or at least not practical, until his return to Berlin on the first of September. Nevertheless the confusion of the next few months, as well as the cynicism of the letter he wrote at the end of September while waiting to escort Leah Lee to Calais (quoted on p. 105), indicate that the resolution to get married was by no means a simple one. One might conjecture that part of the confusion derived simply from the embarrassment of the man who had inveighed wittily against the "hymne fataliste," and indeed all bourgeois institutions such as marriage, and who, rather against his better judgment, found himself going back to his friends in Paris no longer quite as detached from actual life as he had always pretended was desirable. Similarly, he had never resolved (perhaps before this he had never tried) the contradiction between the desire for companionship that is expressed in many of his letters to Kahn and the nihilistic disinclination to accept the normal forms of social existence. But there is also the group of hints that lie behind his quotation: "Aimes-tu deux femmes en même temps, n'en choisis aucune, car tu regretterais toujours l'autre." It seems that he had not forgotten the apparently turbulent friendship with the woman designated as R in the sketchy jottings of the *Agenda de 1883*, the importance of which is stressed by Reboul in his interesting introduction to Laforgue. There are mysteries associated with Laforgue's relationship both with R and with Leah Lee that are still to be resolved. The nature of Laforgue's relationship with R remains unknown. David Arkell's article on Leah Lee (*T.L.S.*, June 10, 1965) substantially confirms the little that Laforgue says about his wife, but nothing is known about her life in Germany or about her relationship with Laforgue. What is certain is that the *Derniers Vers* is fretted with the same kind of personal anxiety as one associates with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Waste Land." The autobiographical strands are definite enough for one to feel that Laforgue's perplexity about how to cope with life is very much less theoretical than in the past. On the other hand, even though the poems are strained with Laforgue's thoughts about Leah Lee, they achieve very much more than mere autobiography.

Whatever the reasons for Laforgue's new sense of direction and commitment, he brought to the new poems greater determination and imaginative energy than ever before. His apprenticeship was over. From his letter to Kahn in November 1885, and from many of the letters he wrote during the early months of 1886, it becomes clear that if he lacked confidence in personal matters this was far from being the case in artistic ones. His comments on the work of other poets published during the winter are firm and discriminating, as for example the rather amusing way he distinguishes between his own work and Kahn's: Kahn, who lacks imagination, should take fewer liberties with the language and with poetic convention. He himself is meanwhile moving away from that convention altogether, giving himself greater freedom as his control increases. Then in July 1886 he tells Kahn:

Pour m'ôter toute envie de publier le volume de vers que j'ai fait cet hiver [*F.B.V.*] et que je t'ai lu au lit (encre rouge et papier jaune), j'en fais un second, tout autre.

Le type d'aspect est la pièce sur l'hiver que je t'ai envoyée.

J'oublie de rimer, j'oublie le nombre de syllabes, j'oublie la distribution des strophes, mes lignes commencent à la marge comme de la prose. L'ancienne strophe régulière ne paraît que lorsqu'elle peut être un quatrain populaire, etc... [*L.A.*, p. 193]

The expectation of formal regularity has been abandoned: rhyme, metre, the arrangement of the poem on the page, and particularly the rhetoric of the Alexandrine—all are deliberately avoided. Instead the poem is permitted to establish and create its own form which has an imaginative or psychological rightness irrespective of convention.

From this technical and imaginative point of view, Laforgue's development as a poet is analogous to Van Gogh's as a painter. His first poems, *Le Sanglot de la Terre*, which were regular in form, orthodox in metre and rhyme, and dependent on Baudelaire in image and symbol, were like the early "orthodox" paintings of Van Gogh in which an original view of things was expressed in a conventional way. His experimental poems, *Les Complaintes*, were like the early paintings at Arles, where Van Gogh liberated himself from the conventional idea of what constituted a painting, for example by an imaginative, not realistic, use of

colour, and by a distortion of perspective. For Laforgue the equivalent was the abandoning of the Alexandrine, the rupture of syntax, the exclusion of grammatically necessary but emotionally unimportant words, and a total disrespect for accepted usage. To replace the traditional rhetoric of French poetry, he learnt to use words for their allusive, musical or tactile effect. His images became objective correlatives. The texture of the poems, depending as it did on word play, slang, and double-entendre, was the texture of irony. Moreover, the technique of free association permitted the poet to stand outside the poems with the artist's detachment. In *Les Complaintes*, in other words, Laforgue freed himself from the "literary" just as did the painters who exhibited at the Salon des Refusés. Finally, in the last stage, and at the point of death, technique has been wholly mastered, and it is here that the comparison is most appropriate. The art of *Derniers Vers* is very close, both in method and effect, to late paintings by Van Gogh, such as "Champ de Blé aux Corbeaux." Laforgue's virtuosity with words in the new form of a free-verse, free-association poem permits him to create a whole world of sensation just as Van Gogh expresses his own vision with nervous brush strokes, the apparent lack of discipline representing in fact a complete mastery of technique.

It is reasonable, therefore, from all these points of view, to regard the twelve poems in the *Derniers Vers* as a single work. (See the further discussion of this in the General Textual Note.) There is a sudden binding together of much that had interested Laforgue throughout his life. Laforgue himself was evidently very clear about this since he asked Dujardin to publish the poems together in one volume, and since, for this purpose, he rewrote or emended at least some of the poems that had originally appeared in *La Vogue*. More important is the unity of theme: a complex of ideas or motifs, which are interwoven in "inextricables symphonies avec une phrase (un sujet) mélodique dont le dessin reparaît de temps en temps." The melodic subject is the feelings of the man who desires a life that has meaning, but whose intelligence and experience tell him that it is impossible in the world as it is. This feeling is expressed in many different ways: in the poet's awareness of autumn in which the sun, and the

life which depends on it, die; in the death, therefore, of determinism, since the sun's death at the end of the year makes obvious the failure, and the meaninglessness, of the automatic systems of biology, and sex, and growth, and desire; in the contemplation of "normal" life, which is the detached, ironic contemplation of what the poet considers to be bourgeois self-deception and fraud; and in the anguish of being set apart from other people, which is the anguish of actual loneliness and actual uncertainty about his own life, but which is also an intellectual unrest, a desire for the certainty of belief set day by day against the feeling that belief is impossible. And beneath this, an undertone to this counterpoint of theme and mood, there is the wry self-conscious insistence of the fin-de-siècle nihilist, the sharp, critical and ironical regard of the man who recognizes in himself the perpetual adolescent.

The unity of the *Derniers Vers* derives from the way in which these various themes complement and extend each other. Sometimes an idea mentioned in an early poem is returned to later and given a more extended treatment. Sometimes an image which seems at first to be little more than a strained attempt at originality takes a more definite meaning as the imaginative scope of the poem is realized. Although Laforgue's feeling for metaphor is quite different from that of the Symbolists, few images are completely arbitrary, nor—as it is hoped the notes to the individual poems will help to make clear—are the poems mere exercises in verbal ingenuity as many of *Les Complaintes* had been. Critics have certainly been put off, however, by the obscurity of the poems, since it is hard to respond either to the predominantly ironical use of word and image, or to the complex of metaphor which is held together by imaginative association rather than logic, if in a more basic sense the nature of the poet's allusions is not at all clear. Ruchon, for example, after working on Laforgue's papers for many years, still preferred the early conventional poems which Laforgue himself had rejected, just as Bourget had declined to comment on the later poems because they were "si peu traditionnels." Similarly, R. A. Bolgar begins his very practical article, "The Present State of Laforgue Studies," by saying abruptly: "Read Laforgue's poems or stories inatten-

tively and you will almost certainly dislike them. They contain more novelties than the mind can accept without a definite purposive effort." The present edition is an attempt at an attentive reading. At least some of the difficulties of interpretation are reduced when the text of the *Derniers Vers* is compared with the earlier version in *La Vogue*, and with the earlier versions of the same imaginative idea in *Moralités légendaires* and *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*. These matters are discussed fully in the notes. The more general problem is that of a poet whose attitude to language is ironical, and whose sensibility thus finds expression in a sceptical though controlled play of words which necessarily seems decadent to the orthodox, and perhaps merely foolish to those whose feeling for language is literal and unsophisticated. Laforgue does in fact abandon normal usage, but only for the sake of creating, or recreating his own idiom. This he does with the greatest precision.

It was just this skill that was noted and discussed in the correspondence between Alain-Fournier and Jacques Rivière. The letters record the reaction of the sensitive French reader to a work which, though recognized to be strong and original, lay somewhat outside the main rhetorical tradition of French poetry. After several exchanges, Rivière sent Alain-Fournier a considered statement on Laforgue which is perhaps a better starting point for the contemporary reader than most subsequent criticism. In a letter dated April 23, 1906, Rivière said:

Voici en deux mots ce que j'y goûte et ce qui m'y dégoûte :

J'y goûte :

1° Une assez belle âme, qui ne s'est pas accommodée des médiocrités, où la vie eût voulu l'ensevelir.

2° Une puissance extraordinaire d'expression, une richesse verbale incomparable.

3° Un grand art d'adapter à sa vision particulière toute l'histoire, toute la littérature et toute la fantaisie, que chacun connaît. (N'est-ce pas l'originalité des *Moralités* ?)

Ce qui m'y dégoûte c'est à peu près la même chose. C'est :

1° Une âme pas assez haute pour savoir s'accommoder des médiocrités de la vie et les transfigurer. (En cela il diffère foncièrement de toi. Cf. par exemple : la *Complainte de la Lune en Province*, où il souffre visiblement de ce que tu aimes.)

2° Une trop grande richesse verbale. Dirai-je du bagout ? Il se

grise de mots; il a tellement de mots pour exprimer sa pensée qu'il reprend toujours la même sous un vêtement toujours nouveau. Il se répète, se répète, se répète sous les formes les plus hétérogènes. Peut-être aussi qu'il n'avait que ça à dire. A ce propos, je lâche mon blasphème (j'ai hésité) : quel bonheur pour lui d'être mort si jeune ! Car, qu'eût-il pu ajouter après les *Derniers Vers*, où il s'est définitivement expliqué. Il ne pouvait guère trouver de forme plus adéquate. Et alors ?

3° Je lui reproche de réduire perpétuellement toute l'histoire, toute la littérature et toute la fantaisie à sa vision. C'est agaçant. Je lui reproche surtout cette vision, cette idée fixe. Car enfin, le malentendu entre les sexes, c'est très joli mais c'est connu et peu intéressant. Il y a tant, tant d'autres choses.

Je finis à dessein sur cette critique, pour que tu sentes combien j'ai conscience que mon jugement sur Laforgue est relatif. Je comprends à merveille combien tout ce que je dis dépend de mes conceptions générales. Si j'attachais au malentendu en question la même importance que toi, c'est-à-dire si j'en avais vraiment souffert (ce dont je me crois incapable), Laforgue serait mon grand poète.

Alain-Fournier replied to this by distinguishing between the *Derniers Vers* and *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté* "qu'on ne peut lire sans exaspération." Fifty years or so later, the tempered and qualified judgment which resulted from the initial enthusiasm of Rivière and Alain-Fournier seems quite accurate. At least they understood how deadly serious irony may be.

Blocus sentimental ! Messageries du Levant !...
Oh, tombée de la pluie ! Oh, tombée de la nuit !
Oh, le vent !...
La Toussaint, la Noël et la Nouvelle Année,
Oh, dans les bruines, toutes mes cheminées !... 5
D'usines...

On ne peut plus s'asseoir, tous les bancs sont mouillés;
Crois-moi, c'est bien fini jusqu'à l'année prochaine,
Tant les bancs sont mouillés, tant les bois sont rouillés,
Et tant les cors ont fait ton ton, ont fait ton taine !... 10

Ah ! nuées accourues des côtes de la Manche,
Vous nous avez gâté notre dernier dimanche !

Il bruine;
Dans la forêt mouillée, les toiles d'araignées
Ploient sous les gouttes d'eau, et c'est leur ruine. 15

Soleils plénipotentiaires des travaux en blonds Pactoles
Des spectacles agricoles,
Où êtes-vous ensevelis ?
Ce soir un soleil fichu gît au haut du coteau,
Gît sur le flanc, dans les genêts, sur son manteau, 20
Un soleil blanc comme un crachat d'estaminet
Sur une litière de jaunes genêts,
De jaunes genêts d'automne.
Et les cors lui sonnent !
Qu'il revienne... 25
Qu'il revienne à lui !
Taïaut ! Taïaut ! et hallali !
O triste antienne, as-tu fini !...

Et font les fous !...
Et il gît là, comme une glande arrachée dans un cou, 30
Et il frissonne, sans personne !...

Allons, allons, et hallali !
C'est l'Hiver bien connu qui s'amène;
Oh ! les tournants des grandes routes,
Et sans petit Chaperon Rouge qui chemine !... 35
Oh ! leurs ornières des chars de l'autre mois,
Montant en don quichottesques rails
Vers les patrouilles des nuées en déroute
Que le vent malmène vers les transatlantiques bercails !...
Accélérons, accélérons, c'est la saison bien connue, cette fois. 40
Et le vent, cette nuit, il en a fait de belles !
O dégâts, ô nids, ô modestes jardinets !
Mon cœur et mon sommeil : ô échos des cognées !...

Tous ces rameaux avaient encor leurs feuilles vertes,
Les sous-bois ne sont plus qu'un fumier de feuilles mortes; 45
Feuilles, folioles, qu'un bon vent vous emporte
Vers les étangs par ribambelles,
Ou pour le feu du garde-chasse,
Ou les sommiers des ambulances
Pour les soldats loin de la France. 50

C'est la saison, c'est la saison, la rouille envahit les masses,
La rouille ronge en leurs spleens kilométriques
Les fils télégraphiques des grandes routes où nul ne passe.

Les cors, les cors, les cors — mélancoliques !...
Mélancoliques !... 55
S'en vont, changeant de ton,
Changeant de ton et de musique,
Ton ton, ton taine, ton ton !...
Les cors, les cors, les cors !...
S'en sont allés au vent du Nord. 60

Je ne puis quitter ce ton : que d'échos !...
C'est la saison, c'est la saison, adieu vendanges !...
Voici venir les pluies d'une patience d'ange,

Adieu vendanges, et adieu tous les paniers,
 Tous les paniers Watteau des bourrées sous les marronniers, 65
 C'est la toux dans les dortoirs du lycée qui rentre,
 C'est la tisane sans le foyer,
 La phtisie pulmonaire attristant le quartier,
 Et toute la misère des grands centres.

Mais, lainages, caoutchoucs, pharmacie, rêve, 70
 Rideaux écartés du haut des balcons des grèves
 Devant l'océan de toitures des faubourgs,
 Lampes, estampes, thé, petits-fours,
 Serez-vous pas mes seules amours !...
 (Oh ! et puis, est-ce que tu connais, outre les pianos, 75
 Le sobre et vespéral mystère hebdomadaire
 Des statistiques sanitaires
 Dans les journaux ?)

Non, non ! c'est la saison et la planète falote !
 Que l'autan, que l'autan 80
 Effiloche les savates que le Temps se tricote !
 C'est la saison, Oh déchirements ! c'est la saison !
 Tous les ans, tous les ans,
 J'essaierai en chœur d'en donner la note.

Un cor dans la plaine
Souffle à perdre haleine,
Un autre, du fond des bois,
Lui répond;
L'un chante ton-taine 5
Aux forêts prochaines,
Et l'autre ton-ton
Aux échos des monts.

Celui de la plaine
Sent gonfler ses veines, 10
Ses veines du front;
Celui du bocage,
En vérité, ménage
Ses jolis poumons.

— Où donc tu te caches, 15
Mon beau cor de chasse ?
Que tu es méchant !

— Je cherche ma belle,
Là-bas, qui m'appelle
Pour voir le Soleil couchant. 20

— Taïaut ! Taïaut ! Je t'aime !
Hallali ! Roncevaux !

— Etre aimé est bien doux;
Mais, le Soleil qui se meurt, avant tout !

Le soleil dépose sa pontificale étole, 25
 Lâche les écluses du Grand-Collecteur
 En mille Pactoles
 Que les plus artistes
 De nos liquoristes
 Attisent de cent fioles de vitriol oriental !... 30
 Le sanglant étang, aussitôt s'étend, aussitôt s'étale,
 Noyant les cavales du quadrigé
 Qui se cabre, et qui patauge, et puis se fige
 Dans ces déluges de bengale et d'alcool !...

 Mais les durs sables et les cendres de l'horizon 35
 Ont vite bu tout cet étalage de poisons.

 Ton ton ton taine, les gloires !...

 Et les cors consternés
 Se retrouvent nez à nez;
 Ils sont trois; 40
 Le vent se lève, il commence à faire froid.

 Ton ton ton taine, les gloires !...

 « Bras dessus, bras dessous,
 Avant de rentrer chacun chez nous,
 Si nous allions boire 45
 Un coup ? »

 Pauvres cors ! pauvres cors !
 Comme ils dirent cela avec un rire amer !
 (Je les entends encor.)

 Le lendemain, l'hôtesse du *Grand-Saint-Hubert* 50
 Les trouva tous trois morts.

 On fut quérir les autorités
 De la localité,

 Qui dressèrent procès-verbal
 De ce mystère très-immoral. 55

Bref, j'allais me donner d'un « Je vous aime »
Quand je m'avisai non sans peine
Que d'abord je ne me possédais pas bien moi-même.

(Mon Moi, c'est Galathée aveuglant Pygmalion !
Impossible de modifier cette situation.)

5

Ainsi donc, pauvre, pâle et piètre individu
Qui ne croit à son Moi qu'à ses moments perdus,
Je vis s'effacer ma fiancée
Emportée par le cours des choses,
Telle l'épine voit s'effeuiller,
Sous prétexte de soir sa meilleure rose.

10

Or, cette nuit anniversaire, toutes les Walkyries du vent
Sont revenues beugler par les fentes de ma porte :
Vae soli !

Mais, ah ! qu'importe ?

15

Il fallait m'en étourdir avant !

Trop tard ! ma petite folie est morte !

