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A CRITICAL EDITION OF ARAGON'S *LE CREVE-COEUR*

ANDREW MACANULTY

PH. D

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH

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ABSTRACT

The edition examines the manuscripts, history and significant variants of *Le Crève-Coeur* and of 'La Rime en 1940'. Aragon's claim that the collection has its origins in World War 1 is considered, but little evidence for this is found. A more likely catalyst is the colonial war in Morocco of 1925-26 that led to Aragon's conversion to Communism. It is in the 1930s that the poet develops his strategy of poetry as a 'contrebande' against war. The principal influences on Aragon in this undertaking are evoked. A survey is given of the political and historical circumstances of *Le Crève-Coeur*, and they are shown to be indivisible from the poetry. The main themes of the collection are considered and the degree to which the 'contrebande' technique affects their accessibility. A detailed discussion of 'La Rime en 1940' and of each poem, stanza by stanza, follows.

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DECLARATION OF THE AUTHOR

In the course of the preparation of this thesis, material was abstracted from it by the author to form three articles, published as follows:

'The Pact and other circumstances of Aragon's *Le Crève-Coeur*', in *French Writers and Politics 1936-1944*, edited by W. Craw and W. Kidd (Glasgow: The University of Glasgow, 1987), pp. 53-86;

'Aragon's "Zone libre" and the PCF', *French Studies Bulletin*, No. 28 (Autumn 1988), pp. 8-11;

'*Le Crève-Coeur*, Poésie pour tous?', *Recherches croisées Aragon/Elsa Triolet*, No. 3 (1991), pp. 141-157.

Most of this material was abstracted from the chapter on 'The Political and Historical Circumstances'.

THE TEXT OF *LE CRÈVE-CŒUR*

The edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* adopted for this thesis is that of *L'OEuvre poétique* (Livre Club Diderot, Paris, vol. IX, 1979) which was the final one supervised by Aragon. This volume of *L'OEuvre poétique* is hereafter referred to as '1979b', as in the list of bibliographical references at the end of the thesis.

The following bibliographical material relevant to *Le Crève-Coeur* is held in Paris at the Fonds Elsa Triolet-Aragon (FTA) of the CNRS.

1) A 'manuscrit restauré BN 1981 (inventaire p. 54-7)', hereafter referred to as 'MS1', containing -

'Petite suite sans fil' (1979b, p. 111-115)

'La Valse des vingt ans' (1979b, p. 119-121)

'Pergame en France' (1979b, p. 122-124)

'Santa Espina' (1979b, p. 124-125)

'Romance du temps qu'il fait' (1979b, p. 129-132)

'Le Poème interrompu' (1979b, p. 133-135)

'Enfer-les-mines' (1979b, p. 138-139)

'Tapisserie de la grande peur' (1979b, p. 140-141)

'Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie' (1979b,
p.142-145)

'Richard II quarante' (1979b, p. 146-147)

'Zone libre' (1979b, p. 148-149)

'Les Croisés' (1979b, p. 153-155)

'Elsa je t'aime' (1979b, p. 156-158).

2) A second group of 'manuscripts et tapuscrits' ('inventaire, p. 112 non relevé v 85'), which contains manuscripts (obviously later than MS1 and written out for an editor) of 'Vingt ans après' (1979b, p. 103-105) and of 'Petite suite sans fil' (1979b, p. 111-115). This second group of manuscripts is hereafter referred to as 'MS2'.

There are also 'épreuves' (hereafter referred to as 'EP'), prepared for *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (NRF), of:

'Vingt ans après' (1979b, p. 103-105)

'J'attends sa lettre au crépuscule' (1979b, p. 106-107)

'Le Temps des mots croisés' (1979b, p. 108-110).

In addition there are 'tapuscrits' (TS) of:

'Vingt ans après'

'Petite suite sans fil I, II [including a double corrected in the hand of Jean Paulhan], III' [2 examples]

'Les Amants séparés' (1979b, p. 116-118)

'La Valse des vingt ans'

'Pergame en France'

'Le Printemps' (1979b, p. 126-128)

'Le Poème interrompu' (3 examples).

This folder includes also a manuscript (MS) of *La Rime en 1940* (1979b, p. 159-168), and a 'tapuscrit' (TS) of the same with corrections in Aragon's hand.

(3) There is a manuscript page ('inventaire p. 77') in Aragon's hand with variants (some scored out) of 'Le Printemps',

'Les Croisés' and *La Rime en 1940*, followed by an incomplete plan of *Le Crève-Coeur*.

The history and variants of the poems will be given in the discussion of each poem individually in the thesis. Only variants significantly different from the text of 1979b will be shown. This will be done by reference to the above material and to the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* (Gallimard, 'Collection Métamorphoses XI', Paris 25 April 1941) as well as to the versions of those poems of *Le Crève-Coeur* that appeared in reviews before publication in the first edition.

The first three poems of what was to become *Le Crève-Coeur* ('Vingt ans après', 'J'attends sa lettre au crépuscule', 'Le Temps des mots croisés') appeared in the *NRF* of 1 December 1939. This was thanks to its editor, Jean Paulhan, who acted as a mediator between Aragon and Gaston Gallimard. These two had not been on good terms after a lawsuit which the poet had lost against Gallimard nine years previously. Paulhan arranged for them to meet at the beginning of November 1939, peace was made, and the three poems appeared in December (the 'épreuve' of 'Le Temps des mots croisés' for the *NRF* is stamped '10 Nov. 1939').

Between then and March 1941, a further fourteen of the poems were published in reviews or (in the case of 'Les Lilas et les roses') in a newspaper.

Pierre Seghers records seeing some of the manuscripts in September 1940 when he went to meet Aragon in Carcassonne:

Dans le petit café [...] Aragon sort de sa poche des feuillets où je reconnais l'écriture droite et arrondie, l'encre bleue. Des poèmes, ceux qu'il a écrits dans les Flandres, à Dunkerque, à Ribérac et ici. Plus de la moitié des poèmes du futur *Crève-Coeur*. Je n'oublierai jamais cette première lecture: une vie nouvelle qui s'ouvrait (Seghers, 1974, p. 71).

The first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur*, published by Gallimard, appeared in the 'Collection Métamorphoses XI', directed by Jean Paulhan, on 25 April 1941.

Between then and 1945 there were editions in London (1942, Horizon-La France libre), reprinted the same year in New York (Editions de la Maison française) and again in New York in 1943 (Pantheon Books); in Beirut (Syrie et Orient) in 1943, as also that year in Montreal (Editions Variétés for Gallimard); in 1944 in London (Editions La France libre), in New York (Pantheon Books) and in Paris (Gallimard); in 1945 there was a reprint of the first edition in France. In 1946 in Paris there appeared a 'Nouvelle Edition' (Gallimard, Collection Métamorphoses XI) with the information:

Cette édition est la première qui ait été revue par l'auteur.

Toutes les éditions reproduites à l'étranger d'après les tirages précédents sont fautives.

This edition (which is not entirely fault-free itself) differs only in minor ways from 1979b.

The impact and popularity of this collection of poems, written between October 1939 and October 1940, may be gauged from the words of Michel-Apel Muller (1991, p. 49):

Le Crève-Coeur, c'est un tout petit livre: 23 poèmes suivis d'un essai sur la théorie du vers: 'La rime en 1940'. Mais c'est aussi un assez extraordinaire succès de librairie qui signale à lui seul l'effet de choc produit dans la France de la défaite. Fin 1945, à travers plusieurs rééditions, 20 000 exemplaires en ont été imprimés. Aujourd'hui les différents tirages nous amènent à 60 000 exemplaires environ.

These figures back up the report of Georges Sadoul (1967, p. 34): 'On s'arracha ce livre'.

The origins of *Le Crève-Coeur*

In a conversation with Francis Crémieux, Aragon (1964, pp. 134-135) makes remarks which throw some light on the origins of *Le Crève-Coeur*. Discussing the poems he was writing in the 1930s, he says:

Au fond, je mettais au point un instrument, lequel m'a servi à partir de 1939, et dont les premiers poèmes du *Crève-Coeur* [...] sont la première expression. En fait, je m'étais toute ma vie juré une chose: après la guerre de 14-18, j'avais ressenti comme une humiliation le fait que le peuple français ait pu laisser s'établir cette guerre sans avoir protesté contre son déclenchement, ou enfin n'ait apporté, à sa protestation contre elle, que de très faibles forces. Je m'étais juré que si mon pays devait être entraîné dans une nouvelle guerre de ce caractère, au moins quelqu'un, dans mon pays, élèverait la voix contre. Et la forme que ma poésie a prise était de longue main la forme par moi préparée pour être entendu du plus grand nombre de gens possible, basant mon expression sur les formes nationales profondes de la poésie française. Et, de cette poésie qui commence dès la *drôle de guerre*, est née, je peux le dire sans me vanter particulièrement, ce qu'on a appelé ensuite la poésie de la Résistance. Pourquoi avais-je *a priori* choisi la poésie comme arme éventuelle plutôt que le roman? C'est que je m'étais dit qu'on ne pourrait pas recommencer le coup du roman contre la guerre, parce qu'on était prévenu

contre lui, du fait même que, dans la guerre précédente, il y avait eu cette surprise, impossible à recommencer, *Le Feu* d'Henri Barbusse... Tandis que dans le domaine poétique, j'espérais surprendre les pouvoirs publics qui se seraient d'emblée opposés au roman. Et, effectivement, je suis arrivé à surprendre le pouvoir de Vichy, qui ne croyait pas que des vers patriotiques pussent être une arme dangereuse pour lui.