Qu'importe *Vae soli !*

Je ne retrouverai plus ma petite folie.

Le grand vent bâillonné,
S'endimanche enfin le ciel du matin.

20

Et alors, eh ! allez donc, carillonnez,
Toutes cloches des bons dimanches !

Et passez layettes et collerettes et robes blanches
Dans un frou-frou de lavande et de thym

25

Vers l'encens et les brioches !

Tout pour la famille, quoi ! *Vae soli !* C'est certain.

La jeune demoiselle à l'ivoirien paroissien
Modestement rentre au logis.
On le voit, son petit corps bien reblanchi 30
Sait qu'il appartient
A un tout autre passé que le mien !

Mon corps, ô ma sœur, a bien mal à sa belle âme...

Oh ! voilà que ton piano
Me recommence, si natal maintenant ! 35
Et ton cœur qui s'ignore s'y ânonne
En ritournelles de bastringues à tout venant,
Et ta pauvre chair s'y fait mal !...
A moi, Walkyries !
Walkyries des hypocondries et des tueries ! 40

Ah ! que je te les tordrais avec plaisir,
Ce corps bijou, ce cœur à ténor,
Et te dirais leur fait, et puis encore
La manière de s'en servir
De s'en servir à deux. 45
Si tu voulais seulement m'approfondir ensuite un peu !

Non, non ! C'est sucer la chair d'un cœur élu,
Adorer d'incurables organes
S'entrevoir avant que les tissus se fanent
En monomanes, en reclus ! 50

Et ce n'est pas sa chair qui me serait tout,
Et je ne serais pas qu'un grand cœur pour elle,
Mais quoi s'en aller faire les fous
Dans des histoires fraternelles !
L'âme et la chair, la chair et l'âme, 55
C'est l'Esprit édénique et fier
D'être un peu l'Homme avec la Femme.

En attendant, oh ! garde-toi des coups de tête,
Oh ! file ton rouet et prie et reste honnête.

— Allons, dernier des poètes,
Toujours enfermé tu te rendras malade !
Vois, il fait beau temps, tout le monde est dehors,
Va donc acheter deux sous d'ellébore,
Ca te fera une petite promenade.

C'est l'automne, l'automne, l'automne,
Le grand vent et toute sa séquelle
De représailles ! et de musiques !...
Rideaux tirés, clôture annuelle,
Chute des feuilles, des Antigones, des Philomèles : 5
Mon fossoyeur, *Alas poor Yorick* !
Les remue à la pelle !...

Vivent l'Amour et les feux de paille !...

Les Jeunes Filles inviolables et frêles
Descendent vers la petite chapelle 10
Dont les chimériques cloches
Du joli, joli dimanche
Hygiéniquement et élégamment les appellent.

Comme tout se fait propre autour d'elles !
Comme tout en est dimanche ! 15

Comme on se fait dur et boudeur à leur approche !...

Ah ! moi, je demeure l'Ours Blanc !
Je suis venu par ces banquises
Plus pures que les communiantes en blanc...
Moi, je ne vais pas à l'église, 20
Moi je suis le Grand Chancelier de l'Analyse,
Qu'on se le dise.

Pourtant ! pourtant ! Qu'est-ce que c'est que cette anémie ?
Voyons, confiez vos chagrins à votre vieil ami...

Vraiment ! Vraiment ! 25
 Ah ! Je me tourne vers la mer, les éléments
 Et tout ce qui n'a plus que les noirs grognements !
 Oh ! que c'est sacré !
 Et qu'il y faut de grandes veillées !
 Pauvre, pauvre, sous couleur d'attraits !... 30
 Et nous, et nous,
 Ivres, ivres, avant qu'émerveillés...
 Qu'émerveillés et à genoux !...
 Et voyez comme on tremble,
 Au premier grand soir 35
 Que tout pousse au désespoir
 D'en mourir ensemble !
 O merveille qu'on n'a su que cacher !
 Si pauvre et si brûlante et si martyre !
 Et qu'on n'ose toucher 40
 Qu'à l'aveugle, en divin délire !
 O merveille,
 Reste cachée, idéale violette,
 L'Univers te veille,
 Les générations de planètes te tettent, 45
 De funérailles en relevailles !...
 Oh ! que c'est plus haut
 Que ce Dieu et que la Pensée !
 Et rien qu'avec ces chers yeux en haut,
 Tout inconscients et couleur de pensée ! 50
 Si frêle, si frêle !
 Et tout le mortel foyer
 Tout, tout ce foyer en elle !...
 Oh, pardonnez-lui si, malgré elle,
 Et cela tant lui sied, 55
 Parfois ses prunelles clignent un peu
 Pour vous demander un peu
 De vous apitoyer un peu !

O frêle, frêle et toujours prête
Pour ces messes dont on a fait un jeu 60
Penche, penche ta chère tête, va,
Regarde les grappes des premiers lilas,
Il ne s'agit pas de conquêtes, avec moi,
Mais d'au-delà !

Oh ! puissions-nous quitter la vie 65
Ensemble dès cette Grand'Messe,
Ecœurés de notre espèce
Qui bâille assouvie
Dès le parvis !...

Amour absolu, carrefour sans fontaine;
Mais, à tous les bouts, d'étourdissantes fêtes foraines.

Jamais franches,
Ou le poing sur la hanche :
Avec toutes, l'amour s'échange 5
Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour.

O bouquets d'oranger cuirassés de satin,
Elle s'éteint, elle s'éteint,
La divine Rosace
A voir vos noces de sexes livrés à la grosse 10
Courir en valsant vers la fosse
Commune !... Pauvre race !

Pas d'absolu; des compromis;
Tout est pas plus, tout est permis.

Et cependant, ô des nuits, laissez-moi, Circés 15
Sombrement coiffées à la Titus,
Et les yeux en grand deuil comme des pensées !
Et passez,
Béatifiques Vénus
Etalées et découvrant vos gencives comme un régal, 20
Et bâillant des aisselles au soleil,
Dans l'assourdissement des cigales !
Ou droites, tenant sur fond violet le lotus
Des sacrilèges domestiques,
En faisant de l'index : *motus* ! 25

Passez, passez, bien que les yeux vierges
 Ne soient que cadrans d'émail bleu,
 Marquant telle heure que l'on veut,
 Sauf à garder pour eux, pour Elle,
 Leur heure immortelle. 30
 Sans doute au premier mot,
 On va baisser ces yeux,
 Et peut-être choir en syncope,
 On est si vierge à fleur de robe
 Peut-être même à fleur de peau, 35
 Mais leur destinée est bien interlope, au nom de Dieu !
 O historiques esclaves !
 Oh ! leur petite chambre !
 Qu'on peut les en faire descendre
 Vers d'autres étages, 40
 Vers les plus frelatées des caves,
 Vers les moins ange-gardien des ménages !
 Et alors, le grand Suicide, à froid,
 Et leur *Amen* d'une voix sans Elle,
 Tout en vaquant aux petits soins secrets, 45
 Et puis leur éternel air distrait
 Leur grand air de dire : « De quoi ?
 Ah ! de quoi, au fond, s'il vous plaît ? »
 Mon Dieu, que l'Idéal
 La dépouillât de ce rôle d'ange ! 50
 Qu'elle adoptât l'homme comme égal
 Oh, que ses yeux ne parlent plus d'Idéal,
 Mais simplement d'humains échanges,
 En frères et sœurs par le cœur,
 Et fiancés par le passé, 55
 Et puis unis par l'Infini !
 Oh ! simplement d'infinis échanges
 A la fin de journées
 A quatre bras moissonnées,
 Quand les tambours, quand les trompettes, 60
 Ils s'en vont sonnant la retraite,

Et qu'on prend le frais sur le pas des portes,
En vidant les pots de grès
A la santé des années mortes
Qui n'ont pas laissé de regrets,
Au su de tout le canton
Que depuis toujours nous habitons,
Ton ton, ton taine, ton ton.

65

O paria ! — Et revoici les sympathies de mai.
Mais tu ne peux que te répéter, ô honte !
Et tu te gonfles et ne crèves jamais.
Et tu sais fort bien, ô paria,
Que ce n'est pas du tout ça. 5

Oh ! que
Devinant l'instant le plus seul de la nature,
Ma mélodie, toute et unique, monte,
Dans le soir et redouble, et fasse tout ce qu'elle peut
Et dise la chose qu'est la chose, 10
Et retombe, et reprenne,
Et fasse de la peine,
O solo de sanglots,
Et reprenne et retombe
Selon la tâche qui lui incombe. 15
Oh ! que ma musique
Se crucifie,
Selon sa photographie
Accoudée et mélancolique !...

Il faut trouver d'autres thèmes, 20
Plus mortels et plus suprêmes.
Oh ! bien, avec le monde tel quel,
Je vais me faire un monde plus mortel !

Les âmes y seront à musique,
Et tous les intérêts puérilement charnels, 25
O fanfares dans les soirs,
Ce sera barbare,
Ce sera sans espoir.

Enquêtes, enquêtes,
 Seront l'unique fête ! 30
 Qui m'en défie ?
 J'entasse sur mon lit, les journaux, linge sale,
 Dessins de mode, photographies quelconques,
 Toute la capitale,
 Matrice sociale. 35
 Que nul n'intercède,
 Ce ne sera jamais assez,
 Il n'y a qu'un remède,
 C'est de tout casser.
 O fanfares dans les soirs ! 40
 Ce sera barbare,
 Ce sera sans espoir.
 Et nous aurons beau la piétiner à l'envi,
 Nous ne serons jamais plus cruels que la vie,
 Qui fait qu'il est des animaux injustement rossés, 45
 Et des femmes à jamais laides...
 Que nul n'intercède,
 Il faut tout casser.
 Alléluia, Terre paria.
 Ce sera sans espoir, 50
 De l'aurore au soir,
 Quand il n'y en aura plus il y en aura encore,
 Du soir à l'aurore.
 Alléluia, Terre paria !
 Les hommes de l'art 55
 Ont dit : « Vrai, c'est trop tard. »
 Pas de raison,
 Pour ne pas activer sa crevaïson.
 Aux armes, citoyens ! Il n'y a plus de RAISON :
 Il prit froid l'autre automne, 60
 S'étant attardé vers les peines des cors,
 Sur la fin d'un beau jour.
 Oh ! ce fut pour vos cors, et ce fut pour l'automne,
 Qu'il nous montra qu'« on meurt d'amour » !

On ne le verra plus aux fêtes nationales,
S'enfermer dans l'Histoire et tirer les verrous,
Il vint trop tôt, il est reparti sans scandale;
O vous qui m'écoutez, rentrez chacun chez vous.

65

Je fume, étalé face au ciel,
Sur l'impériale de la diligence,
Ma carcasse est cahotée, mon âme danse
Comme un Ariel;
Sans miel, sans fiel, ma belle âme danse, 5
O routes, coteaux, ô fumées, ô vallons,
Ma belle âme, ah ! récapitulons.

Nous nous aimions comme deux fous,
On s'est quitté sans en parler,
Un spleen me tenait exilé, 10
Et ce spleen me venait de tout. Bon.

Ses yeux disaient : « Comprenez-vous ?
Pourquoi ne comprenez-vous pas ? »
Mais nul n'a voulu faire le premier pas,
Voulant trop tomber *ensemble* à genoux. 15
(Comprenez-vous ?)

Où est-elle à cette heure ?
Peut-être qu'elle pleure...
Où est-elle à cette heure ?
Oh ! du moins, soigne-toi, je t'en conjure ! 20

O fraîcheur des bois le long de la route,
O châte de mélancolie, toute âme est un peu aux écoutes,
Que ma vie
Fait envie !
Cette impériale de diligence tient de la magie. 25

Accumulons l'irréparable !
 Renchérissons sur notre sort !
 Les étoiles sont plus nombreuses que le sable
 Des mers où d'autres ont vu se baigner son corps;
 Tout n'en va pas moins à la Mort. 30
 Y a pas de port.

Des ans vont passer là-dessus,
 On s'endurcira chacun pour soi,
 Et bien souvent et déjà je m'y vois,
 On se dira : « Si j'avais su... » 35
 Mais mariés de même, ne se fût-on pas dit
 « Si j'avais su, si j'avais su !... » ?
 Ah ! rendez-vous maudit !
 Ah ! mon cœur sans issue !...
 Je me suis mal conduit. 40

Maniaques de bonheur,
 Donc, que ferons-nous ? Moi de mon âme,
 Elle de sa faillible jeunesse ?
 O vieillissante pécheresse,
 Oh ! que de soirs je vais me rendre infâme 45
 En ton honneur !

Ses yeux clignaient : « Comprenez-vous ?
 Pourquoi ne comprenez-vous pas ? »
 Mais nul n'a fait le premier pas
 Pour tomber ensemble à genoux. Ah !... 50

La Lune se lève,
 O route en grand rêve !...

On a dépassé les filatures, les scieries,
 Plus que les bornes kilométriques,
 De petits nuages d'un rose de confiserie, 55
 Cependant qu'un fin croissant de lune se lève,
 O route de rêve, ô nulle musique...

Dans ces bois de pins où depuis
 Le commencement du monde
 Il fait toujours nuit, 60
 Que de chambres propres et profondes !
 Oh ! pour un soir d'enlèvement !
 Et je les peuple et je m'y vois,
 Et c'est un beau couple d'amants,
 Qui gesticulent hors la loi. 65

Et je passe et les abandonne,
 Et me recouche face au ciel.
 La route tourne, je suis Ariel,
 Nul ne m'attend, je ne vais chez personne.
 Je n'ai que l'amitié des chambres d'hôtel. 70

La lune se lève,
 O route en grand rêve.
 O route sans terme,
 Voici le relais,
 Où l'on allume les lanternes, 75
 Où l'on boit un verre de lait,
 Et fouette postillon,
 Dans le chant des grillons,
 Sous les étoiles de juillet.

O clair de Lune, 80
 Noce de feux de Bengale noyant mon infortune,
 Les ombres des peupliers sur la route...
 Le gave qui s'écoute,...
 Qui s'écoute chanter,...
 Dans ces inondations du fleuve du Léthé... 85

O Solo de lune,
 Vous défiez ma plume,
 Oh ! cette nuit sur la route;
 O Etoiles, vous êtes à faire peur,
 Vous y êtes toutes ! toutes ! 90
 O fugacité de cette heure...
 Oh ! qu'il y eût moyen
 De m'en garder l'âme pour l'automne qui vient !...

Voici qu'il fait très, très-frais,
 Oh ! si à la même heure, 95
 Elle va de même le long des forêts,
 Noyer son infortune
 Dans les noces du clair de lune !...
 (Elle aime tant errer tard !)
 Elle aura oublié son foulard, 100
 Elle va prendre mal, vu la beauté de l'heure !
 Oh ! soigne-toi, je t'en conjure !
 Oh ! je ne veux plus entendre cette toux !
 Ah ! que ne suis-je tombé à tes genoux !
 Ah ! que n'as-tu défailli à mes genoux ! 105
 J'eusse été le modèle des époux !
 Comme le frou-frou de ta robe est le modèle des frou-frou.

Armorial d'anémie !
Psautier d'automne !
Offertoire de tout mon ciboire de bonheur et de génie
A cette hostie si féminine,
Et si petite toux sèche maligne, 5
Qu'on voit aux jours déserts, en inconnue,
Sertie en de cendreuses toilettes qui sentent déjà l'hiver,
Se fuir le long des cris surhumains de la Mer.
Grandes amours, oh ! qu'est-ce encor ?...
En tout cas, des lèvres sans façon, 10
Des lèvres déflorées,
Et quoique mortes aux chansons,
Après encore à la curée.
Mais les yeux d'une âme qui s'est bel et bien cloîtrée.
Enfin, voici qu'elle m'honore de ses confidences. 15
J'en souffre plus qu'elle ne pense.
« Mais, chère perdue, comment votre esprit éclairé
Et le stylet d'acier de vos yeux infaillibles,
N'ont-ils pas su percer à jour la mise en frais
De cet économique et passager bellâtre ? » 20
« Il vint le premier; j'étais seule près de l'âtre;
Son cheval attaché à la grille
Hennissait en désespéré... »
« C'est touchant (pauvre fille)
Et puis après ? 25
Oh ! regardez, là-bas, cet épilogue sous couleur de couchant;
Et puis, vrai,

Remarquez que dès l'automne, l'automne !
 Les casinos,
 Qu'on abandonne 30
 Remisent leur piano;
 Hier l'orchestre attaqua
 Sa dernière polka,
 Hier, la dernière fanfare
 Sanglotait vers les gares... » 35

(Oh ! comme elle est maigrie !
 Que va-t-elle devenir ?
 Durcissez, durcissez,
 Vous, caillots de souvenir !)

« Allons, les poteaux télégraphiques 40
 Dans les grisailles de l'exil
 Vous serviront de pleureuses de funérailles;
 Moi, c'est la saison qui veut que je m'en aille,
 Voici l'hiver qui vient.
 Ainsi soit-il. 45
 Ah ! soignez-vous ! Portez-vous bien.

Assez ! assez !
 C'est toi qui as commencé !

Tais-toi ! Vos moindres clin d'yeux sont des parjures
 Laisse ! Avec vous autres rien ne dure. 50
 Va, je te l'assure,
 Si je t'aimais, ce serait par gageure.

Tais-toi ! tais-toi !
 On n'aime qu'une fois ! »

Ah ! voici que l'on compte enfin avec Moi ! 55
 Ah ! ce n'est plus l'automne, alors,
 Ce n'est plus l'exil.
 C'est la douceur des légendes, de l'âge d'or,
 Des légendes des Antigones,
 Douceur qui fait qu'on se demande : 60
 « Quand donc cela se passait-il ? »

C'est des légendes, c'est des gammes perlées,
Qu'on m'a tout enfant enseignées,
Oh ! rien, vous dis-je, des estampes,
Les bêtes de la terre et les oiseaux du ciel 65
Enguirlandant les majuscules d'un Missel,
Il n'y a pas là tant de quoi saigner ?