This account elaborates on a more cryptic statement made already in February 1942 in *Arma virumque cano* (1979b, p. 193):

J'ai un peu écrit et publié ce livre pour dissiper la confusion pleine de bienveillance qu'on avait entretenue autour du *Crève-Coeur*. 'Je chante l'homme et ses armes...' et en ce sens oui, je chante, et je suis prêt à reprendre pour notre temps et mon pays ce programme par quoi débute l'épopée romaine, et je n'ai forgé mon langage pour rien d'autre, de longue date, pour rien d'autre préparé cet instrument chantant [emphasis added].

These latter words support the claim made in the 1964 text to Francis Crémieux, that the form of the poetry in *Le Crève-Coeur* had been prepared over a long period, even if now in 1942 Aragon's task had developed from making a protest against war to waging a struggle of resistance against the German occupiers and their collaborators.

The remarks of 1942 and 1964 were supplemented by Aragon in 1968 in his conversations with Dominique Araban and in *Écrit au Seuil*, the introduction he wrote in 1973 to the first volume of *L'Œuvre Poétique*. In these last two accounts he relates the

discussions he had with André Breton on *la trahison des clercs*. Particularly interesting are the following extracts from *Ecrit au Seuil*:

Pour ma part, dès 1916, me semble-t-il, je portais en moi une colère que la Victoire, comme on dit, n'a jamais pu éteindre. Dissimulée d'abord, même de mes amis les plus proches. [...]. Si étrange que cela puisse paraître à voir ce chemin que j'ai pris vers la fin du conflit et à son lendemain, j'étais habité d'une volonté, dont je crois bien ne m'être jamais ouvert qu'à André Breton, et ceci dès le jour de notre première rencontre (septembre 1917): trouver les moyens de parler au plus grand nombre de nos concitoyens, pour leur rendre cette conscience d'homme, qu'on leur enlevait avec la complicité des gens de lettres. [...]. De cela, dans les conversations entre A.B. et moi, il a été souvent question. [...]. Que je préparais un langage sur lequel ni la censure ni les prisons n'auraient pouvoir d'interdit, que je cherchais le moyen d'être entendu du plus grand nombre, sans donner prise à l'interdit des puissants, c'est le fond même des discussions entre nous qui commencèrent un soir de septembre 1917, sur le boulevard Raspail, où nous découvrîmes, André et moi, chez l'un et chez l'autre, une même volonté de subversion. Ce n'est que bien plus tard qu'à la lumière même de ce qui nous avait unis s'engagea la discussion sur les moyens à employer. Tous mes livres de 1920 à 1939 sont les témoins paradoxaux de cette volonté secrète (1974a, pp. 29-31).

In the statements of 1968 and 1973 we find very important claims: that already in 1916 Aragon was anti-war, that in 1917 he was preparing a poetic language that would enable him, should France be dragged into a similar conflict again, to communicate these anti-war sentiments to the greatest number of his fellow citizens and that this secret desire is reflected in all his works between 1920 and 1940, culminating obviously in *Le Crève-Coeur*.

If we look at the first poem of that collection, 'Vingt ans après', which dates from October 1939, we do find him expressing a protest at the outbreak of World War II: 'L'ère des phrases mécaniques recommence / L'homme dépose enfin l'orgueil' (1979b, p. 104). That Aragon really had these anti-war views as early as 1916 and the political awareness supposed by his wish to communicate his sentiments to the widest number of his fellow citizens is called into question by what we read in Roger Garaudy's *L'Itinéraire d'Aragon* (1961, p. 26):

L'attitude première d'Aragon et de ses amis Breton et Soupault à l'égard de la guerre est significative. Ce n'est pas la révolte de Barbusse dans *Le Feu*. Moins encore celle du combat révolutionnaire qui flambe à l'Est à partir de 1917 et qui, dans les derniers mois de 1918, gagne le coeur de l'Europe.

Leur premier mouvement est celui de l'évasion. La réalité les étouffe, il s'agit de s'en détourner.

Garaudy (1961, p. 27) goes on to quote from a review by Aragon of Drieu la Rochelle's *Fonds de Cantine* in *Littérature* of July-August 1920:

Nous avons aimé la guerre comme une négresse. A combien l'émotion?... Nous ne regretterons jamais assez un état d'exception. Le soleil de la peur est un punch incomparable. La guerre, malgré les petits mortels, a la grandeur du vent.

Earlier, Garaudy (1961, p. 25) cites a manuscript in the Collection Doucet in which he says Aragon himself in 1922-23 evokes the state of mind of his generation of 1914:

Tout ce qui touchait proprement à la guerre, tout ce côté *Illustration*, cet exhibitionnisme de l'horreur, nous répugnait si fortement que je ne crois pas mentir en disant que jamais la guerre ne fut plus loin du cœur des jeunes gens qu'en ces jours qu'elle dominait les adultes [emphasis added].

The great attraction for Aragon and the others in his age-group was the cinema where they found heroes with whom they could identify themselves. Garaudy (1961, p. 26) quotes the same document further:

A ce point étonnant de confusion morale où les hommes vivaient, comment ceux qui étaient jeunes ne se fussent-ils point reconnus dans ces bandits splendides, leur idéal et leur justification?...[...]. A cette magie, à cette attraction, s'ajoutait le charme d'une grande révélation sexuelle.... Il y a une idée de la volupté qui nous est propre, et qui nous est venue par ce chemin de

lumière, entre les images du meurtre et de l'escroquerie, tandis qu'on crevait ferme autre part, sans que nous y prenions seulement garde [emphasis added].

André Breton, Aragon's partner in the discussions the latter claims to have had already in 1917 on how to communicate opposition to war to as many fellow citizens as possible, gave his view (1952, p. 40) on the situation at the period in question in his conversations with A. Parinaud:

La censure de guerre avait été vigilante: dans les milieux qui pouvaient être les nôtres, les événements de signification *politique* [sic] comme les Congrès de Zimmerwald et de Kienthal avaient fait peu d'impression et la révolution bolchevik elle-même était bien loin d'avoir été appréhendée pour ce qu'elle était. Ce qui est convenu d'appeler la 'conscience sociale' parmi nous n'existait pas [emphasis added].

He tells (1952, p. 51) of his own feelings on returning from the war:

Il ne semble pas que je poursuive une idée ou une solution: non, je suis en proie à un sorte de fatalisme au jour le jour, se traduisant par un 'à vau-l'eau' de nature plutôt agréable. Cela se fonde sur une indifférence à peu près totale qui n'excepte que mes rares amis, c'est-à-dire ceux qui participent à quelque titre du même trouble que moi, trouble assurément d'un genre nouveau, quoique peu objectivable [emphasis added].

Talking specifically of the Aragon of the period towards the end of World War I, he says (1952, p. 39):

En lui, à ce moment peu de révolte. Le goût de la subversion plutôt affiché par coquetterie mais, en réalité, les impositions de la guerre et de l'orientation professionnelle (médicale) supportées avec allégresse: croix de guerre au front; il s'arrangeait pour avoir 'pioché' toujours un peu plus que les autres les 'questions d'internat'. [...]. De crise profonde chez lui, à ce moment, aucune...Oui, elle devait se produire plus tard et, autant qu'il me semble, par contagion.

Thus, Breton's testimony clashes with the account given in *Ecrit au Seuil* by Aragon.

Another difficulty in Aragon's statement, that in 1917 he had wanted to prepare to outwit the censor in a future, similar war, is his remark (1964, p. 30) to Francis Crémieux:

Quant à moi, je refusais son visa à la guerre. Il me faut confesser que je ne croyais pas au retour de la guerre. Je ne croyais pas à une pareille folie, en tout cas du fait de mon propre pays [emphasis added], et l'une des choses qui ont changé le sens de ma vie, cela a été précisément d'assister un beau jour au retour de la guerre, dans les années 24 à 26, lors de la guerre du Rif, laquelle a eu sur moi une influence autrement déterminante que bien des faits de l'histoire contemporaine.