Saigner ? moi pétri du plus pur limon de Cybèle !
Moi qui lui eusse été dans tout l'art des Adams
Des Edens aussi hyperboliquement fidèle 70
Que l'est le Soleil chaque soir envers l'Occident !...

IX

Oh ! qu'une, d'Elle-même, un beau soir, sût venir
Ne voyant plus que boire à mes lèvres, ou mourir !...

Oh ! Baptême !
Oh ! baptême de ma Raison d'être !
Faire naître un « Je t'aime ! » 5
Et qu'il vienne à travers les hommes et les dieux,
Sous ma fenêtre,
Baissant les yeux !

Qu'il vienne comme à l'aimant la foudre,
Et dans mon ciel d'orage qui craque et qui s'ouvre 10
Et alors, les averses lustrales jusqu'au matin,
Le grand clapissement des averses toute la nuit ! Enfin !

Qu'Elle vienne ! et baissant les yeux
Et s'essuyant les pieds
Au seuil de notre église, ô mes aïeux 15
Ministres de la Pitié,
Elle dise :

« Pour moi, tu n'es pas comme les autres hommes,
Ils sont ces messieurs, toi tu viens des cieux.
Ta bouche me fait baisser les yeux, 20
Et ton port me transporte
Et je m'en découvre des trésors !
Et je sais parfaitement que ma destinée se borne
(Oh, j'y suis déjà bien habituée !)
A te suivre jusqu'à ce que tu te retournes, 25
Et alors t'exprimer comment tu es !

Vraiment je ne songe pas au reste; j'attendrai
Dans l'attendrissement de ma vie faite exprès.

Que je te dise seulement que depuis des nuits je pleure,
Et que mes sœurs ont bien peur que je n'en meure. 30

Je pleure dans les coins, je n'ai plus goût à rien;
Oh, j'ai tant pleuré dimanche dans mon paroissien !

Tu me demandes pourquoi toi et non un autre,
Ah, laisse, c'est bien toi et non un autre.

J'en suis sûre comme du vide insensé de mon cœur 35
Et comme de votre air mortellement moqueur. »

Ainsi, elle viendrait, évadée, demi-morte,
Se rouler sur le paillason que j'ai mis à cet effet devant ma
porte

Ainsi, elle viendrait à Moi avec des yeux absolument fous,
Et elle me suivrait avec ces yeux-là partout, partout ! 40

O géraniums diaphanes, guerroyeurs sortilèges, Sacrilèges monomanes ! Emballages, dévergondages, douches ! O pressoirs Des vendanges des grands soirs ! Layettes aux abois, Thyrses au fond des bois ! Transfusions, représailles, Relevailles, compresses et l'éternelle potion, <i>Angelus</i> ! n'en pouvoir plus De débâcles nuptiales ! de débâcles nuptiales !...	5 10
Et puis, ô mes amours, A moi, son tous les jours, O ma petite mienne, ô ma quotidienne, Dans mon petit intérieur, C'est-à-dire plus jamais ailleurs !	15
O ma petite quotidienne !...	
Et quoi encore ? Oh du génie, Improvisations aux insomnies !	
Et puis ? L'observer dans le monde, Et songer dans les coins : « Oh, qu'elle est loin ! Oh, qu'elle est belle ! Oh ! qui est-elle ? A qui est-elle ? Oh, quelle inconnue ! Oh, lui parler ! Oh, l'emmener ! » (Et, en effet, à la fin du bal, Elle me suivrait d'un air tout simplement fatal.)	20 25

Et puis, l'éviter des semaines
Après lui avoir fait de la peine
Et lui donner des rendez-vous,
Et nous refaire un chez nous.

Et puis, la perdre des mois et des mois, 30
A ne plus reconnaître sa voix !...

Oui, le Temps salit tout,
Mais, hélas ! sans en venir à bout.

Hélas ! hélas ! et plus la faculté d'errer,
Hypocondrie et pluie, 35
Et seul sous les vieux cieux,
De me faire le fou !

Le fou sans feux ni lieux
(Le pauvre, pauvre fou sans amours !)
Pour, alors, tomber bien bas 40

A me purifier la chair,
Et exulter au petit jour
En me fuyant en chemin de fer,
O Belles-Lettres, ô Beaux-Arts,
Ainsi qu'un Ange à part ! 45

J'aurai passé ma vie le long des quais
A faillir m'embarquer
Dans de bien funestes histoires,
Tout cela pour l'amour
De mon cœur fou de la gloire d'amour. 50

Oh ! qu'ils sont pittoresques les trains manqués !...

Oh ! qu'ils sont « A bientôt ! A bientôt ! »
Les bateaux
Du bout de la jetée !...

De la jetée bien charpentée 55
Contre la mer,
Comme ma chair
Contre l'amour.

Vous ne m'aimeriez pas, voyons,
 Vous ne m'aimeriez pas plus,
 Pas plus, entre nous,
 Qu'une fraternelle Occasion ?...
 — Ah ! elle ne m'aime pas ! 5
 Ah ! elle ne ferait pas le premier pas
 Pour que nous tombions ensemble à genoux !

Si elle avait rencontré seulement
 A, B, C ou D, au lieu de Moi,
 Elle les eût aimés uniquement ! 10

Je les vois, je les vois...

Attendez ! Je la vois
 Avec les nobles A, B, C ou D.
 Elle était née pour chacun d'eux.
 C'est lui, Lui, quel qu'il soit, 15
 Elle le reflète;
 D'un air parfait, elle secoue la tête
 Et dit que rien, rien ne peut lui déraciner
 Cette étonnante destinée.

C'est Lui; elle lui dit : 20
 « Oh, tes yeux, ta démarche !
 Oh, le son fatal de ta voix !
 Voilà si longtemps que je te cherche !
 Oh, c'est bien Toi cette fois !... »

Il baisse un peu sa bonne lampe, 25
Il la ploie, Elle, vers son cœur,
Il la baise à la tempe
Et à la place de son orphelin cœur.

Il l'endort avec des caresses tristes,
Il l'apitoie avec de petites plaintes, 30
Il a des considérations fatalistes,
Il prend à témoin tout ce qui existe,
Et puis, voici que l'heure tinte.

Pendant que je suis dehors,
A errer avec elle au cœur, 35
A m'étonner peut-être
De l'obscurité de sa fenêtre.

Elle est chez lui, et s'y sent chez elle,
Et, comme on vient de le voir,
Elle l'aime, éperdument fidèle, 40
Dans toute sa beauté des soirs !...

Je les ai vus ! Oh, ce fut trop complet !
Elle avait l'air trop trop fidèle
Avec ses grands yeux tout en reflets
Dans sa figure toute nouvelle ! 45

Et je ne serais qu'un pis-aller,
Et je ne serais qu'un pis-aller,
Comme l'est mon jour dans le Temps,
Comme l'est ma place dans l'Espace;
Et l'on ne voudrait pas que je m'accommodasse 50
De ce sort vraiment dégoûtant !...

Non, non ! pour Elle, tout ou rien !
Et je m'en irai donc comme un fou,
A travers l'automne qui vient
Dans le grand vent où il y a tout ! 55

Je me dirai : Oh ! à cette heure,
Elle est bien loin, elle pleure,
Le grand vent se lamente aussi,
Et moi je suis seul dans ma demeure,
Avec mon noble cœur tout transi,
Et sans amour et sans personne,
Car tout est misère, tout est automne,
Tout est endurci et sans merci.

60

Et, si je t'avais aimée ainsi,
Tu l'aurais trouvée trop bien bonne ! Merci !

65

XII

Get thee to a nunnery : why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things, that it were better my mother had not borne me. We are arrant knaves, all: believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery.

HAMLET

Noire bise, averse glapissante,
Et fleuve noir, et maisons closes,
Et quartiers sinistres comme des Morgues,
Et l'Attardé qui à la remorque traîne
Toute la misère du cœur et des choses, 5
Et la souillure des innocentes qui traînent,
Et crie à l'averse : « Oh ? arrose, arrose
Mon cœur si brûlant, ma chair si intéressante ! »

Oh ! elle, mon cœur et ma chair, que fait-elle ?...

Oh, si elle est dehors par ce vilain temps, 10
De quelles histoires trop humaines rentre-t-elle ?
Et si elle est dedans,
A ne pouvoir dormir par ce grand vent,
Pense-t-elle au Bonheur,
Au bonheur à tout prix 15
Disant : tout plutôt que mon cœur reste ainsi incompris ?

Soigne-toi, soigne-toi ! pauvre cœur aux abois.

(Langueurs, débilité, palpitations, larmes,
Oh ! cette misère de vouloir être notre femme !)

O pays, ô famille ! 20
 Et l'âme toute tournée
 D'héroïques destinées
 Au delà des saintes vieilles filles,
 Et pour cette année !

Nuit noire, maisons closes, grand vent, 25
 Oh, dans un couvent, dans un couvent !

Un couvent dans ma ville natale
 Douce de vingt-mille âmes à peine,
 Entre le lycée et la préfecture
 Et vis-à-vis la cathédrale, 30
 Avec ces anonymes en robes grises,
 Dans la prière, le ménage, les travaux de couture;
 Et que cela suffise...
 Et méprise sans envie
 Tout ce qui n'est pas cette vie de Vestale 35
 Provinciale,
 Et marche à jamais glacée,
 Les yeux baissés.

Oh ! je ne puis voir ta petite scène fatale à vif,
 Et ton pauvre air dans ce huis-clos, 40
 Et tes tristes petits gestes instinctifs,
 Et peut-être incapable de sanglots !

Oh ! ce ne fut pas et ce ne peut être,
 Oh, tu n'es pas comme les autres,
 Crispées aux rideaux de leur fenêtre 45
 Devant le soleil couchant qui dans son sang se vautre !
 Oh, tu n'as pas l'âge,
 Oh, dis, tu n'auras jamais l'âge,
 Oh, tu me promets de rester sage comme une image ?...

La nuit est à jamais noire, 50
 Le vent est grandement triste,
 Tout dit la vieille histoire
 Qu'il faut être deux au coin du feu,
 Tout bâcle un hymne fataliste,

Mais toi, il ne faut pas que tu t'abandonnes, A ces vilains jeux !...	55
A ces grandes pitiés du mois de novembre ! Reste dans ta petite chambre, Passe, à jamais glacée, Tes beaux yeux irréconciliablement baissés.	60
Oh, qu'elle est là-bas, que la nuit est noire ! Que la vie est une étourdissante foire ! Que toutes sont créature, et que tout est routine ! Oh ! que nous mourrons !	
Eh bien, pour aimer ce qu'il y a d'histoires Derrière ces beaux yeux d'orpheline héroïne, O Nature, donne-moi la force et le courage De me croire en âge, O Nature relève-moi le front ! Puisque, tôt ou tard, nous mourrons...	65 70

TEXTUAL NOTES AND VARIANTS

ABBREVIATIONS

- B.C.** *Les Complaintes. L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune. Derniers Vers*, Paris: Bibliothèque de Cluny, ed. Claude Pichois, 1959
- C.** *Les Complaintes*
- C.A.** Copie ancienne used by D. & F.
- C.I.** *Les Cahiers Idéalistes*
- D. & F.** Dujardin and Fénéon (first editors of *Derniers Vers*)
- D.V.** *Derniers Vers*
- E.C.(D.)** *Dragées. Charles Baudelaire. Tristan Corbière*, Paris: Edition de la Connaissance, 1920
- F.B.V.** *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*
- L.A.** *Lettres à un Ami (1880–1886)*, ed. G. Jean-Aubry, Paris: Mercure de France, 1941
- M.L.** *Moralités légendaires*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1954 (first published 1903)
- M.P.** *Mélanges posthumes*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1902
- N.–D.** *L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*
- O.C.** *Œuvres complètes de Jules Laforgue*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1920–30
- R.I.** *La Revue Indépendante*
- S.T.** *Le Sanglot de la Terre*
- S.V.** *Stéphane Vassiliew*, Geneva, 1946
- V.** *La Vogue*

GENERAL TEXTUAL NOTE

THE HISTORY of the papers and texts which relate to the *D.V.* can best be referred to in three stages: first, their composition; secondly, their publication in *V.* and *R.I.*; and, thirdly, their publication in the 1890 edition edited by Dujardin and Fénéon. The present editors assume that other factors being equal the definitive text is achieved in the final version. A more detailed consideration of the relevant details seems to confirm this.

COMPOSITION

Laforgue began to write the poems now called the *Derniers Vers* in June 1886, in Germany, and at the same time gave up the idea of publishing *F.B.V.*, which had been refused by Vanier, the publisher of his earlier poems. In July he tells Kahn by letter (*L.A.*, p. 193) that since returning from a brief holiday in Paris he has started to write a new kind of poem. In the same letter he sends Kahn the manuscript of "L'Hiver qui Vient" for publication in Kahn's magazine *V.* (*ibid.*). When Laforgue went to Paris in the autumn, he presumably gave copies of the remaining poems to Kahn and, in the case of XI and XII, to Wyzewa for publication in *R.I.*

These early manuscripts on which publication in these two periodicals was based cannot be traced. Nevertheless they exert

a slight influence on any discussion of the text, since when Dujardin edited the poems in 1890 he obtained from both Kahn and Wyzewa manuscripts which afterwards disappeared. Jean-Aubry eventually inherited from Wyzewa most of Laforgue's papers but does not mention having manuscripts of the *D.V.* Ruchon, who saw the papers in Jean-Aubry's possession while preparing his thesis, says nothing either. Consequently, one only knows of the manuscripts which predated publication in *V.* and *R.I.* from the notation of variants given by D. & F. in their 1890 edition. These variants have been incorporated into the present edition.

LA VOGUE

The poems were published in *V.* and *R.I.* in the order indicated in the list which follows. Presumably it is the order of composition (the early poems were published before the later ones were written), and Laforgue confirms it when he prepares the poems for book publication. In brackets are the numbers (as given in *O.C.*, II) of poems from the earlier projected volume, *F.B.V.*, which were partly or wholly incorporated into the *D.V.*

- i. L'Hiver qui Vient, *V.*, II (no. 5), 16–23 août 1886
 - ii. Le Mystère des trois cors, *ibid.* [entitled "La Légende des trois cors"]
 - iii. Dimanches, *V.*, II (no. 7), 30 août–6 sept. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 5, 18, 24, 28, 30]
 - iv. Dimanches, *V.*, II (no. 7), 30 août–6 sept. 1886
[These two poems called "Dimanches" were first published as one poem]
 - v. Pétition, *V.*, III (no. 1), 11–18 oct. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 37]
 - vi. Simple Agonie, *V.*, III (no. 1), 11–18 oct. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 40]
 - vii. Solo de Lune, *V.*, III (no. 3), 25 oct.–8 nov. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 52]
 - viii. Légende, *V.*, III (no. 3), 25 oct.–8 nov. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 21, 44]
 - ix. « Oh ! qu'une, d'Elle-même... », *V.*, III (no. 8), 6–13 déc. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 2]
 - x. « O géraniums diaphanes... », *V.*, III (no. 8), 6–13 déc. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 24, 36]
- [Poems ix and x were first published as one poem with the title "Les Amours"]
- xi. Sur une Défunte, *R.I.*, nov. 1886 [*F.B.V.*, 38, 52]
 - xii. « Noire bise, averse glapissante », *R.I.*, déc. 1886 [*F.B.V.* 27, 38, 40, 41]

Since the *V.* text is different from the final version, one needs to be certain about its status. On the whole, however, it is safe to assume that the *V.* text corresponds with the manuscripts on which it is based—since otherwise Dujardin would have noted manuscript differences—and that Laforgue only rewrote the poems after the periodical publication.

BOOK PUBLICATION

The first edition of the *D.V.* in book form is *Les Derniers Vers de Jules Laforgue*, 1890, edited by D. & F. This is a textual edition in which Dujardin makes a serious attempt to collate the various papers in his possession, which included *V.* and the manuscripts he said he received from Kahn and Wyzewa. He had Laforgue's authority to publish the *D.V.* as one poem (see Introduction to *Poésies complètes*, 1894) and in addition for some of the poems he had the fair copy which Laforgue had prepared perhaps as late as July 1887, working on the *V.* text which Dujardin had sent him. (In a letter, published in *C.I.* [no. 8], mai 1923, p. 67, written in July 1887, Dujardin tells Laforgue that his clerk "vous portera le découpage de tous vos vers de *la Vogue*.") Internal evidence, referred to in detail in the notes, confirms that this fair copy was prepared after publication in *V.* It is this manuscript, which exists for all the poems except VI, VII, and VIII, which is in the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. Consequently for nine poems one can be certain that one has the poet's final version which he himself prepared for book publication. In the case of the other three, one can assume that since the printed version in the 1890 edition coincides with *V.* there was no need for Laforgue to make a fair copy, and that therefore none ever existed. For poems VI, VII, and VIII the 1890 text has therefore been taken on trust.

DETAILED TEXTUAL NOTES AND VARIANTS

EPIGRAPHS

Laforgue wrote the two epigraphs on the page facing the beginning of “L’Hiver qui Vient.” Beside the first epigraph, Laforgue has the following notes:

En (written in ink)
épigraphe (written in pencil)
en petit romain (written in ink)

Beside the second epigraph, the poet wrote the names “Ophelia” and “Polonius” in pencil. Also in pencil, on the reverse of this epigraph page, are the titles of two poems: “Le Vaisseau fantôme” and “Noire bise.” (Did the poet at one time toy with the idea of including “Le Vaisseau fantôme” [a poem of *F.B.V.*] into the *D.V.*?)

Poems I, II, III, IV, V, and XII are numbered in pencil, in Laforgue’s writing, above their titles.

I. *L’HIVER QUI VIENT*

5–6. (*V.*) One line only: “Il bruine.”

9. Both *D.* & *F.* and *O.C.* have “Tous les bancs.” But *MS* has “Tant,” which is also the *V.* version.

10. This line not in *V.*

14. (*MS*) Dans la forêt toute mouillée...

15. (*V.*) ... sous les perles d’eau...

16 & 17. In *V.* one line only: “Soleils plénipotentiaires des travaux des Pactoles des plaines.” In MS: no accent on “plenipotentiaires”; 17 is an addition; and “En blonds” has been crossed out at the beginning of it.

19–23. (*V.*)

Ce soir, un soleil fichu, gît sur le coteau, dans les genêts,
Un soleil blanc comme un crachat d'estaminet,
Sur une litière de genêts, — de genêts d'automne !

22. (MS) “d'automne” has been crossed out after “genêts.”

23. This line added in MS.

27–29. (*V.*) 28 is not in *V.*, and 27 and 29 form one line only:

Taïaut ! Taïaut ! et hallali ! — et font les fous...

35. (*V.*) Et sans rhapsode qui chemine.

37. This line not in *V.*

38. (MS) ... déroutés

39. (*V.*) Que le vent malmène et mène au bercail.

40–41. (MS & *V.*) Between 40–41, there is the following line:

On ne peut plus s'asseoir, tous les bancs sont mouillés.

The line was at first included in MS as it appeared in *V.*, and then crossed out—indication that the text was indeed revised by Laforgue *after* its publication in *V.*

41. (MS & *V.*) Ah ! le vent...

42.

(*V.*) ... pauvres jardinets !

(MS) ... souffreteux jardinets !

45. (*V.*) Les sous-bois ne sont qu'un fumier...

46. (*V.*) ... que le vent vous emporte

48. (*V.*) ... par le feu...

50. This line is not in *V.* In MS, it seems to have been added as an afterthought in the space previously left for the stanza break.

52. (*V.*) Elle ronge...

53–54. Between these two lines:

(*V.*) O soleils,
Des soirs orangés, aux hallalis,
Aux ovations des royaux cors de chasse,
Que faites-vous ensevelis ?

(MS) O Soleils des soirs tout orangés, aux hallalis,
Aux ovations des royaux cors de chasse
Où m'êtes-vous ensevelis ?

60. (V.) ... vent du nord.

64. (V.) Adieu vendanges et adieu paniers,

65. This line not in V.

67. (V.) ... sans foyer,

71. (V.) ... grèves, dites ?

72. This line not in V.

74. (MS & V.) Vous serez mes seules amours !...

75-78. (V.)

(Oh ! et puis, est-ce que tu connais
La sobre et nette horreur, le vespéral mystère
Hebdomadaire
Des statistiques sanitaires ?...)

79. (V.) Non ! c'est la saison et c'est la terre falote.

81. (V.) ... des savates du Temps,

82-84. After line 82 the poem ended:

(V.) Nul n'en rendra raison
Tous les ans, tous les ans,
J'essaierai en chœur, d'en chanter la note.

(MS) Tous les ans, tous les ans,
J'essaierai en chœur (dans) d'en donner la note,
Pour mes compatriotes,
Mais qu'on ne m'en demande pas la raison !...

The word "dans" in 84 and the two last lines are crossed out.

II. *LE MYSTERE DES TROIS CORS*

Title. (V.) La Légende des trois cors

8. (V.) Aux échos du mont.

23. (V.) Etre aimée...

24. (V.) Mais, le couchant avant tout.

25. (V.) Le soleil dépose sa parole étoile.

D. & F. thought this might have been a V. misprint for "papale étoile."

32. (MS & V.) ... du beuglant quadrigé ("beuglant" crossed out in MS)

34. (MS) ... d'alcool ! Oh ! ("Oh !" crossed out)

36. (V.) Boivent peu à peu tout...

41. (MS & V.) ... s'élève

49. This line not in V.

52–55. These lines not in V.

III. DIMANCHES

3. (V.) ... je ne possédais...

7. (V.) ... ne croit en son Moi...

11.

(V.) Vers le soir ces quelques roses.

(MS) Vers le soir, (ses) sa meilleure rose.

"ses" is crossed out. "Sous prétexte de" is written beneath this line, with an arrow to indicate that it should replace "Vers le."

16. (V.) Il fallait m'enivrer avant !

In MS, "enivrer" is crossed out and replaced by "assourdir" and "étourdir." There is no final indication as to which of these is to be preferred.

20 & 21. (V.) One line only, with a mistake (baïllonné), and, instead of "s'endimanche," "s'élargit enfin."

22. (V.) Et alors, eh allez donc, cloches,

(MS) "cloches" is crossed out before "carillonnez."

23. (V.) ... des dimanches...

24. (V.) Et puis...

In MS, "passez" is added in afterwards between "et" and "layettes."

25. (V.) Line begins with "Et."

26. This line not in V.

27. (V.) ... Oh ! C'est certain.

32. (V.) A un tout autre que le mien !

35. (V.) ... si natal !

38 & 39. (V.) One line only:

Et ta pauvre chair s'y pâme ! A moi, Walkyries !

41. (V.) ... avec grand plaisir,

45. This line not in V.

46. (V.) Si tu voulais m'approfondir un peu !...

48. (V.) Adorer de trop souffrantes organes

49. (V.) Etre deux avant...

52. (V.) Et ne serais...

56. (V.) Tout ça c'est l'Esprit édénique et fier

57 & 58. (V. & MS) Between these two lines:

Après tout ?

60. (V.) Allons être,...

iv. DIMANCHES

3. (V.) The line reads: "De représailles..."

6 & 7. (V.) One line only:

Mon fossoyeur les remue à la pelle...

8. (V.) Vivent l'amour, les feux...

9. (V.) Les vierges inviolables...

11-16.

(V.) Dont les chimériques cloches
Hygiéniquement et élégamment les appellent;
Comme tout se fait propre autour d'Elles !
Comme tout en est dimanche !
Comme on se fait dur et boudeur à leur approche...

In MS, 12, which was entirely missing in the V. version, has been added in afterwards between 11 and 13.

17. (V.) ... l'ours blanc !

18. (V.) ... les banquises

(MS) ... des banquises

19. This line not in V. In MS, the line has been added in the margin, with an arrow to indicate its position after 18. Also in the margin, immediately following this line, are the words "Qu'on se le dise," crossed out.

21. (V.) ... grand chancelier...

22. (V.) Instead of this line, the following:

Bien que d'un cœur encor tremblant,
Ca se comprend.

This variant exists in MS, but has been crossed out.

23 & 24. (V.) The two lines enclosed in parentheses.

25. This line not in V.

26. (V.) Alors je me...

(MS) Ah, non ! je me...

28 to end. (V.) After 27, V. has the following two stanzas, which end the poem:

Mariage, ô dansante bouée,
Portant pavillon des Armoriques roses,
Mon âme de Vaisseau-Fantôme,
Va, ne sera jamais renflouée,
Elle est la chose
Des sautes de vent, des bandes de pétrels, des nuées.

Hissão ! Levez l'ancre !
Hissão ! Les Ithaques
Voguent dans les bruines...
Nous reviendrons à Paques, — Hissão !
Ou à la Saint'Catherine
Reprendre nos manteaux.

33 & 34. (MS) Between lines 33 and 34, MS has the following stanzas:

Oh, la misérable littérature
Qui nous a raillé
Qui nous a chanssonné ces merveilles de la Nature !

Oh, ce n'est pas souiller
Ce n'est pas une aventure
C'est entrevoir le Sacré
De la pauvre, pauvre créature.

The line "Oh, ce n'est pas souiller" is then crossed out, and the following line is added after "Ce n'est pas une aventure":

Ce n'est pas une prouesse.

34. (MS) Et sachez...

43. (MS) Reste cachée idéale et idéale violette

53. (MS) Tout, tout en elle !

56 & 57. (MS)

(Si) ses prunelles clignent un peu
(Parfois) pour vous demander un peu

"Si" and "Parfois" are crossed out.

66. (MS) Ensemble après cette...

v. *PETITION*

1-12. (V.)

Angoisse des carrefours sans fontaine,
Mais avec à tous les bouts des fêtes foraines.
Jamais franches, ou le poing sur la hanche,
Par le temps qui court
Avec toutes l'amour s'échange,
Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour.
O fleurs d'oranger cuirassées de froid satin,
Elle s'éteint
La mystique Rosace
A voir vos noces
De sexes livrés à la grosse
Courir en valsant vers la Fosse
Commune...

13 & 14. (V.) As in the short story "Lohengrin," where these lines also occur, V. has four lines:

Nul Absolu
Des compromis.
Tout est pas plus
Tout est permis.

15-25. (V.)

Et cependant, ô du Mal, laissez-moi, Circés
Sombrement coiffées à la Titus
Avec des yeux en grand deuil comme des pensées;
Et passez,
Béatifiques Vénus
Étalées découvrant leurs gencives
Toutes vives,
Et leurs aisselles au soleil
Comme on bâille après le sommeil,
Tenant sur fond d'or le lotus
Des sacrilèges domestiques,
Et faisant de l'index : *motus* !

20. (MS) ... découvrant leurs...

21. (MS) Et livrant...

26-48. (V.)

Passez, passez, encor que les yeux vierges
Ne soient que cadran d'émail bleu
Marquant telle heure que l'on veut,
Sauf, à cacher leur heure immortelle
Et tout ce qui est bien elle,
O nuptiales, animales,

O blanchissages, Oh ! leur chambre
 O à tout âge,
 On peut les en faire descendre.
 Et les petits soins secrets
 Et leurs tristes voix sans timbres,
 Et leur salive de gingembre,
 Et leur suicide à froid
 Et puis l'air de dire « De quoi ? »
 Sans doute au premier mot
 On va choir en syncope
 (On est si vierge à fleur de peau).
 Mais leur destinée est bien interlope.

28–30. (MS) After 28, MS has the following line, as in *V.*:

Sauf à cacher leur heure immortelle

This line is then crossed out.

35. (MS) Et peut-être à fleur de peau (“même” added in afterwards)

49 to end. (*V.*)

Oh ! qu'elle laissât là le rôle d'ange
 Et adoptât l'homme comme égal,
 Et que ses yeux ne parlent plus d'Idéal.
 Mais simplement d'humains échanges,
 A la fin des journées,
 Quand les tambours, quand les trompettes
 Ils s'en vont sonnant la retraite,
 Et qu'on prend le frais sur le pas des portes
 En vidant les pots de grès
 A la santé des années mortes
 Qui n'ont pas laissé de regrets.
 Ton ton, tontaine, ton ton,...

54. (MS) Frères et sœurs... (“En” added in to margin)

55. (MS) par leur passé,

56. (MS) Et unis...

58. (MS) A la fin des journées

59. (MS) A quatre (m) bras... (“m” crossed out)

65 & 66. (MS) Pas de regrets au su de tout le canton

vi. *SIMPLE AGONIE*

There are no manuscripts for poems vi, vii, and viii in the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet. D. & F. appear to have had for these poems manuscripts which they describe in each case as “copie ancienne sur

laquelle a déjà été composé le texte de la Vogue.” These are no longer available. The variants given by D. & F. in their edition are reproduced here, and indicated by the letters C.A.

3. (C.A.) D. & F. say that this is a “vers intercalé,” a line added in afterwards on their manuscript.

10. (C.A.) Line added in afterwards.

25. (C.A.) “Et” not in C.A. at first.

33. (C.A.) ... photographies,

51. (C.A.) Du soir à...

62. (C.A.) A la fin d’un beau jour.

63. (C.A.) ... les cors...

VII. *SOLO DE LUNE*

56. (C.A.) ... fin trois quart de lune...

57. (C.A.) O route de rêve, oh pas de musique !

63. (V.) ... et je n’y... (no doubt a printing error in V.)

66. (C.A.) “Je” for “Et.”

91. (V.) “sagacité” for “fugacité.” Editors since D. & F., whose edition reads “fugacité,” have agreed that “sagacité” must be a printing error in V. D. & F. do not record this V. variant.

98. (V.) ... ces nocces...

VIII. *LEGENDE*

1. (V.) “Armoirial” (no doubt a misprint).

26. (V.) ... sans couleur...

54. (V.) Ou n’aime...

IX

In V., poems ix and x form one single poem called “Les Amours,” with the epigraph, from Petrarch, “Arrêtons-nous, Amour, contemplons notre gloire.”

3. This line, not in V., has been added in afterwards in MS.

4. (V.) O, baptême de ma Raison d’être !
(MS) O changed to Oh

6.

(V.) Et qu'il vienne,

A travers les litières des hommes et des dieux,

(MS) Et qu'il vienne, à travers les litières des hommes et des dieux.

10. (V.) ... un ciel...

12. (V.) ... la nuit !

15.

(V.) Au seuil de l'église de mes aïeux

(MS) Au seuil de notre (1) église (des) ô mes aïeux

"I" and "des" crossed out.

16–17.

(V.) Les génies de la Pitié, dise :

(MS) Les grands Génies de la Pitié, dise :

19. (V.) ... ces Messieurs,...

20. (V.) Ta bouche souveraine me fait baisser les yeux

21 & 22. (MS) A single line at first, as it is in V. Line 22 is enclosed in parentheses with an arrow to indicate that it should be a new line.

26. (V. & MS) ... te révéler...

34. (V.) ... et point un...

40. (V.) This line was followed by another:

Oh ! alités du coup !

(MS) This line exists but has been crossed out.

x

In MS margin, Laforgue wrote: "autre pièce," to separate this poem from ix.

13–15. (V.)

O ma petite mienne

O ma quotidienne,

Dans mon petit intérieur,

Et plus jamais ailleurs !

17. (V. & MS) ... Oh mon génie

28. (V.) Et lui redonner...

31 & 32. (V. & MS) Between 31 & 32 in both, but then crossed out in MS:

Enfant ! et l'amitié !

Et la fidélité

Et tout le dévouement

Plein de détails charmants !

33. (V.) Mais sans en venir...

34. (V.) ... et plus le droit...

37. (V.) De faire le fou,

46. (MS) J'aurai passé ma vie (à faillir m'embar) le long des quais
("à faillir m'embar" crossed out)

50. (V.) A single line:

Et tout cela pour l'amour de mon cœur fou de gloire.

(MS)

Et tout cela pour l'amour de mon cœur fou de la gloire d'amour.

"d'amour" has been added in afterwards.

52. (V.) ... à bientôt ? A bientôt ?

58. (V.) Contre l'Amour.

xi. SUR UNE DEFUNTE

1–4. This variant, given by D. & F., occurs neither in *R.I.* nor in MS, and must therefore come from the earlier manuscripts already referred to in the General Textual Note pp. 55–56):

Elle ne m'aimerait pas plus,
Pas plus qu'une Occasion,
Tout est occasion, nul élus, nul absolu...

13. As in 1–4, a variant given by D. & F. Avec A, B, C ou D.

15. (*R.I.*) C'est Lui !...

19. (*R.I.*) "Cette destinée." This version was also adopted, perhaps through oversight or misprint, by D. & F., and later by *O.C.*, whose text is based on D. & F.

20. (*R.I.*) C'est lui;

34–37. These lines not in *R.I.* Instead, the following:

Pendant que je suis dans la rue
Où elle a tant passé sans me voir.

36. (MS)

A m'étonner (de l'obscurité de sa fenêtre) peut-être
(Peut-être) de l'obscurité de sa fenêtre.

The words in parentheses were pencilled in and then crossed out. Apart from a few lines on the epigraph page (noted above) these are the only pencilled emendations in MS, and may represent a late revision.

38. *O.C.* has: "... chez lui, *elle*..." Both *R.I.* and MS have "et."

42. (MS) There is an unintelligible word crossed out after “je les ai.”

43. D. & F. and *O.C.*:

... l'air trop fidèle

43–48. (*R.I.*)

Elle avait l'air trop trop heureuse
Avec ses yeux mouillés d'extase
Et je ne serais qu'un pis-aller
Comme l'est mon jour dans le Temps.

52. (*R.I.*) ... non ! vers Elle...

53. “Et” not in *R.I.*

60. (*R.I.*) ... mon petit cœur...

xii

15. (MS): Pense-t-elle au prix de Moi

17. (MS)

(Oh, ne pense qu'à toi !) Soigne-toi, soigne-toi ! pauvre chair aux abois.
“Oh, ne pense qu'à toi” is crossed out, and “cœur” substituted for
“chair.” This line was originally followed by:

Et que tes pauvres rêves aient le grand air du bois
which is crossed out.

20. (MS) O patrie, ô famille !

21. (MS) “toute” added in afterwards.

24. (MS) Et dès...

31. (MS) Et jeunes anges en robes grises

34. (MS) Et qu'elle méprise sans envie

42. (MS) Et peut-être ton incapacité de sanglots

53. (C.A.) ... au coin du feu un peu

54. (MS) Tout fait...

60. (MS) Les beaux yeux...

62. (MS) ... une irrésistible foire !

65. (MS) “Eh bien” was at first a line in itself. There is an arrow in MS to indicate that it should be part of the next line.

CRITICAL NOTES

CRITICAL NOTES

1. *L'HIVER QUI VIENT*

LAFORGUE'S FIRST FREE-VERSE POEM, "L'Hiver qui Vient," is one of the most self-contained and technically accomplished of the *D.V.* Although Laforgue wrote to Kahn (in the letter quoted in the Introduction) that he had "forgotten" to rhyme, count syllables, or create stanzas, the poem itself does not lack artistic control and unity. Liberated from the external disciplines of more formal poetry, "L'Hiver qui Vient" is nevertheless firmly held by the strength and unity of its theme, and by the way in which the various strands of its imagery are worked into a single rich pattern. The poem is an attempt to seize and render the elusive essence of autumn, both in its physical manifestations and in the complex of feelings, memories, and association with which, for the poet, it has become charged. The poem thus sets up a delicate balance between the concrete examples of the working of autumn (rain, wind, deserted highways, falling leaves, etc.) and the symbolic representation of what the season means to the poet (the hunting horns, the dying sun, the city district with its loneliness and misery). But in the interplay and merging of symbol and description, in the constant pointing of the irony, the distinction is blurred, so that Laforgue successfully achieves what the last line of the poem indicates is his aim: a representation of autumn which takes fully into account the sensibility of the

viewer. This aim was not a recent one with Laforgue; he had always felt a special affinity for this season of muted tones, of the apparent end of life and hope. Both Mallarmé and Baudelaire he praised for their poems on autumn, saying of Baudelaire: “. . . Mais comme il a compris l’automne!” and adding: “Parmi les trente sonnets que j’ai déjà pour mon livre, j’en ai déjà quatre intitulés ‘Après-midi d’automne’. Ce sont ceux que j’ai le plus travaillés, et que j’aime le moins, je ne suis pas parvenu à faire sentir la mélancolie des après-midi d’automne. Je me rappelle certain poème en prose de Mallarmé sur l’automne, voilà!” (Jan. 27, 1881) The fact that the book mentioned here is Laforgue’s proposed first, *S.T.*, is evidence of his continuing desire to evoke this season. There are indeed a number of earlier poems on the theme, but none is as sustained a piece of writing, nor as telling in its irony as is “L’Hiver qui Vient.”