Do we find a hint here that it was this later war that was to play a more important rôle in inspiring the strategy that was to lead to *Le Crève-Coeur* ?

Aragon (1968, p. 42) tells Dominique Arban:

Breton et moi, nous étions des lecteurs du *Drapeau rouge*, du *Journal du Peuple*, de *La vague*, c'est-à-dire des journaux contre la guerre, les journaux de ces socialistes qui étaient contre la guerre. Et, d'ailleurs, en 1921, au moment du congrès de Tours et de la fondation du parti communiste, Breton et moi avons voulu donner notre adhésion à ce parti [...]. Je raconte cela pour marquer notre orientation d'alors. **Néanmoins, j'étais politiquement très ignorant, je ne savais rien du tout, mes connaissances étaient dans un tout autre domaine** [emphasis added]...mais il est certain que le front, la guerre, d'avoir vu comment tout cela se passait, m'avait mis d'un certain côté. De la façon la plus vague, la plus générale: ce qui **me caractérisait, c'était une parfaite absence de connaissances politiques** [emphasis added].

There seems to be a paradox here. Someone with a complete absence of political knowledge would be unlikely to seek out socialist anti-war newspapers in what Aragon himself in *Écrit au Seuil* (1974a, p. 30) describes as an atmosphere of terror.

It is interesting to know that *Le Bonnet rouge* (the actual title of the newspaper in question) was seized countless times by the authorities during 1916 and 1917, that its owner was arrested in July 1917 and, having been found guilty of secretly accepting

funds from the Germans (a fact confirmed later by their archives), was executed on 17 July 1918. Its editor died a week after his arrest in August 1917, perhaps having committed suicide. Is this the kind of paper searched out by someone who is politically ignorant?

Le Journal du Peuple was one of the first to rally to the Bolshevik cause. Again, is this the preferred reading of a young, politically uneducated soldier in the circumstances of the time?

He himself (1968, p. 91), speaking of this very period, told Dominique Arban: 'Et je n'étais pas du tout communiste à l'époque, Dieu sait!'

Most significant is the situation of *La Vague*. The press historian Claude Bellanger tells us (1972, p. 443):

Pierre Brizon, le pèlerin de Kienthal, avait créé un hebdomadaire de combat pacifiste, *la Vague*. Longtemps mûri, son projet se réalisa le 5 janvier 1918. Le journal, qui fut diffusé dans l'armée et qui pénétra jusqu'en première ligne, avait largement ouvert ses colonnes aux soldats. Son courrier des lecteurs, que le G.Q.G. tolérait car il y trouvait l'expression de certains mécontentements dont il s'efforçait ensuite de supprimer les causes, expliquait en partie son succès. *La Vague* tirait à plus de 100 000 exemplaires en novembre 1918.

According to Breton, if we remember, Kienthal had made very little impression in the circles to which he (and Aragon) belonged. Yet the latter maintains they read the paper directed by someone who, in April 1916, had attended this Conference of

socialists who were calling for an end to the war. In addition, if such a journal penetrated to the front line in such numbers and was tolerated by General Headquarters, why did Aragon need his secret strategy?

Aragon volunteered for action at the front and was sent there in June 1918. In *Pour expliquer ce que j'étais*, written probably in 1943 and not intended for publication, he gives an idea of his feelings at the time of World War 1:

J'étais de ceux qui, au fond attendaient avec une certaine impatience l'heure du départ, pour être un homme comme les autres, mais qui cachaient ce goût peut-être d'une aventure derrière le langage sceptique, bafoueur, méprisant, qu'ils tenaient des embusqués; de ceux-là enfin, dont beaucoup moururent, mais pour qui cette guerre-là quoi qu'on fit, n'était pas, ne pouvait pas être leur guerre. Parce que cette guerre-là, on voyait trop de quoi elle était faite. c'était une guerre des vieux, pour des raisons qui avaient exalté les vieux, qui ne touchaient pas les jeunes, et c'étaient les jeunes qui la faisaient pour les vieux.

Tout ceci dit comme nous le sentions. Je ne prends pas aujourd'hui, tant s'en faut, à mon actif d'homme, ce qu'enfant ou presque je pensais avec d'autres enfants. Dépourvus de toute idéologie cohérente. Ne voyant guère plus loin que notre famille, nos couchages, nos goûts. Guère plus loin que le bout de notre nez (1989b, pp. 35-36, emphasis in text).

This is a rather more modest statement than the one in *Ecrit au seuil*. It shows the mixture of feelings and makes clear that any opposition to the war was not formulated intellectually as would be necessary in someone planning a strategy as sophisticated as using poetry to reach the maximum of fellow citizens with an uncensored protest.

The poet himself says in *Ecrit au Seuil*:

Mieux que des mémoires où le mensonge, inconscient ou conscient, jette nécessairement un jour faux sur ce qui fut, la publication [...] de ces livres [...] ouvre, mieux que toute prétention à donner l'histoire de ma vie, la lumière et l'ombre de ces années qui, finalement, semblent couvrir un demi-siècle... (1974a, p. 32).

It does seem valuable, in order to assess his claim that the origins of *Le Crève-Coeur* go back to the period of the First World War, to consider what he was actually writing then.

Before his departure to the front, he wrote 'Pour Demain' (1974a, pp. 110-111), which evokes the month of April 1918 (when he had just qualified as a 'médecin-auxiliaire'). The poem, which celebrates the effects of light in spring, does not give any indication of a negative attitude to what lies ahead. Its tone is one of enthusiastic anticipation and joy in reawakening nature. The poet's mood is brought out in the first stanza:

Mon esprit épris du départ
dans un rayon soudain se perd
perpétué par la cadence.

This positive note continues in the second stanza:

La Seine au soleil d'avril danse

Comme Cécile au premier bal.

The poet then evokes the way in which the advancing brightness penetrates the greyness of departing winter and brings out the beauties of Paris:

Les quais gris comme en carnaval

vont au-devant de la lumière

Elle visite les palais

surgis selon ses jeux ou lois

Moi je l'honore à ma manière.

The final stanza translates the delight of direct experience of nature:

La seule école buissonnière

et non Silène m'enseigne

cette ivresse couleur de lèvres.

In this month of April 1918, when he was just about to be confronted by the full horror of the war, the poet's mood does seem to be one of intoxication. Some forty years later in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 286), the presentation of the period is quite different:

J'ai laissé mon coeur à la traîne

Dans les bosquets du Cours-la-Reine

Je ne vous reverrai jamais

Fleurir marronniers que j'aimais

Je pars et je vous abandonne

Longs quais de pierre sans personne

Veillant sur le fleuve profond

Où les désespérés s'en vont

Il paraît que je pars me battre

There is no trace of this sadness in the 1918 poem. It was dedicated to Valéry, hardly a sign of revolt.

More negative is 'Vie de Jean-Baptiste A*' (1974a, pp. 120-121). According to a note in *L'OEuvre Poétique* (1974a, p. 366, note 17), it was written at the front. To Dominique Arban, the poet describes it as follows (1968, p. 13): 'écrit à l'époque où j'allais partir pour le front', and in it, 'l'idée que je n'en reviendrais pas provenait du fait qu'en réalité, pratiquement [...] tous les autres hommes de la famille ont été tués dans cette guerre.'

In this autobiographical poem (cf. 1974a, p. 366, note 17), he tells us: 'En ce temps je n'étais pas né'. He was 'born' only in 1918 when he was informed of the real facts of his parentage a few days before he left for the front. His father, Louis Andrieux, had insisted on this revelation lest Aragon perish in battle not knowing the truth (until then his mother had pretended to be his sister). This makes all the more poignant the sense that he has not really lived, his youth has been like a mere apéritif:

Ma jeunesse Apéro qu'à peine ont aperçu
 les glaces d'un café lasses de tant de mouches
 Jeunesse et je n'ai pas baisé toutes les bouches.

And he is all too aware of the fate he considers inevitable at the front:

Le premier arrivé au fond du corridor

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 MORT.

Speaking to Francis Crémieux, Aragon (1964, pp. 27-28)

recounts his attitude to the war at its close:

Bien sûr, je revenais du Chemin des Dames et quand les gens parlaient de la guerre, fût-ce contre elle, je me fâchais parce que j'étais de ceux qui croyaient (c'est là sans doute une idée un peu enfantine, mais enfin c'était la mienne) que, même si c'était pour lutter contre elle, nommer la guerre c'était lui faire de la réclame. La haute idée que je me faisais de la force poétique de la réclame avait pour conséquence que je ne nommais même pas la guerre.

This leads Crémieux to remark: 'J'avais cru pour ma part trouver d'autres échos de la guerre dans certains de vos poèmes de *Feu de joie* écrits aux tranchées, en août 1918. Mais vous considérez que je me suis trompé' (Aragon 1964, p. 30).

However, in *L'OEuvre Poétique* we find the following note on 'Secousse': 'A trait à la journée du 6 août 1918, à Couvrelle-sur-la-Vesle, dans l'Aisne où l'auteur s'est trouvé enterré trois fois, au cours des combats sur le front de la Chaussée Brunehaut' (1974a, p. 366, note 15).

In this poem (1974a, pp. 114-115), as in others which do reflect Aragon's life in the face of danger, there is a certain ambiguity of attitude. 'Secousse' evokes the noise of the explosions, the earth flying through the air, the fields trembling beneath his feet, the shells reaching their zenith before beginning their deadly descent, the deafening impact.

Calligrammes had appeared in April 1918 but Aragon had already seen a proof copy given to Breton by the poet. In 'Secousse' there is a reminiscence of *Calligrammes*, of poems like 'Fête' (1965, page 238) or 'Merveille de la guerre' (1965, p. 271), in the sense of escape from the bitterness of life, the awareness of the 'magnificence' of this 'transformation' of the landscape:

Brouf

Fuite à jamais de l'amertume

Les prés magnifiques volants peints de frais
tournent

champs qui chancellent

Le point mort

Ma tête tinte de tant de crécelles.

There is a deliberate arrangement of the lines, again taken over from Apollinaire (and Reverdy), that highlights the sequence of events but also makes this experience into 'art'. Even if there is a link between the outer destruction and the poet's emotional response to it

(Mon coeur est en morceaux

le paysage en miettes),

the derivation seems to be from a phrase of Apollinaire's: 'Coeur obus éclaté', in 'La Nuit d'avril 1915' (1965, p. 243).

And the word-association that follows in 'Secousse' has the effect of mitigating the horror:

Hop l'Univers verse

Qui chavire l'autre ou moi

L'autre émoi.

Apollinaire's poetic approach to the war, as expressed above all in 'Chevaux de frise' (1965, pp. 302-3), where his word-association transforms ugliness and destruction into something beautiful, is reflected in the following lines of 'Secousse':

Je donne un nom meilleur aux merveilles du jour
 J'invente à nouveau le vent tape-joue
 le vent tapageur.

It is difficult to gauge the tone of the next line:

Le monde à bas je le bâtis plus beau.

Is the reconstruction to be merely aesthetic or is it to be political as well? Certainly, in what follows, the deadly reality is made beautiful: instead of telling us that bombs scar the landscape, he says

Sept soleils de couleur griffent la campagne.

How deeply felt are the tears through which the vision of the external world is broken up into the colours of the spectrum? -

Au bout de mes cils tremble un prisme de larmes
 désormais Gouttes d'eau.

The artistic presentation of the horror is perhaps an attempt to overcome the effect of the shock. The final two lines seem full of bitter irony, given the violent earthworks thrown up by the war:

On lit au poteau du chemin vicinal
 ROUTE INTERDITE AUX TERRASSIERS.

But even here, the use of the signpost is part of the aesthetic that Aragon and Breton were evolving and which can be seen in *Du Décor* (published in September 1918) where Aragon talks of

'l'obsédante beauté des inscriptions, commerciales, des affiches, des majuscules évocatrices' (1974a, p. 64).

Perhaps, however, the use of the signpost in this context could be taken as evidence of the discussions he maintains (1968, p. 134) he was having with Breton on the development of the 'poème-affiche' which would be used for their anti-war message.

'Eclairage à perte de vue' (1974a, pp. 116-117), 'écrit en réaction contre la vie du Front' (1974a, p. 366, note 16), again shows the influence of Apollinaire, in the transformations and the word-associations, and of Reverdy in the very deliberate arrangement of the lines. Any reaction against the life at the front is ambiguous in its expression. The title immediately makes us think of the flares that cast a terrifyingly infernal light on the darkness of the battlefield. But the illumination that Aragon in fact presents is that of a sunset.

He views a cloud from the end of one of the bulrushes among which he is presumably lying. It is transformed into a parasol, a bird, a flower:

Je tiens ce nuage or et mauve au bout d'un jonc
l'ombrelle ou l'oiselle ou la fleur.

It is then seen as a woman's hair which, as it falls through the ashes of the sunlight, fades in colour between his fingers:

La chevelure
descend des cendres du soleil se décolore
entre mes doigts.

The changing nature of the light is expressed in the next line:

Le jour est gorge-de-pigeon.

He wants to know if he is part of this mirage that allows all these transformations:

Vite un miroir participé-je à ce mirage.

And the associations continue:

Si le parasol change en paradis le sol.

The 'parasol', which recalls the earlier 'ombrelle', allows his mind to change the ground (with all its ugliness and horror?) into a 'paradise' which, in turn, evokes the word angel, the flight of which conjures up the name of a bird ('mésange') and then of another bird ('passereau'):

jouons à l'ange

à la mésange

au passereau.

As he is playing this game, he would have wings that could overcome the hail and the storms which are part of the reality of the war-zone. There is a change of mood from the conditional to the indicative future and then to the present tense as though the 'mirage' becomes reality:

Mais elles qui vaincraient les grêles et l'orage

mes ailes oublieront les bras et les travaux

Plus léger que l'argent de l'air où je me love

je file au ras des rets et m'évade du rêve.

His wings will forget the reality of his arms and the labours (or the trench-diggings?), and lighter than the silvery gleam of the air in which he twists and turns, he speeds away at the level of the nets (the network of shadows, or the nets to catch birds

evoking the nets set up in the battlefield to entrap men?) and escapes from the dream-like quality of this vision.

The final line of the poem seems to vaunt the same kind of power (of the poetic imagination) that Rimbaud and Apollinaire claimed over the surrounding world:

La Nature se plie et sait ce que je vauX.

Indeed, the poem seems to have been inspired by the end of 'La Nuit d'avril 1915' (1965, p. 244):

Mais

orgues

aux fétus de la paille où tu dors

L'hymne de l'avenir est paradisiaque.

As a reaction to the life at the front, 'Eclairage à perte de vue' seems an escape from reality. Perhaps here the judgement of Garaudy (1961, p. 27) on the attitude of the Aragon of this period is pertinent:

Il ne s'agissait pas de transformer le monde, mais seulement l'idée qu'on en faisait; de le rendre habitable en considérant le réel comme un ensemble de reflets illusoires.

Garaudy (ibid.) goes on to underpin his argument with a quotation from *Anicet* (which Aragon began at this very period at the front):

J'ai parmi mes vieux jouets une boîte de prestigidigitation, dit Anicet... tout l'attirail d'un transfigurateur des mondes. Ce lieu en est l'image, et tout s'offre à ma guise pour y transformer la vie.

'Parti-Pris' (1974a, p. 118), again according to Aragon 'écrit en réaction contre la vie du Front' (1974a, p. 366, note 16) seems even more influenced by Apollinaire's war poetry.

The presentation of the front with its exploding bombs is hardly negative:

Je danse au milieu des miracles

Mille soleils peints sur le sol

(once again 'La Nuit d'avril 1915' (1965, p. 243) seems to be the source cf. :

Le ciel est étoilé par les obus des Boches

La forêt merveilleuse où je vis donne un bal [...]

Coeur obus éclaté tu sifflais ta romance

Et tes mille soleils ont vidé les caissons

Que les dieux de mes yeux remplissent en silence).

As so often in these poems of *Feu de Joie* (his first collection, published in 1920), Aragon is aware of the gaze of others, of the light their eyes cast on him:

Mille amis Mille yeux ou monocles

m'illuminent de leurs regards.

But this association between the brightness of the deadly suns ('miracles') and the illuminating gaze of those whom he calls 'Mille amis' tends to soften the horror of the reality.

The next two lines are difficult to evaluate:

Pleurs du pétrole sur la route

Sang perdu depuis les hangars.

Are these two elements to be seen as equally 'decorative' in this artistic framework or is there bitter irony behind the fact that,

in this environment, bloodstains on the road are as common as oil stains?

The mood of the next four lines seems to hark back to the opening of the poem:

Je saute ainsi d'un jour à l'autre
 rond polychrome et plus joli
 qu'un paillasson de tir ou l'âtre
 quand la flamme est couleur du vent.

Thus the 'rond polychrome' would refer to the word 'jour' that is characterized by the multicoloured round shapes that are projected on the ground, e.g. 'Mille soleils' (other 'round' forms can be seen in 'Mille yeux ou monocles', 'Pleurs du pétrole', 'Sang perdu'). Is the comparison 'plus joli / Qu'un paillasson de tir' meant (as with Apollinaire) to link the vocabulary of the war to more traditional elements of poetry in a new and surprising way? Or is there a deliberate irony in the application of the word 'joli' to this basic military article, especially in conjunction with the image of a hearth?