1. There is probably a play here on the expression “blocus continental,” the Continental System in the Napoleonic War. The image of winter settling in like a blockade is sustained subtly throughout the poem. “Messageries du Levant,” on one level the cold east wind associated with the coming of winter, constitutes with its military undertone an extension of the blockade image, “messageries,” like its English equivalent “packet,” being interpreted in the double sense of message (or parcel) and messenger vehicle.

1–5. The exclamations at the beginning of this, and other, poems demonstrate Laforgue’s decision to break with conventional syntax to the extent of including in the verse line only those words capable of adding to the total imaginative and tonal effect, so that the make-weight words which might be required by the syntax of normal meanings are abandoned. Each line thus becomes charged with a maximum of association. It is possible to compare this both with the use of hyphens which, in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, allows her words an emotional force unrestricted by the framework of conventional punctuation, and to the desire of the Symbolists for a “pure” poetry far removed from normal prose.

5 & 6. This emendation—the substitution of lines 5 and 6 for the original single line “Il bruine”—reveals the nature of Laforgue’s irony. Laforgue’s habit in this instance as in others is to control feeling with irony, to cancel out romantic possibility with a realistic, down-to-earth detail. Here, he undercuts what could have been a description

of warm autumnal mists by introducing the word "usines" which stresses the fact that his is not an idyllic country scene, but an urban district, bristling with the factories that are for the poet such a potent symbol of the modern, industrial, anti-romantic way of life. Later details such as the hammers, the telegraph wires, the suburban rooftops serve to sustain and strengthen this point.

Cf. Huysmans, *En Ménage* (a novel which Laforgue admired and had reviewed for a German journal): "L'accent d'un paysage était, selon lui, donné par les tuyaux d'usine qui s'élevaient au-dessus des arbres et crachaient jusqu'aux nuages des flocons de suie."

Cf. also *E.C.(D.)*, where Laforgue equates factories with a sterile life: "Je croupis dans les Usines du Négatif."

11 & 12. The stylistic effect of introducing a rhyming couplet such as this one into a free-verse poem is to emphasize the fundamental irony of the lines by placing them in sharp relief. This is a technique which Eliot was later to use, in such poems as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock:

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

16. The variant "Pactoles des plaines" (see p. 59) is more explicit than the elliptical final version. Beneath the setting sun, fields of wheat spread out like the legendary river whose sands turned to gold when Midas bathed in it; but the once-mighty and splendid "overseer of work" who supervised the ripening of the crops has now vanished. The change from "Pactole des plaines" to "Pactoles / Des spectacles agricoles" does much to stiffen the ironical texture. On the one hand, the scene is once again prevented from being a purely rural one; on the other, the agricultural show has unpleasant associations, as it has in *Madame Bovary*. Cf. "Complainte du soir des comices agricoles" (*O.C.*, I, 152), where this kind of show is made to stand for the sordidness and futility of life.

19-23. As the sun declines, the spreading of its rays along the horizon makes a bed which is to become its death-bed. Again, in "crachat d'estaminet" the sordid detail is used ironically.

The "death" of the sun is of crucial importance to Laforgue's portrayal of autumn. The sun represents the source of life, growth, warmth, and reproduction. But, like Hartmann and Schopenhauer, Laforgue tends to reject life as inevitably flawed and miserable and to accept, at least in theory, what is sometimes posited as a consequence: that the only solution lies in the systematic negation of the will to live. This idea is stated very explicitly in many poems or prose notes:

Absurdité des remèdes. Deux solutions proposées : Bouddha, l'Inde vénérable — Schopenhauer, Hartmann.

Pas de remède absolu, universel, qui supprime le mal universel.

Rêves de dilettantes : l'atrophie du vouloir, l'insaisissable présent partout sous les mille variétés de l'illusion, désir, appétit sexuel, etc...

Jamais on n'atteindra l'essence même de la Volonté, le principe mystérieux, insaisissable qui circule partout. Il faut se contenter du suicide matériel et du renoncement.

Tuez votre existence individuelle, matériellement ou intellectuellement mais ne songez pas à tuer le Vouloir universel... [*M.P.*, p. 10]

In the earlier poems, the same pessimistic philosophy is often expressed through a contrast between sun and moon. In the first poem of *N.-D.*, for instance, the poet covers with abuse the life-giving sun and finally repudiates it altogether in favour of the moon, symbol of sterility and renunciation. Although the imagery of "L'Hiver qui Vient" is not strictly allegorical in this rather crude way, the philosophical implications remain and give depth to the image of the sun's lonely agonizing.

27-29. See note on hunting horns at the beginning of II below.

31. The sun lies in complete isolation, like a gland torn from a body. There is a word play on "sans personne": the gland is literally without a body, but also without anyone to help.

42. It is interesting that after having tried the non-romantic adjectives "pauvres" and "souffreteux" Laforgue comes to choose the more ironical "modestes" which expresses most economically his distaste for bourgeois gentility.

50 & 53. There is in "soldats loin de la France" and in "où nul ne passe," with their suggestions of communication interrupted in war-time, an extension of the blockade image.

68. Cf. *En Ménage*, p. 111: "les quartiers poitrinaires et charmants."

73. These expressions, like the "modestes jardinets," are objective correlatives of the cosy suburban life to which the poet is a stranger. Cf. Eliot: "After the cups, the marmalade, the tea . . ."

79. Cf. Laforgue's earlier poem: "Complainte sur le mot falot falotte" (*O.C.*, I, 174).

82. It is interesting to see Laforgue removing from the final version his own rather heavy-handed comment on the poem: "Pour mes

compatriotes, / Mais qu'on ne m'en demande pas la raison!" The tone of self-justification, the talk of reasons and explanations reminiscent of his earlier volumes are dropped altogether, the poet retaining instead as his last line the one which records his artistic impulse to catch the essence of autumn and the feelings he associates with it. The musical analogy expressing this long-standing desire is a familiar one with him, as shown by this comment in *M.P.*: "Quand est-ce que nous nous montrerons adéquats à la valeur des phénomènes et vivrons-nous justes de ton?"

II. *LE MYSTERE DES TROIS CORS*

THIS POEM elaborates a theme introduced in "L'Hiver qui Vient." Once again, life, represented by the sun, is hunted to death; but the focus now shifts to the witnesses of that death, the hunting horns. Although the symbol of the hunting horns is a complex one, some of its implications may be ascertained from Laforgue's earlier references to them. In a letter to Kahn, for instance, Laforgue uses the horn to indicate the fundamental ennui of his life. To understand the real nature of his feeling, he says, "pour goûter cette chose, il faudrait chanter les refrains sur un air de cor de chasse que j'ai entendu dans mon enfance en province" (*L.A.*, p. 56). The hunting horn thus symbolizes on one level the hopelessness and despair of a meaningless life. Unable to find any ultimate answers to the questions which riddle his existence, man in this metaphor is "at bay," since his position is, like that of the stag, without issue; and the horns sound his "hallali," the signal for the kill.

Laforgue returns to this metaphor in the last of the *D.V.*, where his fiancée is described as a "pauvre cœur aux abois." Like Baudelaire and Mallarmé, Laforgue associates the hunting horn with the theme of death. It is in this sense that, in poem VI, the breaking-up or death of the existing social order is attended by the sound of horns, the "fanfare dans les soirs" (26). In "Le Mystère des trois cors" it is the death of the horns themselves that constitutes the "mystery" of the title.

Lastly, the hunting horn is often the objective correlative of a sexual theme. In Laforgue's earlier poems its call is heard

immediately before sexual union, as in later poems it is heard immediately before death. In "Complainte du soir des comices agricoles," for instance, the horns are told that since coupling in men is inevitable, there is no need for them to be always announcing the fact:

Laissez, laissez, ô cors de chasse,
Puisque c'est le sort de la race.

And these horns die when the couple in the poem do come together. Again, in "Complainte des formalités nuptiales" (*O.C.*, I, 121) the horns are suddenly stilled at the very moment of the girl's inevitable capitulation. In "Le Mystère des trois cors" these implications are more subdued, evident in such details as the fact that there are three horns obviously involved in a "triangle" which results in their mysterious and "highly immoral" deaths.

24. The changing of "le couchant" to "le Soleil qui se meurt" strengthens the theme of death introduced in "L'Hiver qui Vient."

25-36. Cf. the short story "Persée et Andromède" (*M.L.*, p. 234) in which the daily setting of the sun is described as a vast and magnificent pageant for the benefit of both cosmic and earthly spectators:

L'Astre !...
Là-bas, à l'horizon miroitant où les sirènes retiennent leur respiration,
Les échafaudages du couchant montent;
De phares en phares, s'étagent des maçonneries de théâtre;
Les artificiers donnent le dernier coup de main;
Une série de lunes d'or s'épanouissent, comme les embouchures de buccins rangés dont des phalanges de hérauts annonciateurs fumineraient !
L'abattoir est prêt, les tentures se carguent;
Sur des litières de diadèmes, et des moissons de lanternes vénitiennes, et des purées et des gerbes,
Endiguées par des barrages de similor déjà au pillage,
L'Astre Pacha,
Son Eminence Rouge,
En Simarre de débâcles,
Descend, mortellement triomphal,
Durant des minutes, par la Sublime Porte !...
Et le voilà qui gît sur le flanc, tout marbré de stigmates atrabillaires.
Vite, quelqu'un pousse du pied cette citrouille crevée, et alors !...

Adieu, paniers, vendanges sont faites !...

Les rangées de buccins s'abaissent, les remparts s'écroulent, avec leurs phares de carafes prismatiques ! Des cymbales volent, les courtisans trébuchent dans les étendards, les tentes sont repliées, l'armée lève le camp, emportant dans une panique les basiliques occidentales, les pressoirs, les idoles, les ballots, les vestales, les bureaux, les ambulances, les estrades des orphéons, tous les accessoires officiels.

Et ils s'effacent dans un poudrolement d'or rose.

Ah ! bref, tout s'est passé à merveille !...

In this section of the poem, Laforgue similarly attempts to portray imaginatively the various stages of sunset. As in "L'Hiver qui Vient," the sun during the day is a splendid official, whose first action in the evening is to put off his gown of office. But as the sun declines, it opens the floodgates to let its streaming rays flow out like golden rivers (or drains, since Laforgue ironically uses the expression "Grand Collecteur," the main drain); these rays are reflected, and thus "rekindled" in the bottles displayed in wine-shop windows. Sinking further, the sun reddens: the golden rivers become a bog of blood, the sun's steeds panic and rear (for the sun here is suddenly transformed into the mythical Phoebus, driving his chariot over the rim of the horizon). But chariot and steeds are caught and drowned in the engulfing bog which is soon, in its turn, absorbed into the hard, ash-coloured horizon. Cf. Baudelaire's: "Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige" ("Harmonie du soir").

37. The word "gloire" introduces the theme of an unreal, chivalric, legendary love, which appears again in "Légende" (VIII), and in the original epigraph to poems IX and X: "Arrêtons-nous, Amour, contemplons notre gloire!"

III. DIMANCHES

AFTER THE FIRST TWO EVOCATIVE TONE POEMS, the third strikes a more direct, personal note. To begin with, the poet now speaks in the first person; and one of the principal themes introduced—that of the highly introspective, sensitive individual whose very self-awareness makes him unsure of his own personality and unable to establish contact with others—is of central concern to Laforgue himself. In the *D.V.* it recurs again and again, thus forming one of the leitmotives which give the twelve poems their

unity. Another personal theme introduced in this poem is also to gain increasing prominence in succeeding poems: that of the two lovers who thought of marrying only to separate. Because of the urgency with which the theme is stated and restated, explored and probed from so many different angles throughout the *D.V.*, it is hard to escape the conjecture that it is, at least partly, autobiographical. This is discussed more fully in the notes whenever it seems particularly relevant to any passage in the poems.

Also given its first statement in this poem is the important symbol of "Sunday," one which Laforgue used consistently as the exterior equivalent for his "spleen," his alienation from the world around him. For it is on Sunday, when he is himself idle, and when he sees other people occupied together in the weekly rituals of churchgoing and family reunions, that the poet most feels his own isolation and boredom. The irony of the situation lies in his awareness of the fact that, although he has nothing but contempt for the emptiness of lives filled with such mechanical routines, he cannot help feeling still the loneliness of his own position. The potency for Laforgue of the connotations of Sunday is evidenced by his repeated use of the symbol in letters, poems, and prose notes. There is no doubt that the daily boredom of his life in Germany was greatly intensified on Sundays, as is recorded in the following letter:

Je loge près de la chapelle anglaise du château et passe mes dimanches, comme hier, à travailler, rideaux tirés, en écoutant les éternelles et très lamentables litanies accompagnées par l'orgue; cela dure deux heures, pendant lesquelles je suis accablé de tristesse, je renais ma vie, ma triste vie, je songe aux cloîtres. — Puis les voix se taisent, je me mets à la fenêtre et je vois sortir toute la colonie anglaise de Coblenz, entre autres un pensionnat de young ladies en toilettes exquises, tout plissés et bouillonnés... [juin 1882, *O.C.*, IV, 167]

Or again: "Voilà qu'on entend quelques cloches d'après les vêpres, disant la province bloquée sans espoir et les dimanches de vieilles filles" (*M.P.*, p. 37). There are two "Complaintes" on the theme: "Complainte d'un Certain Dimanche" and "Complainte d'un Autre Dimanche"; in *F.B.V.* no less than thirteen of the poems are entitled "Dimanches," fragments from four of them having later been incorporated into the *D.V.* Although

these poems are less substantial evocations of the inherent melancholy of Sundays, some of them are none the less interesting in that they state so bluntly what the day means to the poet. An instance is the "Dimanches" (XXIII) which begins:

Je m'ennuie, natal ! je m'ennuie,
Sans cause bien appréciable,
Que bloqué par les boues, les dimanches, les pluies,
En d'humides tabacs ne valant pas le diable.

Or again ("Dimanches," XXVIII):

Les nasillardes cloches des dimanches
A l'étranger,
Me font que j'ai de la vache enragée
Pour jusqu'à la nuit, sur la planche...

1-3. "Self-possession" would seem to mean for Laforgue a profound understanding and control of the largely subconscious forces which make up man's "interior universe." Laforgue's interest in philosophy, and his sustained study of Hartmann's psychology, had naturally made him feel that the visible personality was but a mere fraction of man's total "self," and that in this larger, virtually unknown whole would lie any real explanation of man's nature and behaviour. His desire to probe this interior world is recorded in such prose fragments as the one quoted in the Introduction: "La rage de vouloir se connaître—de plonger sous la culture consciente vers 'l'Afrique intérieure' de notre inconscient domaine. . . ." But the exploration is of its very nature limited; and many of Laforgue's poems express in ironical terms the dilemma of the introspective person whose constant self-scrutiny never yields completely satisfactory results, never leads to positive conclusions. "Ballade," for instance (*F.B.V.*, XXVI), is a deft play with the idea that one is ignorant of the very elements of one's own composition:

Oyez, au physique comme au moral,
Ne suis qu'une colonie de cellules
De raccroc; et ce sieur que j'intitule
Moi, n'est, dit-on, qu'un polypier fatal !

De mon cœur un tel, à ma chair védique,
Comme de mes orteils à mes cheveux,
Va-et-vient de cellules sans aveu,
Rien de bien solvable et rien d'authentique.

Quand j'organise une descente en Moi,
J'en conviens, je trouve là, attablée,
Une société un peu bien mêlée,
Et que je n'ai point vue à mes octrois...

In another poem (*F.B.V.*, xviii), the poet's self is a "tonneau d'Ixion des Danaïdes," a bottomless vessel which no amount of scrutiny will completely exhaust.

For Laforgue, a corollary of this lack of self-knowledge is the impossibility of decisive action. He cannot muster enough belief in the value or stability of what appears on the surface as his own personality to take the decisive step of involving himself with others. Again, this is expressed in a number of poems in *F.B.V.*, either ironically (LI):

Mais peut-il être question
D'aller tirer des exemplaires
De son individu si on
N'en a pas une idée plus claire ?...

Or bluntly (xviii):

(Comment lui dire : « Je vous aime » ?
Je me connais si peu moi-même.)

For the poet, as for Hamlet, introspection stifles action. In "Dimanches" he sees his fiancée carried away by the force of circumstance but does nothing to intervene; in later poems this chronic inaction—this "anaemia"—becomes his coat of arms.

4. A first draft of this line in *F.B.V.*, xxx, "Dimanches," gives the following:

Chez moi, c'est Galathée aveuglant Pygmalion !
Ah ! faudrait modifier cette situation...

This metaphor makes more concrete the theme introduced in the first three lines, and discussed in the previous note. The poet feels himself to be blinded by his desire for the ideal, the absolute, just as Pygmalion is blinded by the ideal beauty of the statue he has created. And just as Pygmalion turns away from the ordinary but real women about him, so the poet feels that his preoccupation with abstract values has cut him off from the values of the world about him and made him incapable of living or acting in it.

Cf. also the editor's gloss on these lines in *B.C.*, p. 341:

En se référant à la première version, plus claire peut-être, on peut proposer cette interprétation : Pygmalion aveuglé par Galatée... sans doute au moment où Galatée est de marbre, abstraction faite de la métamorphose qui lui permettra d'être femme parmi les femmes réelles — c'est le moi aveuglé par ses propres phantasmes, ses rêves, son idéal, et rendu incapable de s'accrocher à des êtres réels et de se situer lui-même dans le monde des réalités.