The tone of the final three lines is crucial for the understanding of the poem. If the words are meant literally -

Vie ô paisible automobile
 et le joyeux péril de courir au-devant
 Je brûlerai du feu des phares

- we would have an example of the 'punch incomparable' of war evoked by Aragon in his 1920 review of Drieu la Rochelle's *Fonds de Cantine* quoted above. At the end of 'Parti-Pris', we apparently find the poet comparing the heightened sense of life

he feels, as part of an artistic avant-garde, to revelling in the danger of running ahead of the slow mechanized vehicles of the time in the war zone. But does the final line merely evoke the excitement of being in the aesthetic vanguard (an association with 'Les Phares' (1961, p. 15) of Baudelaire?) or does it also convey the inevitability of being lit up by the searchlights of the battlefield and consumed by the fire of war?

'Lever' (1974a, pp. 135-142) is 'dédié à Pierre Reverdy et marque une période où l'influence de celui-ci sur Aragon a été considérable (Hiver 1918-1919)' (1974a, p. 367, note 23). It is important to recognize the influence of Reverdy here because this fact must colour our interpretation of the end of the poem.

In it Aragon reflects on the prospects that await him in a conventional future:

Songe

sans en mourir au gagne-pain
 au travail tout le long du jour
 L'habitude
 Le pli pris
 L'habit gris
 Servitude.

The physical aspects of his immediate surroundings in a depressing room lead him to revolt on a general scale:

Le tapis déchiré par endroits
 Le plafond trop voisin
 Que la vie est étroite
 Tout de même j'en ai assez

Sortira-t-on Je suis à bout
Casser cet univers sur le genou ployé
Bois sec dont on ferait des flammes singulières.

Here is Aragon's first obvious declaration of opposition in *Feu de Joie* to the world as it is. The revolt seems to be against the narrow, restrictive values of a society governed by 'les hommes à la mâchoire carrée'- presumably the lantern-jawed bourgeois:

Ah taper sur la table à midi
que le vin se renverse
qu'il submerge
les hommes à la mâchoire carrée
marteaux pilons.

Once their power has been broken, the young will take over and unite to sing the praises of beauty, the only unsullied virtue:

Alors se lèveront les poneys
les jeunes gens
en bande par la main par les villes
en promenade
pour chanter
à bride abattue à gorge déployée
comme un drapeau
la beauté la seule vertu
qui tende encore ses mains pures.

In these last lines is there a refusal of chauvinism, with the emotional response normally reserved for a flag being transferred to an aesthetic? If beauty is the only pure virtue left, is this because all the others acclaimed by this society have proved

false? How far is the desire to snap the dry wood of this universe driven by social and political opposition? The fact that 'Lever' is dedicated to Reverdy tends to move the revolt to the aesthetic plane.

This latter impression is supported by what Aragon says in *Pour expliquer ce que j'étais* (1989b, p. 42). There he speaks of his refusal even to mention the war at its close:

A vrai dire, cette attitude était dictée plus que par la haine de la guerre, par la haine de la littérature de guerre, il faut bien en convenir. Le propre de ces jeunes gens sans idéologie cohérente dont j'étais, c'était au fond de tout juger suivant leur esthétique. Elle leur tenait lieu de morale, ou tout au moins les valeurs morales pour eux se classaient suivant leurs principes esthétiques.

Aesthetic considerations clearly dominate two articles of the period which are of great interest in assessing Aragon's claim to have wanted already in 1917 to communicate his anti-war sentiments to the greatest number of his fellow citizens.

The first is *Du Décor*, published in September 1918 (1974a, pages 63-70). In it, speaking of the cinema, he appeals for film directors with 'une esthétique audacieuse et neuve, et le sentiment de la beauté moderne' (1974a, p. 69). They should not be afraid of unpopularity, quite the contrary:

La belle chose qu'un film hué par la foule! [...]. Il manque encore au cinéma la consécration des sifflets pour avoir la considération des gens de coeur. Procurez-la-lui, qu'enfin apparaisse la pureté qui attire les crachats! Quand devant

l'écran nu de projections sous la lumière seule de la lanterne, aurons-nous ce sentiment de la virginité redoutable,

Le blanc souci de notre toile? (1974a, p. 70).

It is fitting that he should quote a line of Mallarmé here, for Aragon is most certainly not concerned with reaching as many of his fellow citizens as possible with his message through this mass medium. His cinema is for an élite with the sensitivity to appreciate 'la beauté moderne'.

Du Sujet (1974a, pp.88-98), which appeared in *Le Film* in January 1919 seems to undermine seriously any claim that Aragon was in the least concerned at the time with the welfare of '[le] plus grand nombre de nos concitoyens'. The aesthetic considerations of *Du Décor* are developed in a way that seems to show contempt for the general public:

Pour épurer leur art, les auteurs de films ne devront chanter que l'homme moderne et la vie moderne, et le champ qui s'offre ainsi à la foule des petites gens [emphasis added] jusqu'ici abandonnées au cinéma, est encore trop large pour elle' (1974a, p. 93).

Aragon gives some examples of 'l'homme moderne': the Lafcadio of *Les Caves du Vatican*, Jarry's *Surmâle* and Apollinaire's *Croniamental*. In describing admiringly some of the characteristics of this new hero, Aragon surely gives us an insight into his own attitudes at the period:

L'homme moderne n'est dominé ni par des sentiments ni par des préjugés. Il cherche à atteindre un idéal par tous les

moyens. Rien ne l'arrête, il paraît dans sa conduite une hardiesse et une décision singulières. [...]. L'homme moderne exalte l'action, il trouve en elle-même sa récompense et se rit des fruits qu'elle peut porter. Il n'a ni désirs de réforme sociale ni volonté de progrès moral [emphasis added]. [...]. Rien n'asservit l'homme moderne ni les cadres établis de la vie ni les contingences. [...]. Il faut à l'homme moderne la vie moderne, vie de libre concurrence, où les faibles périssent et les forts demeurent. La sentimentalité s'y punit de mort [emphasis added]. [...]. La vie moderne, c'est la lutte pour la vie et la course à la mort (1974a, pp. 94-96).

The process of development in the attitude of Aragon towards the war is perhaps best shown in his view of Apollinaire. In 'Oraison funèbre' (1974a, pp. 83-85), first published in January 1919, there is a wholly positive portrait of the poet of *Calligrammes*, no criticism of the war imagery:

Enfin, charmeur de fusées, il attirait à lui les feux d'artifice comme des oiseaux de paradis. [...]. Gardons encore de lui cette image d'Epinal, le poète équestre et couleur de la guerre. Je le reconnais ainsi: il fut ce condottiere de Ferrare ou de Ravenne qui périt droit sur son cheval.

By the time Aragon writes an article entitled 'Calligrammes' (1974a, pp. 205-213), which appeared first in October 1920, the presentation has changed. This piece is described in a note in *L'OEuvre Poétique* as bringing out

l'importance et la nature de l'influence de Guillaume Apollinaire sur Aragon et ses amis, avec cependant ici un caractère critique qu'on n'aurait pas trouvé quelques mois plus tôt et qui marque peut-être sinon une évolution de la pensée politique sous-jacente (en tout cas pour Breton et Aragon), en ce temps-là du moins, probablement son premier aveu (1974a, p. 369, note 39).

The newly critical tone comes out in the account given by Aragon of the first reading of the proofs of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* with André Breton in a café:

On ne raconte pas un vertige. Nous lisions à mi-voix et notre voisine, qui nous écoutait, interrompait sa chanson pour reprendre le refrain d'un poème d'Obus couleur de lune':

Allo la Truie

Nous parler de cela même que nous abominions et nous charmer au moyen des pires réalités, le tour de force est à peine croyable. Cette voix dans la nuit:

Ah Dieu que la guerre est jolie

Avec ses chants ses longs loisirs

révoltait-elle assez les hommes sérieux qui prenaient au tragique une aventure où ils ne risquaient après tout que leur vie!

(1974a, pp. 206-207).

There is more criticism of a similar kind:

Encore qu'il se soit malheureusement astreint de changer les obus, les fusées en phantasmes, je crois qu'Apollinaire n'éprouva jamais à la guerre de plus forte émotion qu'au

simple geste de prendre la mesure d'un doigt pour une bague d'aluminium (1974a, pp. 211-212).

It is hard not to regard the confession in the note to this article quoted above from *L'OEuvre Poétique* as rather an understatement. Even if already in April 1919, writing of the recently dead Apollinaire (in *Littérature*, no. 2), he had described the latter as 'cet esprit changeant qui sable / Aux quinquets d'un temps haïssable / Le champagne clair du canon', the October 1920 article on *Calligrammes* seems to mark a decisive difference in the attitude towards the Apollinaire whose very technique of poeticising the war we have seen in 'Secousse', 'Eclairage à perte de vue' and 'Parti-Pris'.

Again it is interesting to turn for a view on his attitude at the time of World War I to *Pour expliquer ce que j'étais* which he seems to have written for his own consumption:

Il est si vrai que l'esthétique l'emportait pour nous sur toutes considérations, que nous ne nous embarrassions pas de nous contredire, touchant la guerre et ceux qui en parlent. Il ne nous gênait guère par exemple qu'elle fit le fond de *Calligrammes*, et nous passions à Apollinaire toute une imagerie qui nous eût fait hurler ailleurs. Il est vrai aussi que l'oreille des gens épris de poésie est singulièrement sélective; et que nous n'entendions que ce que nous voulions bien d'Apollinaire, où la beauté de l'image, de l'élément poétique, nous faisait très facilement oublier ce que disait le poème. Je ne veux pas dire que nous eussions dû à Apollinaire la colère que nous réservions à

Barbusse. Non. Je constate simplement qu'il y avait ici deux poids deux mesures, et que l'invective mise de côté, nous aurions été bien incapables d'expliquer logiquement cette inconséquence remarquable. Sauf par des raisons d'esthétique. Ce que je disais précisément.

When we examine Aragon's actual production at the period of the First World War, we do find aesthetic considerations dominating the presentation of reality, and it is difficult to find convincing evidence that he had a clear enough position on the war and on his fellow citizens to begin in 1917 the reflections that were to lead to *Le Crève-Coeur*.

This impression seems to be supported by a statement Aragon made in 'Le Retour à la réalité' in June 1935 about the literary tendency represented by Reverdy who, as we have seen, influenced some of the poetry that Aragon was himself producing during the the First World War:

On peut affirmer du cubisme littéraire, dont j'ai moi-même alors pu me réclamer [emphasis added], que c'était un mouvement essentiellement réactionnaire dans la poésie [...]; la réalité de tous les jours s'y évanouissait, cette réalité qui comportait Verdun et le Chemin des Dames [emphasis added] (1975b, p. 319).

In *Paris-Journal* in December 1923, however, Aragon was still maintaining:

Il me faut de la place pour Pierre Reverdy, m'entendez-vous? Il me faut toute la place pour Pierre Reverdy, le plus grand poète français vivant (1974b, pp. 180-181).

In the same article, Aragon tells how he had met Reverdy during the war, a war which he dismisses thus: 'Je l'ai connu au milieu d'un assez joli désarroi: que se passait-il donc, une espèce de tremblement de terre d'importance purement historique...' (ibid., p. 178).

In November 1923, in *Paris-Journal* also, Aragon was to be found angrily defending Apollinaire: 'Apollinaire n'a jamais rien écrit qui ne soit admirable, entendez-vous' (1974b, p. 175).

But this was two years after the 'Procès Barrès' of April 1921, when the author of *Un Homme libre* was condemned by the Dadaïstes because he had become a war propagandist and president of *La Ligue des Patriotes* (Aragon was one of the two advocates for the defence).

There can be no doubt that Aragon rejected Barrès's position, but an element of youthful provocation of the older writer and of the generation he represented comes out in Aragon's article of January 1924 in *L'Information d'Extrême-Orient* recalling the interview he had had with Barrès in the spring of 1923:

Il parla de la guerre et des morts. Je ne manquai pas sur-le-champ de manquer de respect à ceux-ci. 'Vous ne me gâchez pas votre personnage, s'écria-t-il, vous êtes l'insolence traditionnelle de cette race' (1974b, p. 207).

It may be doubted that Aragon had, as early as he maintains, the kind of attitude that would make him want to formulate a poetic vehicle for anti-war *contrebande* directed towards 'le plus grand nombre'. At the end of April 1935, in his *Message au*

Congrès des John Reed Clubs he looked back at his situation after the First World War:

Ma révolte contre le monde qui m'entourait trouva dans Dada tout naturellement sa dérivation entière [emphasis added]. Le débat que je poursuivais était le débat de plusieurs générations, son aboutissant. Il opposait avec violence l'écrivain et le public. Le public en général un ennemi [emphasis added]. [...]. Pourtant, au milieu des manifestations, des injures, ces quelques hommes qui avaient repris comme un défi le drapeau scandaleux de la poésie, n'étaient pas entièrement sourds à ce qui était étranger à leur combat. Nous étions, que nous le voulussions ou non, des hommes de l'après-guerre, sous le règne ignoble du traité de Versailles, devant une Allemagne où la Révolution avait été écrasée avec les mitrailleuses de Clemenceau. Je me souviens de l'émotion avec laquelle j'avais suivi le Congrès de Tours quand surgit, face à la police, Clara Zetkin et naquit le Parti communiste français.

Cependant, au milieu du brouillard d'idéologies et de contradictions où nous nous débattions, de Dada au surréalisme, il fallut des années pour que la conscience me vint, et à la plupart de mes amis, que ce n'était pas là simple affaire d'exaltation, mais une part de notre tâche propre d'écrivains, que de travailler à renverser ce monde qui nous révoltait. Longtemps cette révolte garda pour moi la forme de l'anarchie [emphasis added] (1975b, pp. 251-2).

Aragon's emotion at the 1920 *Congrès de Tours*, at which the PCF was founded and joined Lenin's Communist International, has to be confronted by his own words in 1924 on the death of Anatole France (who had supported the Communists). Aragon condemns him in *Avez-vous déjà giflé un mort?* for being hailed by 'le tapir Maurras et Moscou la gâteuse' (in Nadeau 1948, p. 14). In *Communisme et révolution* in January 1925, in reply to a Communist's reproach for the words of the attack on Anatole France, Aragon said: 'La révolution russe, vous ne m'empêcherez pas de hausser les épaules. A l'échelle des idées, c'est au plus une vague crise ministérielle' (in Nadeau 1948, p. 25).

There certainly appear to be contradictions in the statements of Aragon at the period. In *Une Vague de rêves*, published in the autumn of 1924, the author says: '"Il s'agit d'aboutir à une nouvelle déclaration des droits de l'homme."' (1974b, p. 249). But in December of the same year in 'Saint-John Perse: *Anabase*', while evoking the war and its aftermath, Aragon attacks the majority, whose ideas he scorns:

Quand la terre trembla, quand l'ombre suspendit son
 feuillage au-dessus des cérémonies militaires, quand on vit,
 dira-t-on, le défilé des couleurs humaines sur une tombe
 absurde, quand le sentiment de la consécration eut déposé sa
 palme et ses murmures sur le dénouement prévu d'idées
 vulgaires, défendues par le plus grand nombre [emphasis
 added] [...] (1974b, p. 260).

In December 1924, talking of the inventions of Surrealism, Aragon's shows only contempt for those on whose interests he claims, in *Ecrit au seuil*, to have been reflecting since 1917:

Inventions philosophiques qui sont toujours un peu
plaisantées du vulgaire, que les contradictions
déconcertent, et qui a inventé le rire pour se tirer
d'affaire en leur présence. C'est là l'humour, qui fait
sonner faussement les petites cloches du bétail humain
[emphasis added] (1974b, p. 266).

Aragon (1968, pp. 87-89) gives to Dominique Arban an account of the turning point in his political development which he dates from the French colonial war in Morocco of 1925-6:

Que mon pays ait pu - sept ans après une guerre dont on nous
avait dit qu'elle serait la dernière - faire de ses fils des
assassins en portant la guerre dans un pays lointain,
c'était pour moi chose intolérable! Et je suis allé
directement vers le seul parti qui se dressât contre cette
guerre.

In fact he did not join the French Communist Party until January 1927 and the way towards it was not as straight as he describes here. But this colonial war can be considered as the most obvious starting point of the path that was to take him to the political awareness necessary to plan *Le Crève-Coeur*.

He recounts in 'L'An 26' how it was from discussions among the Surrealists in the summer of 1925 that were to develop (at the end of that year),

[les] premières rencontres que j'avais pu faire de communistes, sensiblement de mon âge, le groupe *Clarté*, pour tout préciser. [...]. Si brève qu'ait été cette rencontre, et si étrangement divergente puisque, arrivé parmi ces jeunes gens que je considérais comme les porteurs d'une lumière dont j'étais ébloui (et dont je me défendais encore) [emphasis added], je devais à l'aube de 1927 entrer dans leur parti, tandis qu'eux allaient diversement s'en éloigner (1974c, pp. 9-10).