Perhaps the inspiration for this metaphor was a visual one: it is interesting for example that Burne-Jones, whom Laforgue mentions

a number of times in his notes on art or aesthetics, has a series of paintings on Pygmalion which illustrates in a very precise way Laforgue's interpretation of the myth. And the poet does mention specifically the painting by Moreau: "où dort Galatée de Moreau surveillée par Polyphème."

7. Cf. the early draft in *F.B.V.* ("Dimanches," xxx) where the autobiographical element is surely stronger than in the final version:

Un soir, je crus en Moi ! J'en faillis me fiancer !
Est-ce possible... Où donc tout ça est-il passé !

There are parallels to this situation in Laforgue's letters. In February of 1886 he is seriously thinking of getting married:

Et moi aussi je suis embêté, moulu et souffrant. Le fin mot de ces *affaires-là* c'est que nous ne sommes pas mariés... quant à moi j'y songe quotidiennement et franchement, et il n'est pas de railleries ou de mirages romantiques qui m'en détournent... Tout ce que je vois — et tout ce que je puis imaginer de mieux dans cette carrière, même à Paris — me rive au cœur et par-dessus la tête l'idée d'un mariage charmant et simple (je te tiendrai au courant des progrès). [*L.A.*, pp. 158-9]

But by the summer Laforgue had abandoned this idea, and he writes to Kahn that with the end of the cold weather, "la tarentule grave du mariage a cessé de me tarentuler." And to his brother Emile, in July: "Mais tout plutôt qu'un second hiver à Berlin, j'y perds mon temps sans intérêt et j'ai par lassitude failli m'y marier. Ce que je n'ai pas encore le droit de faire." On September 1 he writes to Kahn in the same vein: "passant un autre hiver à Berlin j'en reviendrai infailliblement marié avec quelqu'un qui m'est absolument interdite de par moi, elle, et tout." Eight days later, the "tarantula" having apparently caught up with him meanwhile, he writes to tell his sister of his engagement. It is the same indecision about marriage and the same mixture of longing and cynicism which inform the theme of the "missed" marriage in the following poems.

26. The addition of this line, which was not in *V.*, does much to point the irony of the next line: "Tout pour la famille." In an earlier poem, "Complainte d'un Certain Dimanche," Laforgue had already used "brioches" as a symbol of the Sunday rituals of bourgeois families, thus placing in sharper relief his own loneliness:

Dans ce village en falaises, loin, vers les cloches,
Je redescends dévisagé par les enfants
Qui s'en vont faire bénir de tièdes brioches;

The present passage again suggests the poet's estrangement from his surroundings, but its irony is more bitter. Family and religious rituals

are now seen as unavoidably empty: "C'est certain!" And, if the objective correlatives of this feeling—the incense, the "brioches," the churchgoing young ladies—are personal to Laforgue's vision, they are not completely arbitrary for they embody and convey a sentiment which was sufficiently current in the period to give them immediate force. Aversion for the bourgeois way of life, and for religion as merely another manifestation of it, is of course the touchstone of much social writing at that time (cf. Marx and Engels, in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*: "Law, Morality, religion are to him (the member of the proletariat) so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests"); but it is also prominent in French literature of the period and in the work of the Impressionists.

34–45. Some of the implications of the symbol of the piano can be seen more clearly in the following prose fragments (*M.P.*, p. 30):

Oui, error dans une capitale, par un fin matin de lendemain de pluie; aller — regarder les visages de femmes, y déchiffrer la quotidienneté de leur existence et de leur destiné. — Un pensionnat distingué passe, je le regarde passer, ô délices, orgies de berquinades bizarres, mélancolie dont les objets sont tirés à tant d'exemplaires, qu'elle devient monotonie et débonnaire fatalisme.

Quelle est cette rue de province aisée ? A une fenêtre, des rideaux, un piano travaille réglé d'un métronome cette éternelle valse de Chopin usée comme l'amour — ô délices poignantes, ô bon fatalisme !

In an earlier poem, "Complainte des pianos qu'on entend dans les quartiers aisés," Laforgue similarly associates with the piano's "stériles ritournelles" the futile lives of young girls who sit all day at their eternal needlework. In both these examples, the emphasis is on "quotidienneté"—the empty, mechanical routines of existence. Life is formed, portioned, meted out by the repetition of daily habits with all the monotonous regularity of a metronome. The poet is forced (as later D. H. Lawrence, for instance in *Women in Love*) to face the central problem of whether this routine constitutes the whole of life or whether there can be any meaning transcending it. It is in this sense that the piano is "si natal maintenant": it makes the poet question again the very sources of his life, as though he had been newly reborn and had to begin afresh thinking out all the old, well-known problems. But the questioning can produce no new outcome, and the poet, caught in his fatalistic view of a rigorously determined, meaningless life, can only turn to hypochondria and slaughter, the negation of life, health, happiness—"Walkyries des hypocondries et des tueries!"—not a final conclusion, however, since the theme is held throughout the *D.V.* until in the last section there is proposed a slightly more hopeful solution to the dilemma.

50. Cf. "Célibat, célibat, tout n'est que célibat" (*F.B.V.*, xx):

Ne serais-je qu'un monomane
Dissolu
Par ses travaux de décadent et de reclus ?

52. Cf. *M.L.*, "Pan et la Syrinx":

Ce n'est pas sa chair qui me serait tout,
Et je ne serais pas que le grand Pan pour elle,
Mais quoi ! aller faire les fous
Dans les histoires fraternelles !

This desire for a union which would be neither purely sexual, nor merely a platonic "histoire fraternelle" becomes in the poems which follow a dominant theme.

58 & 59. A reference to Hamlet which becomes more explicit in later poems.

60-64. The poem ends on a light note, an ironical equilibrium in which the issues of the poem are suspended, the problems, since in any case they seem insoluble, temporarily shelved; while the poet is brusquely shaken out of his speculative mood by down-to-earth advice. The word "ellébore" is highly ironical, since hellebore is not only the realist's cure to purge the poet of his neurotic hypochondria, but also, as in La Fontaine's fable of the tortoise and the hare, the classical remedy for madness. Again, comparison with Hamlet is unavoidable.

IV. *DIMANCHES*

BEFORE TAKING UP ONCE AGAIN the various strands of the preceding poem, this second "Dimanches" reasserts in its vigorous opening section the original leitmotif of autumn. The image of young ladies on their way to church again conveys the melancholy of Sundays and the poet's isolation; but the focus shifts gradually to a slightly different aspect of the symbol, as the young girls come to represent womankind as a whole. Laforgue thus probes the nature both of women and of relationship between the sexes, a psychological exploration which, continued in the next poem, becomes its main and all-encompassing subject.

5. "Chute des feuilles," besides its contrapuntal reference to the "feuilles, folioles . . ." section of I (46-50), has the image of the abandoned theatrical announcements which, along with the plays and the legendary characters they represent, are all swept away on the great autumnal wind. The names "Antigone" and "Philomèle," although they are called up by the theatrical connotations of "feuilles," symbolize more generally the golden age of myth, the summery world of warmth and happiness which vanishes at the coming of winter.

8. For "feux de paille," cf. "Albums" (*F.B.V.*, xix), in which, having described the idyllic life he imagines himself leading in the American Far West, the poet concludes:

Oh ! qu'ils sont beaux les feux de paille ! qu'ils sont fous
Les albums ! et non incassables mes joujoux.

Similarly, the poet's momentary impression that the frail young ladies might represent a world of love and hope proves to be nothing but a "feu de paille," a short-lived illusion.

12-16. The same sentiment is expressed in *En Ménage*: "Il [Cyprien] haïssait d'ailleurs la bourgeoisie dont la corruption endimanchée l'horripilait. . . ."

17. The bear is of course a common image for an unsociable, or socially inept, person. Laforgue describes himself in these terms in one of his notes (*M.P.*, p. 21): "Je ne suis point un jeune homme beau, ni remarquable d'aspect sous aucun rapport, je ne m'étaie pas ni comme manières ni comme conversation, je suis même un peu ours, et je ne m'amuse pas à rencontrer et à intriguer des regards de jeunes filles." But in this poem the image is strengthened by the idea of the polar bear whose solitary, icy figure is in perfect harmony with the prevailing mood of autumn and its repudiation of life and warmth. There is an interesting parallel to this "polar" imagery in "Soirs de Fêtes" (*F.B.V.*, xxxii) where the poet, now the "Gondole enfant chérie" who has arrived late at a ball only to find no one pays any attention to him, sails away, in a fit of pique, to the polar regions:

C'est bien. Je m'exile en ma gondole
(Si frêle !) aux mouettes, aux orages,
Vers les malheurs qu'on voit au Pôle !

22. The change from "Bien que d'un cœur encor tremblant" to the much more aggressive "Qu'on se le dise" shows the movement

towards greater firmness and sharper irony that is visible in so many of Laforgue's emendations.

26. The poet turns away from the civilized life he has been contemplating in the form of the young ladies, to the dark, elemental forces of the universe: to the sea which is to Laforgue as to Baudelaire the symbol of the unconscious.

28 to end. The first, completely different ending to this poem is interesting in that it sustained the elemental sea-imagery introduced in 26, and in that it also made clear the poet's intense preoccupation with the question of the value of marriage. But its frivolity allowed the poem to be resolved ironically without saying very much about the problems it had raised. In the revised version we see Laforgue rejecting this way out, and choosing instead to express much more fully the theme, central to the entire *D.V.* as well as to this poem, of the relationship between men and women.

In the new ending the poet, wishing to escape from his lonely "polar bear" position—from the solitude of the analytical, self-conscious mind—toys with the idea of marriage as an alternative. But for several reasons the alternative proves unacceptable. In the first place, the poet cannot accept what he considers to be the hypocritical bourgeois attitude to marriage: an attitude that covers difficulties by making of sexual union a "mystery," a "purple ideal" not to be approached openly, but covertly, "en divin délire." Secondly, marriage would perhaps involve him in reproduction. (Although this aspect is merely suggested here in the word "relevailles," it gains greater prominence in succeeding poems, especially in v and x.) For the poet, reproduction is irremediably sordid: not only is it in his view a mechanical and biologically determined function in men as in animals, but it also represents the positive will to live which the pessimist feels must be given up by all men. Thirdly, the poet cannot forget his grievance against womankind as a whole. This theme is also dealt with more fully in the next poem. In the end the poet finds no solution to his dilemma but a Swift-like revulsion from all human beings ("Ecœurés de notre espèce") which prevails temporarily over the compassion he had previously expressed for "la pauvre, pauvre créature."

53. As in the prose notes where Laforgue discusses "la femme, foyer réflecteur" (*M.P.*, p. 53) women are here, despite their obvious weakness and frailty, the centre or focus of human life.

60. This is the first instance of a recurring use of religious imagery with sexual connotations.

v. PETITION

THE BEGINNING of "Pétition" is a variation on the closing lines of the preceding poem, whose bitter tone it sustains. Anatomizing the "espèce" with which he is so disgusted, the poet finds little cause for optimism: love is as sterile as a fountainless square and yet full of meaningless fury like a fairground; beneath a genteel façade women are merely the instruments of sex. From this cynical outburst, the poem moves to a serious appeal—the "petition" of the title—for a more genuine and equal contact between the sexes, but the earnestness of the plea is neutralized by the irony of the fanciful last section.

1 & 2. The image of love as a fountainless square is an example of a symbol which is consolidated by the poems surrounding it; the passages about love and marriage in the preceding poem especially give it a deeper meaning and more immediate force. Laforgue thus succeeds in writing tone poems in which, on the analogy of music, various themes illuminate and enhance each other.

3. This line marks the beginning of the vehement attack on women which forms the bulk of the poem (3–48). In spirit the passage is close to the misogyny of Schopenhauer and of *Hamlet*, influences which can also be seen in Laforgue's own notes on women in *M.P.* That the poet could be overwhelmed with disgust at the mere thought of the sexual side of women is shown in an early letter he wrote to his friend Henry:

un temps charmant qui remplit les rues de jolies femmes qui se croient au printemps. Mes fenêtres donnent sur la promenade la plus fréquentée et je regarde. Il y en a d'adorables. Je passe des heures à les regarder, je fais des rêves. Mais bientôt je songe qu'elles ont, ces anges ! pantalons et organes génitaux — pouah ! pouah ! C'est là, d'ailleurs, la grande tristesse de ma vie. [*O.C.*, IV, 92]

The same disgust permeates "Pierrot Fumiste" (Laforgue's only known attempt at a play) as well as the short story "Lohengrin," where the hero, in a last desperate attempt to escape from his bride, clutches his pillow—which turns into a white swan to bear him far away from his nuptial bed.

Not only is woman a sexual being ("petit mammifère usuel" Laforgue calls her in an earlier poem) but she has the added disadvantage of embodying nature's impulse towards reproduction. This

is indeed her main function in life: "la croisade féminine pour la propagation de l'Idéal, c'est-à-dire de l'espèce" (*M.P.*, p. 72). In order to fulfil this aim, women subjugate men, turning them away from higher metaphysical speculations to the practical details of everyday life:

Elle croit au *moi*, et n'a pas peur de la mort, et est fermée aux angoisses métaphysiques et au désespoir de l'Inconnaissable. Elle est la vie contente. Sa vocation immuable et inextirpable, sa raison d'être est de perpétuer la vie. Le règne de la femme est arrivé. La fonction de l'homme désormais sera l'art de faire des enfants à sa compagne. [*M.P.*, p. 53]

And again:

Alors, comme aux âges préhistoriques, la Femme frissonne, son premier et dernier instinct est de se blottir contre l'Homme, et ses yeux levés, ne cherchant pas plus haut (n'eût-il que la taille d'un fantassin) que le regard du Vainqueur qui a aménagé la terre et fondé le foyer, se font terrestrement amoureux. Et, comme aux premiers jours aussi, dégoûté de la volupté et repoussant sa petite compagne terrestre, l'Homme fixe tristement les profondeurs toujours si mystérieuses du ciel, et voudrait bien aussi se blottir contre un Vainqueur qui aurait aménagé l'univers et fondé un foyer supérieur. On connaît le reste.

Certes si l'Homme ne s'était fait des religions, ce n'est pas sa compagne qui aurait eu cure de succédanés de ce genre.

Maintenant elle a pris cette œuvre de l'Homme, et son génie pratique et quotidien en a chassé l'Infini primitif pour y installer un laboratoire d'idéal, de mystère et de remords, à la gloire, à la culture et aux intérêts de son sexe. [*M.P.*, p. 65]

5 & 6. These lines were used a number of times by Laforgue, perhaps an indication of their imaginative vitality. Cf. the short story "Hamlet" in *M.L.*:

Oh ! cloître-toi ! L'amour, l'amour
S'échange, par le temps qui court,
Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour.

F.B.V., xxxvii:

Le mal m'est trop ! tant que l'Amour
S'échange par le temps qui court.

Cf. also Eliot's "La Figlia Che Piange": "Simple and faithless as a smile and a shake of the hand."

7-11. The conventional symbol of marriage, the bouquet of orange-blossom is here "armour-plated" in satin, the sinister detail again disposing of romantic possibility. In an early poem, Laforgue presents the rose window as a mirror which catches the essence of life and reflects impartially all its turmoil and misery: "tu dis bien notre

vie et splendide et macabre," while remaining aloof from it: "chaste rosace d'or" ("Rosace en Vitrail," *S.T.*). But even this detached on-looker is now shocked by the crudely sexual and mercenary marriages it sees.

11–12. "Fosse commune," like the hunting horn, is an example of death imagery with sexual implications. Cf. "Lohengrin," *M.L.*: "Cette Villa-Nuptiale sent la fosse-commune."

15–25. These lines are a review of the various roles of woman as seductress. Women, the poet maintains, are never simple and open in their dealings with men ("Jamais franches . . .") but always assume the attitudes and guises of seduction, in order to achieve their aim of continuing the species. Again, there are numerous parallels in *M.P.*:

Elles font ce qu'elles veulent avec leur corps (ce corps qui doit dire l'âme !), changent en un tour de main par la coiffure — bandeaux virginaux, à la chien canaille, à la titus équivoque et noble, en tour, en bacchante avec des fleurs, en tresses, accroche-cœur andaloux — changent d'âme leur visage. Une mèche folle près de l'œil ! des bandeaux plats. Et tout de suite leurs yeux, leur air prend l'expression de leur coiffure — baissés avec les bandeaux et les tresses, etc...

Mirage ! mirage ! il faut les tuer puisqu'on ne peut les saisir; — ou bien les rassurer, les reformer, leur faire passer le goût des bijoux, en faire véritablement nos compagnes égales, nos amies intimes, des associés d'ici-bas, les habiller autrement, leur couper les cheveux, leur tout dire. [*M.P.*, p. 48]

Or again:

Comme on l'a laissée dans l'esclavage, la paresse, sans autre occupation que son sexe, elle l'a hypertrophié, et est devenue le Féminin, toilettes, bijoux, faux-derrières ou plates tuniques grecques, romans, drames, décolletages, nus, paquets de lettres parfumées, lunes de miel; nous l'avons laissée s'hypertrophier, elle est un monde pour nous, nous ne la voyons qu'en amour, et comme la nature de cet amour est de durer à peine une demi-heure, il a fallu, pour remplir les vides et joindre les deux bouts, qu'elle se fit une humanité à part, chaque an, chaque saison une nouvelle mode, un nouvel art de séduction, et des variétés d'amour, tête, cœur, chair, platoniques, amours mûres, etc., etc... [*M.P.*, p. 52]

Also illuminating in the context of this passage is the quotation from *Hamlet* which Laforgue used as epigraph to an earlier poem (*F.B.V.*, XXXIV) on the same theme:

HAMLET: I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another, you jig, you amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance; go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad.

And in the poem which follows, Laforgue threatens to strip woman of her seductive apparatus and thus reduce her to an equal:

Là, là, je te ferai honte !
Et je te demanderai compte
De ce corset cambrant tes reins,
De ta tournure et des frisures
Achalandant contre nature
Ton front et ton arrière-train.