The clearest sign of Aragon's growing commitment to 'le plus grand nombre' is provided by his review 'Le Croiseur Potemkine', published in December 1926. Eisenstein's film had been banned by the French censor from general release and Aragon saw it at a private showing. For him it is 'le plus beau film qu'on ait jamais fait' (1974c, p. 377). And even before it begins, the announcement on the screen that it does not contain any stars but is the work of Russian workers with no personal ambitions provokes in him the following reaction:

Je défie un homme qui a le sentiment de la grandeur et le sens de la morale de ne pas éprouver cette émotion qui ne le quittera plus de toute la durée du film et qui est tout ce qui fait encore la dignité humaine sous un régime abject [i.e. of France], et la surveillance subie des mouchards (1974c, p. 377).

Very important also for our discussion of the origins of *Le Crève-Coeur* is Aragon's assessment in this review that the French Government is preparing for an imminent war which a conditioned

public will not resist. Important as well, coming from someone who had made a point of dismissing the war in which he had participated, is his praise for the film's brutally truthful representation of the horrors involved:

Ce qu'il faut aux Français, qui aiment les beaux uniformes qu'on leur prépare pour une guerre prochaine, ce sont les parades qui travestissent en idylles les horribles réalités. Ah, *le Croiseur Potemkine* n'est pas comparable à la production des films de guerre américains et français, si pleins de sentiments patriotiques et d'idioties matérielles [...]. Imaginez-vous qu'on voit de la vraie viande pourrie à l'écran, avec de vrais vers grouillants (1974c, pp. 375-376).

It seems significant that it is at the beginning of 1928, almost exactly a year after this review and the political commitment of joining the PCF, that we find the first direct, realistic description of his war experience in his poetry. It is in a supremely personal poem of tortured, unhappy love for Nancy Cunard, entitled *Puerta del sol*, first published in 1974:

Ecoute-moi Je suis devant le monde entier comme
 Un massacre Une guerre d'épouvante et je sais
 Ce que j'en dis J'ai vu périr
 Des jeunes gens J'ai regardé
 Leurs lèvres pâles sur la terre
 J'ai relevé des trépassés J'ai même
 Deux ou trois fois creusé leur tombe (1974d, p. 183).

It is in *La Grande Gaîté*, written in 1927-8, that we find the first clearly circumstantial poems of a political and social nature, poems that are not dissimilar to *Front Rouge* (1930) which was to be attacked by the Surrealists.

Consider the ironically titled 'Berceuse' (1974d, pp. 197-9):

Chie chie chie chie donc chie

Ecoute la voix de ta mère

Petit enfant chie

Comme les grands de la terre

M. Poincaré

Mme Selma Lagerloff

Les Princes de la Maison de Belgique.

'Faiblement dit' (ibid., pp. 244-6) is a ferocious attack on the bourgeoisie:

Parce que je les dégueule que je

Hausse les épaules devant les boas de leurs femmes

Les cerceaux de leurs rejets

Les appartements de leurs bedaines

Parce que moi

Je ne suis pas en règle avec le maire et la patrie

Que je ne me cache pas de l'horreur qu'ils m'inspirent

Parce que

Je n'aime pas les gens.

In *Ecrit au Seuil* (1974a, pp. 26-33), Aragon talks of the technical aspects of his claimed desire to develop an anti-war message. He tells how he never abandoned the sonnet although it

was one of the most decried forms of traditional poetry at the time of Dada and Surrealism. This form would appear either openly or camouflaged in nearly all his collections. He gives us to understand that this was part of his reflection on a method of poetic communication that would evade censorship. Discussing his so-called return to traditional verse with *Le Crève-Coeur*, he says:

Tout de même, il me faut faire remarquer que dans les temps mêmes où j'étais considéré comme surréaliste (comme l'un des fondateurs du surréalisme), dès *Le Mouvement perpétuel* (1920-24) et sa seconde partie *Les destinées de la Poésie* [sic], écrite en quelques jours en 1925, souvent sur un ton dérisoire, le retour [sic] en question avait été précocement amorcé (1974a, p. 28).

And so, with reference to *Le Crève-Coeur* and his poetry since, he asks:

D'où me venait pourtant cette technique, qui n'était pas née en deux jours? On voit bien que j'en ai dénoncé ici les origines, dans un travail formel, plus ou moins heureux, qui s'étend sur presque toute ma vie d'écrivain (ibid., p. 29).

If we examine these claims, we find that in *Le Mouvement perpétuel*, there are only three poems that have rhyme and regular metres. One of them is a sonnet 'Un Air embaumé', but it dates in fact from early 1919. *Les destinées de la Poésie* contains a good many poems that rhyme and have regular metres, but most of them ridicule the form. This is brought out by Aragon (1968, pp. 66-67) himself in his conversations with Dominique Arban:

Pour ma part, j'utilisais parfois la forme traditionnelle du vers français. Comme l'autre [i.e. Rimbaud], disant adieu à la vie par des espèces de chansons. Et moi aussi, par une sorte de dérision [...]. Et tels sont un certain nombre de poèmes qu'on trouverait dans mon livre de 1926, *Le Mouvement perpétuel* [...] puis une seconde partie, intitulée *Les Destinées de la poésie*. [...]. Ces poèmes de dérision ont une assez grande diversité, mais se ressemblent entre eux par le ton qu'on doit mettre à les lire. J'en citerai comme exemple ce 'Nocturne', il est assez caractéristique que j'aie voulu le dédier à André Breton:

Dans la forêt dans les buissons
 Se sont envolés les soupçons
 Les vers luisants les étoiles
 Se sont accrochés dans les voiles
 De la nuit odorante

Vois

Les oiseaux assis aux toits.

La faiblesse des rimes n'est pas de hasard: je jouais sur le ton faible.

Aragon adds in a note:

Toutefois il est à signaler que la coupure en deux lignes du vers d'abord écrit 'De la nuit odorante Vois' n'a pas pour but seulement d'y ajouter une emphase ironique, marquée à la fois par la liaison humoristique 'nuitodorante', et du fait de l'arrêt l'exagération orale de la septième syllabe, muette non élidée, mais constitue l'invention à proprement

parler de cette *rime enjambée* ('Vois-les') systématiquement plus tard employée dans *Le Crève-Coeur* .

Here we find no claim as in *Écrit au Seuil* that this return to traditional forms was part of the development of a technique that he intended then to use in a future *contrebande*. This analysis is supported by what he goes on to say in the same passage:

Mais pour en revenir au *Mouvement perpétuel*, tout n'y dépendait pas du vers faible et de la rime *déshonorée* [emphasis added]. On y trouve des poèmes où l'élément particulier, la faiblesse particulière, réside non dans la forme, mais dans la pensée. J'en prendrai exemple avec [...] 'La Force' [...]. C'est ici, avec ce qu'il y a de provocatoire, dirons-nous, dans la pensée, que l'on trouvait chez moi la conciliation de Dada et du surréalisme [emphasis added] (1968, pp. 67-69).

The ridicule of traditional form is very important for our discussion. As we have seen, Aragon (1964, p. 134) maintains to Francis Crémieux that the form taken by *Le Crève-Coeur*

était de longue main la forme par moi préparée pour être entendu du plus grand nombre de gens possible, basant mon expression sur les formes nationales profondes de la poésie française [emphasis added].

But it seems most unlikely that he had this idea in mind in 1925-6 when his attitude was one of 'dérision'. And his view then of anything that might be deemed part of French national culture may be gleaned from a lecture ('D'une conférence') that he gave

to Spanish students in Madrid in April 1925 at the beginning of the war in Morocco:

Mon pays, remarquez bien, que je déteste, où tout ce qui est français [sic] comme moi me révolte à proportion que c'est français [sic] [...]. Un Français, vous me prenez pour un Français. Je me lève pourtant en face de cette idée locale, la bouche débordant d'imprécations [...]. J'arrache de moi cette France, qui ne m'a rien donné, que de petites chansons et des vêtements bleus d'assassin (1974b, pp. 300-1).

This hostility to the national concept comes out very strongly in the Surrealists' *Lettre Ouverte à M. Paul Claudel* of which Aragon was a co-signatory in July 1925: 'Nous saisissons cette occasion pour nous désolidariser publiquement de tout ce qui est français, en paroles et en actions' (in Nadeau 1948, p. 36). In the same year, Aragon's is the first signature to *La Révolution d'abord et toujours*, in which the Surrealists declare:

Plus encore que le patriotisme qui est une hystérie comme une autre, mais plus creuse et plus mortelle qu'une autre, ce qui nous répugne c'est l'idée de Patrie qui est vraiment le concept le plus bestial, le moins philosophique dans lequel on essaie de faire entrer notre esprit (in Nadeau 1948, p. 38).

Already in 1924 in his 'Lettre à Francis Viélé-Griffin sur la destinée de l'homme', Aragon had criticized this poet for returning to that most national of French forms, *l'alexandrin* (the principal metre of *Le Crève-Coeur*): 'vous cédez à une

illusion [...] quand vous remettez follement votre fortune, héros du vers libre, au vers regulier' (1974b, p. 217).