Je te crierai : « Nous sommes frères !
Alors, vêts-toi à ma manière,
Ma manière ne trompe pas;
Et perds ce dandinement louche
D'animal lesté de ses couches,
Et galopant pas les haras ! »

17. Cf. Laforgue's recurring claim that "le violet grand-deuil est ma couleur locale."

20. Cf. *M.P.* (p. 20): "Le montré de la denture est la caractéristique des têtes de mort. . . . C'est tout de suite un rappel de fragilité, de tombe, du sublime martyr de la créature périssable, mais révoltée et sanglotant quand même vers le bonheur."

26-48. It is interesting to compare this passage to the original version in *V.* (see textual variants); not only is the revised passage more fluent and musical than the earlier, but it is also more subtle and controlled in its irony. In particular, Laforgue either completely removes his blunt comment on sex—"nuptiales animales" does not appear in the second version—or tones it down considerably—instead of "à fleur de peau," the more subdued but more ironical "à fleur de robe / Peut-être même à fleur de peau." In substance, however, the revised passage remains the same. After evoking the image of woman as seductress, Laforgue examines another feminine attitude which just as surely sets woman apart from men and prevents a frank, equal relationship between them. This is their hypocritical attitude of prudish aloofness, which, the poet now claims, is not really different from open seduction, since it merely covers with affected airs of innocence the same fundamental preoccupation with sex.

31. Cf. the early draft in *F.B.V.*, xxxvii, "La vie qu'elles me font mener":

Au premier mot,
Peut-être (on est si distinguée à fleur de peau !)
Elles vont tomber en syncope
Avec des regards d'antilope; —
Mais tout leur être est interlope !

37. "Historiques esclaves": Woman is enslaved by the position to which she has been accustomed throughout history, that of a creature who has only sexual and maternal function. This is the sense in which the word is used in the passage already quoted: "Comme on l'a laissée dans l'esclavage, la paresse, sans autre occupation que son sexe, elle l'a hypertrophié, et est devenu le Féminin" and in this note:

Non, la femme n'est pas notre frère; par la paresse et la corruption nous en avons fait un être à part, inconnu, n'ayant d'autre arme que son sexe, ce qui est non seulement la guerre perpétuelle, mais encore une arme pas de bonne guerre — adorant ou haïssant mais pas compagnon franc, un être qui forme légion avec esprit de corps, franc-maçonnerie — des défiances d'éternel petit esclave. [*M.P.*, p. 47]

43 & 44. Although the women inevitably succumb, they do so not openly or whole-heartedly, but in a cold and soulless way, still wishing to retain their role of spiritual superiority. Again, the sexual aspect is conveyed through imagery of death: "Le grand Suicide, à froid."

53 & 57. The word "échanges," which was used at the beginning of the poem to mean the sordid barter of physical love, is used again to denote a true exchange, on equal terms, of sympathy and affection between men and women. It is thus a unifying element in the dissimilar moods of the beginning and the end of the poem.

VI. *SIMPLE AGONIE*

THE MAIN THEME of "Simple Agonie" is once again close to *Hamlet*, but to a different aspect from the one stressed in previous poems. It is a meditation on life, on the problem "to be or not to be." The "Agonie" of the title holds several levels of association. It can mean the anguish—or "désespoir de l'Inconnaissable" (*M.P.*, p. 53)—of the man caught in the fatalistic situation outlined in the first five poems. As in those poems, that man can find no certainty or value, either in himself, since he is critical of his very ability to think or judge accurately (4 & 5), or in society—from which he is in any case estranged ("O paria!")—and which he feels to be irremediably corrupt ("il faut tout casser"). But "Agonie" also denotes a more literal death-agony, for the protagonist in the last section is in fact dead. He—unlike Hamlet—could find no reason to continue living, since he no longer believed in or feared the "something

after death, the undiscovered country." This reason, indeed all reasons, are no longer valid: "Il n'y a plus de RAISON." Lastly, the title also retains its suggestion of Christ's agony in the garden, but the coupling of "simple" and "agonie" makes this religious implication very ironical.

1. "les sympathies de mai." With its extravagant display of new life and growth, springtime is in exact opposition to the poet's mood of renunciation; but its all-pervasive atmosphere is too powerful to be resisted completely. April is indeed the cruellest month: the poet is forced, against his will and convictions, into harmony with this season of re-birth: "et ce sacré printemps surtout qui vous donne la sensation que tout recommence, et qu'on n'en est pas quitte avec son insaisissable *moi* dans cette ritournelle des saisons . . ." (*L.A.*, pp. 70-71).

6-19. These lines develop the idea first stated in the last line of "L'Hiver qui Vient": that of the poet's desire to catch accurately in his "melody" the thing as it is, "la chose qu'est la chose." The passage thus expresses Laforgue's theory of art as an attempt to reproduce the truth of one moment of time. The attempt is unique, "Toute et unique," because the artist records what he, one individual, sees and feels at one particular moment: "Chaque homme est selon son moment dans le temps, son milieu de race et de condition sociale, son moment d'évolution individuelle, un certain clavier sur lequel le monde extérieur joue d'une certaine façon. Mon clavier est perpétuellement changeant et il n'y en a pas un autre identique au mien. Tous les claviers sont légitimes." (*M.P.*, p. 141) The similarity of this aesthetic to that of the Impressionist is discussed in the Introduction. But the formulation of the theory in musical terms is not so arbitrary as it might seem; Laforgue had felt strongly the liberating effect of Wagner. He had the desire (one which Valéry later said was common to most Symbolist poets) to find poetical equivalents for Wagner's musical innovations. This can be seen for example in Laforgue's insistence on the importance and richness of the "melodic" line (as opposed to a conventional line based on a fixed number of syllables), in his use of leitmotif, in his attempt to fuse the dramatic and musical elements of poetry, and in his desire to express directly shades of emotion and thought.

From another point of view, the lines are representative of Laforgue's poetical development as a whole. From his earlier poems, which were "pas du tout ça" in their heavy theorizing and artistic gaucheness, he moves steadily towards a more flexible form of poem, at once more "mortal" and more supreme: more mortal because the

poem is now concerned not uniquely with speculation about eternal truths, but also with the world immediately surrounding the poet, with the "thing as it is"; but more supreme because the poem comes to express his entire sensibility, his entire apprehension of the world. This is also, of course, the way a large part of modern poetry has gone: away from the romantic and the abstract to the more private, mundane kind of poem.

16-17. As in the title, there is in the word "crucifie" an element of religious parody. The religious undertone is organic to the theme of the fatalist's anguish in the sense that one of the sources of his "agonie" lies in what he considers to be the failure of religion to give him certainty. For the poet, thinking leads inevitably to scepticism. And scepticism in turn leads to one of its logical outcomes, the acceptance of purely human values. For, as Laforgue reasons in a number of earlier poems, the man who can no longer believe in an other world is forced to make the best of the only world he knows (*F.B.V.*, xxxiv):

Oh ! vivre autochtones
Sur cette terre (où nous cantonne
Après tout notre être tel quel !)
Et sans préférer, l'âme aigrie,
Aux vers luisants de nos prairies
Les lucioles des prés du ciel;
Et sans plus sangloter aux heures
De lendemains, vers des demeures
Dont nous nous sacrons les élus,
Ah ! que je vous dis, autochtones !
Tant la vie à terre elle est bonne,
Quand on n'en demande pas plus.

But the early poems all record the despair of the man who cannot really be completely satisfied with "la vie à terre," who cannot help yearning for more. Although on an artistic level Laforgue abandons his metaphysical questioning in order to explore the more mortal theme, on a personal level this impasse remains to the last a real and anguishing one for him.

24-28. As usual, Laforgue sees no middle path open to the thinking person: either he frustrates himself searching for the ultimate meaning he has already decided he will never find, or he turns away from thought altogether to a purely sensual, animal life. This option is sometimes given in religious terms, as in the earlier poem where Laforgue, parodying the Lord's Prayer, prays that men be liberated from their vain spiritual quests (*F.B.V.*, xv):

Et laissez-nous en paix, morts aux mondes meilleurs
Paître dans notre coin, et forniquer, et rire.

Sometimes it is expressed in evolutionary terms: in another mood the poet imagines that if he could only create the world again from the beginning, he would reduce man to a more primitive stage of development:

Si c'était à refaire,
Chers madrépores, comme on ficherait le camp
Chez vous ! Oh ! même vers la Période Glaciaire !

Similarly, in "Simple Agonie," the "more mortal world" he imagines, with its simple unreflective souls and its exclusively fleshly interests, is "barbare" and "sans espoir."

26. See also note on hunting horns at beginning of II.

29-39. "Enquêtes, enquêtes," a merciless inquiry is conducted by the poet into social institutions. As in the first poem, where the highest mystery of social living consisted of nothing more than the sanitation statistics reported in newspapers, here again the social forms are found to be entirely trivial. Scandal sheets, fashion designs are the very womb of society. Clearly, it is impossible to accept the values of such a world: the incipient humanism of the beginning of the poem fails to bring the poet any real comfort. Laforgue's conclusion that the only possible solution is the total destruction of the social order anticipates twentieth-century reactions, that of the Surrealists, for example, or the Angry Young Men. From this point of view perhaps can be justified his claim to be in advance of his age: "Il vint trop tôt, il est reparti sans scandale."

43-46. Here a lighter irony is abruptly introduced, like the Wagnerian change of key, to create a shift in tension, to add another, more remote dimension to an already emotionally charged theme.

60-68. The fantasy of this last section once again establishes a remove, a critical distance from the stronger statements preceding it. To escape without scandal is the most positive thing one could expect to achieve in this "scandaleuse planète" (*F.B.V.*, XL), this "Bas monde de scandale" ("Pierrot," v).

It has been claimed that the last line of this poem has given rise to Eliot's line: "O you who turn the wheel and look to windward . . ."

VII. *SOLO DE LUNE*

THIS POEM, just past the half-way mark of the *D.V.*, might be described in Eliot's phrase as the "still point of the turning world."

Alone on the roof-top of a travelling coach, the poet is suspended from the rush of everyday events; he hovers over his life, as time past and time future fuse into one; he regards dispassionately, as in a dream, past incidents and their possible consequences, "what might have been and what has been." In the magic of the moonlit hour, time is abolished, and the journey takes on the depth and significance of an entire lifetime. At the same time, however, the poet on his coach-top is brought into immediate contact with the whole universe surrounding him, and his individual consciousness so caught up, so absorbed by its immensity and elemental force that the urgency of his own personal anxiety dissolves away. There remains, as he contemplates what seemed the débâcle of his life, only a slight feeling of compassion for his unhappy companion and a wry, ironical regret for "what might have been."

1-7. Cf. *En Ménage* (p. 169): Cyprien goes home at night "sur l'impérial d'un omnibus. . . . La voiture ballotait, lui tapant l'échine contre la barre du dossier. . . . Il dormassait, un bout de cigare dans le bec. . . . Minuit sonnait, les fenêtres des maisons dont les roues frôlaient le trottoir avec une penchée brusque, étaient presque toutes noires. . . ."

4. Cf. *M.P.*, p. 70: "Je ne trouverai beau et pur que ce que j'imagine et ce dont je me souviens—ce qui peut arriver et ce qui a été. Je me sens comme un Ariel au-dessus du Présent . . . l'odieux et quotidien et importun Présent."

7. "récapitulons." This is a recapitulation in the musical sense of the word, which implies a gathering together and summary of the various themes introduced in the first six poems. The strong musical element in the *D.V.* (at least partly due to the influence of Wagner, as mentioned in the notes to the preceding poem) is evident not only in the ordering, counterpointing and modulation of the themes, but in the imagery as well: the horns of the first and second poems, the Wagnerian Walkyries and the piano of the third, the drums and trumpets of the fifth, the "unique" melody of the sixth, and finally this recapitulating solo. Cf. Eliot's "Five Finger Exercises" and "Four Quartets."

8-9. See also discussion of biographical parallels, in note to III, 7.

10-11. "Spleen" has its Baudelairean meaning of fundamental ennui: the despair and loss of incentive which result from failure to discover

real values in life. These two lines are another example of lines which depend for their meaning and strength upon the context of the poems surrounding them. It is the cumulative effect of all the previous discussions on the value of marriage and of existence itself which makes very precise and forceful the simple statement: "Et ce spleen me venait de tout."

12-16. The first draft of these lines occurs in a short poem, "Arabesques de Malheur" (*F.B.V.*, LII). This early poem is a much slighter, less sustained expression of the theme than "Solo de Lune," consisting of little more than the bare bones of the story of the parted lovers. The last two stanzas of the poem do, however, provide a gloss on line 15 of "Solo de Lune":

Ses yeux disaient : « Comprenez-vous !
Comment ne comprenez-vous pas ! »
Et nul n'a pu le premier pas;
On s'est séparés d'un air fou.

Si on ne tombe pas d'un même
Cri à genoux, c'est du factice.
Ensemble ! voilà la justice.
Selon moi, voilà comment j'aime.

The lines thus echo the theme of the poet's desire for spontaneous, equal relationships between men and women.

22. "toute âme est un peu aux écoutes." Alone beneath the skies, surrounded by primeval woods, the poet feels his spirit in closer communion with the unconscious or Anima Mundi. Cf. Wallace Stevens' image of the "shawl wrapped tightly around us since we are poor."

26 & 27. These lines, like "Impossible de modifier cette situation" in III, again place ironical emphasis on Laforgue's view of life as a series or "accumulation" of predetermined, unchangeable situations.

29. "où d'autres ont vu se baigner son corps." A first reference to a theme which becomes more important in the next poem and in XI: that of the "other men" in the fiancée's life.

36 & 37. The first draft (*F.B.V.*, LII) did not contain this speculation but stated simply:

Des ans vont passer là-dessus;
On durcira chacun pour soi;
Et bien souvent, et je m'y vois,
On ragera : « Si j'avais su !... »

However, the doubt as to whether marriage would really have made a difference is much more in keeping with the concerns of the *D.V.* as a whole. This entire question Laforgue had already explored in a short story entitled "Les Deux Pigeons," in which two lovers separate because they cannot accept the domestic and reproductive implications of marriage. Despite all their efforts, however, fate forces them to come together again; though they resign themselves to their destiny and marry, each knows that nothing has changed, and both commit suicide.

42. Cf. the first version in *F.B.V.*, LII:

Que ferons-nous, moi de mon âme,
Elle de sa tendre jeunesse !
O vieillissante pêcheusesse,
Oh ! que tu vas me rendre infâme !

64-67. The poet imagines a pair of ideal lovers, who, in the everlasting darkness of their enchanted forest, are completely free, unbound by the laws or conventions of civilization. But almost immediately he recognizes his vision to be illusory, no more than the projection of his wish. The coach goes on, the poet continues his journey, leaving behind him the two lovers in their mythical world, which is not his: for his is the world of lonely, friendless hotel-rooms.

Like the Walkyries in III, the lovers in their deep forest are Wagnerian in tone. It is interesting to note how close in mood and imagery is Henry James's presentation, in *The Golden Bowl*, of the novel's two illicit lovers, whose life at first seems quite charmed and "outside law": "a pair of operatic, of high Wagnerian lovers . . . interlocked in their wood of enchantment, a green glade as romantic as one's dream of an old German forest."

70. Cf. *En Ménage* (p. 2): "On loge ses affections dans des meublés, jamais dans une chambre qui vous appartienne. Dame, oui, c'est dur; on voudrait avoir son petit lopin de bonheur et en être le seul propriétaire." Cf. also the first draft of "Solo de Lune" in *F.B.V.*, LII:

Oh ! comme on fait claquer les portes,
Dans ce Grand Hôtel d'anonymes !
Touristes, couples légitimes,
Ma Destinée est demi-morte !...

And Eliot's "Prufrock":

The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels.

81. "Noce de feux de Bengale." On one level, the moonlight on the road is like the flood of dazzling light resulting from a union ("noces") of fireworks, and blinding the poet to his own misfortunes, or at least allowing him to momentarily forget them. In this great inundation of light, the dancing motion of the coach flares ("feux de Bengale" can mean an enclosed lamp which burns without oxygen) also becomes a kind of torch-lit wedding procession, a consolation for the real wedding the poet never had. The image has sexual undertones in the use of the word "noces" ("noces de sexes livrés à la grosse"—v, 10) and in "feux de Bengale." The image of fireworks as a sexual equivalent is fairly common: Laforgue uses it in the poem "Complainte du Bon Chevalier-Errant," and Huysmans expresses in the same way the idea of the failure of one's first infatuation: "il est un moment où les feux de Bengale sont mouillés et ratent!—On ne rit plus alors!" (*En Ménage*)

82–85. Again, elemental imagery. The brook which is aware of its own song extends the concept of the all-enveloping Anima Mundi in which "toute âme est un peu aux écoutes": the moonlight drowning the poet's sorrow is now seen as Lethe, the mythical river of forgetfulness. As the poet's personal worry dissolves in the moonlight his experience takes on a more profound, perhaps more archetypal significance.

103. Cf. III: "Adorer d'incurables organes"; and VIII: "et si petite toux sèche maligne." There may well be an autobiographical urgency in the poet's references to his own illness, or in his repeated expressions of concern at his fiancée's coughing. From Laforgue's letters to his sister we learn that he was aware in 1886 that he was coughing far too much, like his father who had died of tuberculosis. Less than a year after Laforgue's death, his wife also died of tuberculosis.

VIII. *LEGENDE*

"SOLO DE LUNE" AND "LÉGENDE" were first published in the same issue of *V.*, and, since they are similar in tone and theme, it is quite possible they were written at the same time. The first version of "Légende" ("Dimanches," *F.B.V.*, XLIV) carries as epigraph the lines from *Hamlet* which are so appropriate to both poems: "The chariest maid is prodigal enough / If she unmask her beauty to the moon." In "Légende" we find the poet once

more recapitulating the events which led to his separation from his fiancée. This time, however, it is no longer a general "spleen" which creates the estrangement between them, but a specific quarrel about a third person.

After the opening section (1-16) which, like an operatic prelude, anticipates the themes and moods of the entire poem, "Légende" is cast at first in the form of a dialogue. The woman answers the man's sarcastic queries (17-20) by confessing (21-23) the story of her former love: a confession ironically expressed through the phrases and conventions of heroic romance. After this, the dialogue gives way, first to a stream-of-consciousness recording of the man's comments (24-35) or thoughts (36-39), and then to a dramatic monologue (40-54) in which the woman's replies are merely suggested, the conversation reconstructed solely from the man's objections to what must be her entreaties and protests of undying love. As in "Solo de Lune," the poem ends on a note of ironical regret that the proposed marriage could not occur: it means after all such a waste of the poet's potentiality as an absolutely model husband!

1. See also note on "anaemia" (III, 1-3).

2-4. As in VI, religious imagery used ironically.

3-8. The meaning of this passage is illuminated by the earlier version (*F.B.V.*, XLIV):

J'aime, j'aime de tout mon siècle ! cette hostie
Féminine en si vierge et destructible chair
Qu'on voit, au point du jour, altièrement sertie
Dans de cendreuse toilettes déjà d'hiver,
Se fuir le long des cris surhumains de la mer !

9-14. These lines are a thorough disposal of ideal, "romantic" love. In days when "l'amour s'échange / Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour," love is no longer a heroic value or a Petrarchan "glory": it is a mercenary traffic in lust. Laforgue's irony plays especially on those features conventionally praised by love poets, the lady's eyes and mouth. But in these "unlegendary" days, a woman's mouth, though no longer capable of spontaneous expression, is still "eager for the spoils" (once again, hunting imagery with sexual connotations); her eyes are closed to the possibility of spiritual values. The woman's confession

which immediately follows this diatribe is thus already weighted with irony, her cause already prejudged.

26. The sunset here has all the weight of association it has gained throughout the earlier poems. It is this sunset, symbolizing as it does the renunciation of hope and happiness, which is to be the final act in the woman's story. A new start is no longer possible for her. It is too late, the sun is setting, autumn is already shutting out the possibility of fresh action. Like the poet himself, she must learn to resign herself to the inevitable course of events.

34. For "fanfare," see note (p. 77) on II, on the symbol of the horn.

40-43. The earlier version (*F.B.V.*, XLIV) is less elliptical:

Adieu ! Les files d'ifs dans les grisailles
Ont l'air de pleureuses de funérailles
Sous l'autan noir qui veut que tout s'en aille.

45. "Ainsi soit-il" reasserts the original religious undertone of the poem. Listening as a confessor to the woman's story, the man uses the traditional "Amen" to conclude his advice to her. But again "ainsi soit-il" is highly ironical: it also represents the essence of fatalistic renunciation, as in the poem where the wise Pierrot, emancipated from the turmoil of life, sums up the only possible attitude to the world in these words: "L'Art de Tout est l'Ainsi soit-il" ("Pierrots," v, *N.-D.*).

49-54. The man retorts sharply to the woman's suggested appeal against his pessimistic counsel and abrupt dismissal. Like Hamlet, he claims that he does not love her, and that her own protests of love can only be false, since all women are inconstant.

55. In the short story "Lohengrin," the hero, when pressed by Elsa to consummate their marriage, replies similarly: "Vous commencez à être un personnage, un personnage avec qui il faut compter."

59. As in iv, Antigone is made to stand for the ideal world of myth. The faith in the validity of her love which is expressed by the woman, as well as her hope for a new beginning, are as imaginary, unsubstantial, and remote from the real world of autumn and sunset as old legends or children's fairy tales.

68-71. This final image is extremely neat and telling, for it manages to unite all the main strands of the poem: the religious element, the theme of myth or legend (in "Cybèle" and in the paradisaal myth), the

recurring theme of an unspoilt relationship between men and women (in "Edens," as in the earlier (III, 56 & 57) ". . . l'Esprit édénique et fier / D'être un peu l'Homme avec la Femme") and finally, the central symbol of sunset. The pointing of the irony is also achieved in a most effective way in the single word "hyperboliquement," which implies not only the curved trajectory of the declining sun, but also the wild extravagance, the unreal, almost mythical quality of the man's claim that he would have made a model husband.

IX

POEMS IX and X, which were originally one poem, take up the threads of the first section of the preceding poem. They constitute a debunking of the "glory" of love. The original epigraph from Petrarch: "Arrêtons-nous, Amour, contemplons notre gloire!," although it is of course very ironical, is in another sense quite appropriate, since the poet does pause, after his prolonged recollection of past events, in order to contemplate and appraise the idea of love, "l'amour, cette force éternellement charmante et sale et ridicule" (*O.C.*, IV, 88).

1. "d'Elle-même." Having said in previous poems that he and his fiancée separated because neither would take the first step towards a mutual meeting, the poet now imagines what would happen if the girl *did* make that first overture and come to him of her own accord.

4-5. In the original *F.B.V.* version ("Figurez-vous un peu," II) the ironical play on "gloire" is more explicit still:

Je m'enlève rien que d'y penser ! Quel baptême
De gloire intrinsèque, attirer un « Je vous aime ! »

18-22. Cf. early version:

Je t'aime ! comprend-on ? Pour moi tu n'es pas comme
Les autres; jusqu'ici c'était des messieurs, l'Homme...
Ta bouche me fait baisser les yeux ! et ton port
Me transporte ! (et je m'en découvre des trésors...)

In 18 & 19 there is again the suggestion that the woman has known other men, with the implication that love is inevitably promiscuous and sordid. In this context the woman's protests that the poet is "not like others" are already underscored with irony.

35–40. This passage has many points of similarity with the *M.L.* story, “Lohengrin”:

LOHENGRIN [*as he arrives to save Elsa from a sacrificial death*]. — Oh !
m’aimerez-vous ? Me suivrez-vous partout avec des yeux fous ?

ELSA. — Vous savez bien, fatal Chevalier... que je vous suivrai partout
avec des regards fous... Ah ! j’ai la chair encore tout évanouie de
votre vision et (mettant la main sur son cœur) mon petit cratère m’en
fait mal, et je m’en découvre des tas de trésors !... Oh ! je vous com-
prends d’avance ! Oh ! je vous suivrai partout avec des yeux fous !
Et je resterai si constamment suspendue à la lumière de votre front,
que j’en oublierai de vieillir...

X

1–10. In his essay “The Metaphysical Poets” Eliot adduces this passage as an example of modern “metaphysical” poetry which, according to his argument, must necessarily be obscure; and he comments: “The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. Hence we get something which looks very much like the conceit,—we get, in fact, a method curiously similar to that of the ‘metaphysical poets’, similar also in its use of obscure words and of simple phrasing.” Martin Turnell, disputing this interpretation, seeks to trace the logic of the imagery by thinking of it in terms of images of “compression” and “decompression.”

In any case, part of the obscurity vanishes when the passage is considered in the larger context of the *D.V.* It is useful to remember that these lines originally followed the words “Oh! alités du coup!” (see textual note on IX, 40, p. 67) which, along with the reiteration of “débâcles nuptiales” at the end, give clearly enough the controlling idea of the entire passage. The poet expresses through an accumulation of symbols the “débâcles nuptiales” which result when in his imagination he and the girl who came “d’Elle-même” are “alités du coup.” Although the passage consists of a rapid succession of separate images rather than the more usual “metaphysical” extension of one central image, it does possess other “metaphysical” characteristics: allusiveness and the violent yoking of heterogeneous ideas. The “diaphanous geranium” of the couple’s union is seen as a warlike, maleficent spell which makes them commit monomaniacal sacrileges. This is perhaps a startling association of ideas, but the image as a whole depends upon and in turn reinforces a theme anticipated in previous poems: the theme that sexual love is not a genuine meeting of two equals, but merely a brief and illusory contact between two

entities who remain completely separate ("S'entrevoir avant que les tissus se fanent / En monomanes, en reclus!"—III, 49 & 50).

The progression "emballages, dévergondages, douches" represents imaginatively the poet's idea of the inevitable stages of love: enthusiasm, sexual excess, disillusion. (The "compression" and "decompression" implicit in such imagery is of course not inappropriate to sexual equivalents.) With its "hygienic" element, the word "douches" anticipates the medical imagery of "Transfusions, représailles. . . ."

The crushing of harvested grapes is the next image in the series expressing the couple's union; "grand soir," as in IV, 34–37, is a wedding night:

Et voyez comme on tremble,
Au premier grand soir
Que tout pousse au désespoir
D'en mourir ensemble !

Again as in IV, "layettes" has the double meaning of young girls and baby clothes; it thus introduces the idea of reproduction and childbirth which becomes stronger in the later use of the word "relevailles." Between these two words of similar connotation, however, the intervening line, "Thyrses au fond des bois," creates an ironical contrast between the "romantic" conception of idyllic woodland love and the crude realities of biological reproduction. (It is perhaps relevant to note Laforgue's horror of childbirth; although only expressed indirectly here, it forms a strong undertone in *M.L.* and is quite explicit in his letters, as in this one to his sister Marie: "Mais en vérité, et tout d'abord, tu es effrayante avec ces maternités successives! Il me semble que si Leah était dans cet état, je vivrais dans des angoisses continues." (*O.C.*, V, 205) Finally, "Angelus," again a word encompassing religious and sexual implications, calls up the poet's last vehement rejection of the matrimonial vision he has been contemplating.

34–35. Cf. VII, 40: "Je me suis mal conduit." The poet is constantly haunted by the suspicion that he was after all wrong to let his fiancée slip away from him, wrong to reject hope and relationship with others. In so doing he has managed to avoid the "débâcles nuptiales," but the resulting isolation is not very much more satisfactory: he is still a "pauvre, pauvre fou sans feux ni lieux."

46–51. Cf. *F.B.V.*, xxxvi:

J'aurai passé ma vie à faillir m'embarquer
Dans de bien funestes histoires,
Pour l'amour de mon cœur de Gloire !...
— Oh ! qu'ils sont chers, les trains manqués
Où j'ai passé ma vie à faillir m'embarquer !

The change from "chers" to "pittoresques" again marks the greater ironical control, the more complete dramatic detachment of the *D.V.* as compared to the earlier *F.B.V.*

XI. *SUR UNE DEFUNTE*

THIS POEM BEGINS TO KNIT TOGETHER some of the previously unrelated themes informing the *D.V.* as a whole. Although it is mainly concerned with the idea of the fiancée's other loves, this is no longer seen as a single, isolated event (as in "Légende") but as an inevitable corollary to the lack of certainty in life. Thus it unites two main themes: the theme that man has no control over his own destiny ("Impossible de modifier cette situation"—III, 5) and the theme that there is no such thing as absolute value or absolute love ("Amour absolu, carrefour sans fontaine"—v, 1) and "Grandes amours, oh! qu'est-ce encor?" (VIII, 9). The poet's fatalistic dilemma, his loneliness, his failure to marry are also seen as part of the larger pattern which has formed the backdrop to the *D.V.*: a pattern of isolation, despair, renunciation, autumn, death.

8. In September 1886, Laforgue, having resigned his post, left Berlin to attend the wedding in Verviers of his friend Eugène Ysaye. He was then to meet Leah Lee briefly before returning to Paris. As he was waiting for her to arrive, he wrote to Theo Ysaye a letter which states so precisely and explicitly the main theme of this poem that it seems relevant to quote it at length:

Ah ! Je suis plus que jamais l'esclave du sort. Ce que l'on nomme notre état normal est la grâce d'une totale Ivresse qui se déchaîne, délivrée. C'est effrayant et divin. Je me suis dit : à quoi tient notre sort ! d'émouvants (ou d'effrayants) hasards, un sourire fortuit dans un village et nous devenons shakespeariens, notre destinée se fixe. Je soupirais en pensant à la plainte de nos cerveaux qui aspirent follement à l'Unique, à la plénitude du sort; ironiquement et à pleins poumons, je respire l'air fier des longs voyages. Puis, vint le crépuscule et une heure d'attente en une petite station; je déambulais de-ci de-là, contemplant les profondeurs du ciel prodigieusement constellées, je regardais une lampe à la fenêtre d'une lourde maison bourgeoise (c'était une lampe à abat-jour rose), et je me mis à rêver. Les Corinne, les Ophélie, etc., tout cela, dans notre vie, est mensonge; dans le fond, il n'y a pour nous que les petites Adrienne au bon

cœur, aux longs cils, au juvénile et éphémère sourire, les petites Adrienne à la peau enchanteresse, que le hasard (et tout n'est-il pas hasard ?) a conduites sur notre chemin. Oui, tout est hasard, car n'y eût-il pas existé d'Adrienne, il y aurait eu une Leah; n'y eût-il pas eu de Leah, il y aurait eu une Nini, et ainsi de suite. C'est pourquoi il nous est enjoint de nous attacher à la première que le hasard nous présente, et nous l'aimerons seule, car c'est la première et nous ne rêverons pas à une autre. La vieille maxime du sage est : « Aimes-tu deux femmes en même temps, n'en choisis aucune, car tu regretterais toujours l'autre. » Cependant, c'est l'ivresse de la vie créée, continuée, l'ivresse de l'action et de la joie, l'ivresse d'avoir obéi à l'Inconscient, à la volonté du destin... [*O.C.*, V, 162-64]

As "Sur une Défunte" was published in November 1886, it is very possible that it was written at approximately the same time as this letter.

53. The word "Et" was not included in this line when it was first published in *R.I.* As the editor, Claude Pichois, points out in *B.C.*, the addition of this word gives the line nine syllables like its rhyming partner, line 55, thus making it a "vers impair."

Cf. Verlaine's "Art poétique":

De la musique avant toute chose,
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

Laforque knew this poem well and had quoted with approval another of its lines in a letter to Kahn: "Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou!"

XII

1-8. Like the opening section of IV, the beginning of this poem sketches in, very briefly and vividly, the background of autumn, storm, empty streets, and houses closed up against the approaching winter. But the mood has changed from the ironical exuberance of the earlier poem to a darker one, much grimmer, more desperate, as though the progress of life and autumn had now brought the impending end too close for any further banter about it.

4. "L'Attardé." Once again we meet the "pariah" of earlier poems, the polar bear, the solitary mind which holds within itself the incapable knowledge of the essential poverty and misery of the human condition.

10. This line takes up the theme of VII:

Oh ! si à la même heure,
Elle va de même le long des forêts...

11. "Histoires" may mean, as in VIII and XI, the woman's individual past, her former loves; but the word also implies the "too human" frailties which afflict the whole of mankind: "We are arrant knaves, all."

14 & 15. A restatement of VII, 12-13:

« Comprenez-vous ?
Pourquoi ne comprenez-vous pas ? »

27-43. In this passage the poet imagines what the woman's life would be if she did take his Hamlet-like advice and withdraw from the world.

As has been pointed out by several critics, the beginning of the passage, with its description of a convent in a small town, is quite probably a reminiscence of Tarbes, where Laforgue spent his boyhood. It is also possible that the poem was written in Tarbes sometime during October or November 1886. On several occasions Laforgue had spent part of his yearly holiday away from the German court in Tarbes with his sister Marie. Very little is known about Laforgue's activities in the period from October 1886 to the end of December when he went to England to get married, but it is certainly not impossible that he travelled to Tarbes to visit his sister again during that time.

44. Although the tone is one of serious, and even distressed entreaty, the line is already heavily weighted with the irony of the larger context of the *D.V.*, since it echoes faithfully the words of the imagined fiancée in IX, 18: "‘Pour moi, tu n'est pas comme les autres hommes. . . .’" But her love, as the poet imagined it in the earlier poem, turned out to be no different from that of all "the others."

46. There is in this line an explicit return to the original symbol of the dying sun.

47. R. R. Bolgar's research into birth records in England made him think Leah Lee was still under age when she married Laforgue. This is a mistake. According to her death certificate, Leah Laforgue was twenty-seven when she died in 1888.

49. A restatement of III, 59:

Oh ! file ton rouet et prie et reste honnête !

61–64. In these lines the poet presents a final summary of the general philosophy expressed throughout the twelve poems of the *D.V.* Life is still seen as a deafening fairground (as in the opening lines of v); it is without hope (the night which follows sunset is “à jamais noire”), or meaningful relationships (“toutes sont créature,” recalling the diatribes against women of iv and v), and filled with an endless succession of habitual acts (“tout est routine,” re-emphasizing the theme expressed in so many symbols: the refrains of the piano, the weekly statistics in newspapers, the bourgeois rituals of Sundays . . .). Even such a consistent picture of the misery of existence, however, is now overshadowed and to a certain extent transformed by the one inevitable fact which has come to dominate all the poet’s thoughts and emotions: the fact of death.

65–70. Faced with imminent death, the poet cannot in the last resort accept the total renunciation of life which has been throughout the poems his solution to an unsatisfactory existence. When like Hamlet he tries advising his fiancée to keep herself from the corruption of living, he finds that the resulting sterility is too terrifying to contemplate. And so he is forced, against his very convictions and against his experience, into the position of attempting to accept the life he has, vitiated as he knows it to be. From complete nihilism he thus moves towards some slight hope, towards at least a desire for the strength and courage to commit himself to living. (One is reminded of Valéry’s rather similar conclusion, in “Le Cimetière marin”: “Il faut tenter de vivre.”)

There is in the phrasing of this last passage an overt reference to the final lines of Baudelaire’s poem “Un Voyage à Cythère”:

Dans ton île, ô Vénus ! je n’ai trouvé debout
Qu’un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image...
— Ah ! Seigneur ! donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon cœur et mon corps sans dégoût !

A reference particularly appropriate since such a large part of the *D.V.* has been in Baudelaire’s sense a “voyage to Cythera,” and since Laforgue’s exploration of love has also confronted him with the spectre of death. Even with this strong association, however, Laforgue’s plea for courage to believe in himself might seem rather hollow but for the weight of the twelve poems behind it. It is their combined expression of his long struggle to find value in his own existence which makes so poignant his final prayer for maturity as an escape from his “inutile cœur d’adolescent,” from the entire fatalistic dilemma.

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