In 1974 in 'Prélude à un autodafé', Aragon himself comments on this letter which he calls

ce reproche au vieil homme de la part du jeune canard que j'étais, d'avoir trahi, pas seulement le vers libre, mais l'évolution générale de l'activité poétique, par ce retour à l'alexandrin: accusation qui prête à sourire aujourd'hui sous ma signature, si on songe à ce que j'ai écrit par la suite (1974d, p. 140).

It is certainly a letter that casts a shadow over the state of the formal considerations in which he claims to have been engaged.

Later, in 'Partie fine' (in *La Grande Gaité* written in 1927-28), we find him refusing to produce poetry acceptable to bourgeois taste because -

Moi je n'ai pas fini de prendre en mauvaise part
 Tout ce qui touche à la flicaille à la militairerie
 Et plus particulièrement croa-croa aux curetages
 Je n'ai pas assez le goût des alexandrins
 Pour me le faire par-donner pan pan pan pan
 (1974d, p. 220, emphasis added).

It is of course deliberately derisive on Aragon's part that the final two lines here are themselves alexandrines.

If we consider the record of Aragon's poetry in the 1920s, we do find him sometimes using traditional forms. Occasionally he follows the rhyming practice of Apollinaire (employed

systematically later in *Le Crève-Coeur*) according to which feminine rhymes end in a pronounced consonant and masculine ones in a vowel or nasal sound - there is even an example of this in *Feu de Joie*, published in 1920, where in 'Soifs de l'Ouest' he rhymes 'gin' and 'devine' (1974a, p. 103). We see that in addition to his invention of *rime enjambée* found solely in 'Nocturne' quoted above, there are cognate experiments with line endings as found in *Chant de la puerta del sol* (1974d, p. 176):

Il n'y

A plus ni jour ni nuit.

But there seems to be no pattern. For example, after the frequent rhyme and regular metres of *Les Destinées de la poésie*, we encounter much less rhyme and few examples of 'vers comptés' in *La Grande Gaîté*.

And so it is difficult to find clear evidence to support the claims made by Aragon in *Ecrit au Seuil* and elsewhere on the origins of *le Crève-Coeur*.

What is clear is the effect on Aragon's poetry of his political development occasioned by the war in Morocco. We have seen this manifested in the circumstantial poems of *La Grande Gaîté* and in the recall of his own experience at the front in *Chant de la Puerta del Sol*.

The effect of the Moroccan war can not be overestimated. In his 1935 'Message au Congrès des John Reed Clubs' he says of it:

La cassure pourtant, le grand choc, ce fut pour moi, et pour plusieurs, la guerre du Rif. Quand notre bourgeoisie aux lèvres pacifiques entreprit le massacre systématique des

Marocains, luttant pour leur indépendance tout comme 'la malheureuse petite Belgique', dont on nous avait cassé les oreilles, quand nous revîmes la guerre partant de notre propre pays avec l'appui des académiciens, ce fut pour nous un coup et pour moi une bifurcation dans la vie (1975b, p. 253).

He goes on to dismiss the period before this crucial event as 'Cinq années d'hésitations, de contre-marches. Ce fut là le beau temps et l'éclat du surréalisme' (ibid.).

He then recounts another vital element in his development, the meeting in November 1928 with Mayakovski:

C'est pourtant cette minute qui devait changer ma vie. Le poète qui a su faire de la poésie une arme, le poète qui a su ne pas être *au-dessous* [sic] de la Révolution devait être le lien entre un monde et moi. Le premier anneau d'une chaîne que j'accepte et que je montre à tous à mon poignet aujourd'hui, celle qui m'unit à nouveau à ce monde extérieur [...] où j'aperçois non seulement le visage hideux de l'ennemi, mais aussi les yeux profonds des millions d'hommes et de femmes auxquels Maïakovsky le poète m'a appris simplement qu'on pouvait, qu'on devait s'adresser, de ceux qui transformeront le monde et qui lèvent au-dessus de lui leurs poings meurtris où pend une chaîne (1975b, p. 254).

His personal circumstances also played an essential rôle in engendering ideas that are central to *Le Crève-Coeur*. The devastating end of his relationship with Nancy Cunard made him write in 'Poème à crier dans les ruines' in 1928:

Crachons sur l'amour (1974d, p. 301).

However, by the end of 1929, having spent his first year with Elsa Triolet, he was able when asked (by *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*) 'Quelle sorte d'espoir mettez-vous dans l'amour?' to reply: 'je place tout mon espoir dans l'amour comme dans la révolution de laquelle [...] il n'est plus aucunement distinguable' (1974d, p. 393. emphasis added). Here we have an essential component of the philosophy that informs *Le Crève-Coeur*. A dominant theme of that collection is foreshadowed in another part of his reply: 'Je ne puis absolument pas me passer de la présence de qui j'aime' (ibid., p. 394). A measure of the development in Aragon's thinking is given by a comparison of the views expressed on love in this reply to the 1929 questionnaire and those revealed in his 'Manifeste Dada' of March 1920 in *Littérature*:

Il n'y a que moi au monde et si j'ai de temps en temps la faiblesse de croire à l'existence d'une femme, il me suffit de me pencher sur son sein pour entendre le bruit de mon [sic] coeur et me reconnaître. Les sentiments ne sont que des langages pour faciliter l'exercice de quelques fonctions.

It seems that his new political attitude, stemming from the impact of the Moroccan war, is the key factor in socialising love for him, in giving him that 'conscience sociale' that Breton says did not exist in their group at the time when Aragon maintains he was discussing the possibilities of reaching 'le plus grand nombre' with an anti-war message.

The dating by Sadoul, one of his most intimate friends and closest political allies, of Aragon's plan (to use poetry as a means of communicating with the masses while evading censorship) is significant:

Durant nos rencontres de mars-avril [1940], Aragon pour désigner la méthode poétique qui lui permettait de se faire comprendre par beaucoup malgré la censure, employa le mot 'contrebande' dont je compris immédiatement le sens. A cette 'contrebande' Aragon pensait depuis longtemps. Il avait adopté dans *Hourra l'Oural* et dans d'autres poèmes publiés en revues, notamment dans les 'Couplets du Beau Monde' (1933), une prosodie classique aux quatrains octosyllabes et aux rimes masculines et féminines fort orthodoxes.

Ce retour aux formes traditionnelles n'était dicté ni par un défi, ni par une réaction, mais par un dessein profond. Au début des années 1930, et surtout après la prise du pouvoir par Hitler en 1933 [emphasis added], Aragon avait pensé à l'éventualité imminente d'une guerre qui serait dirigée, d'une façon ou de l'autre, contre l'URSS. Dans des circonstances [sic] impossibles alors à prévoir la poésie pouvait devenir un moyen de 'parler à la foule', d'une façon ou de l'autre, à condition d'employer le plus souvent les vers et les rimes, auxquels les grandes masses sont habituées, alors qu'elles rechignaient encore devant les recherches d'avant-garde (Sadoul 1967, p. 28).

This version fits much better the actual poetic production and statements of Aragon up until his conversion to communism.

Aragon's account to Dominique Arban of the direction his poetry took in the 1930s does not pose for us the difficulties of the earlier period. He tells (1968, pp. 131 and 136-137) how his new understanding of what he calls *le mécanisme de classe* of poetic inspiration represented for him 'un élargissement de l'inspiration poétique, à partir de la poésie pour quelques-uns vers la poésie pour tous', and how

je me suis peu à peu retrouvé en face du problème du poème s'adressant à [*sic*] tous, et en particulier à ceux qui pouvaient ne pas suivre un gouvernement dont la volonté serait d'entraîner la France dans une, dans la guerre. Ce problème se posait devant moi, avec l'évolution de mes idées politiques, d'une façon un peu différente, mais qui était pourtant la suite dialectique de mes préoccupations antérieures. [...]. Et peu à peu, j'ai entrepris de transformer la poésie qui était la mienne, par des étapes souvent contradictoires, dont le premier exemple public est un poème que je trouve très mauvais [...]: je parle de *Front rouge* [...]. Ensuite et au-delà, j'ai reconnu la nécessité, si on veut parler aux gens et être compris de tous, de reprendre un langage qui ne serait pas mis en discussion, de faire que la discussion porte sur *ce qui est dit*, et non sur *comment c'est dit* [*italics in text*]. Il ne s'agissait pas pour autant de reprendre le langage de la rue, parce que ce langage, une fois écrit, serait toujours remis en discussion, mais un langage de tradition nationale. De cette considération sont parties des tentatives diverses, et

pendant dix ans j'ai écrit des poèmes dont peu furent publiés, beaucoup déchirés, d'autres perdus simplement (notamment pendant la guerre d'Espagne), et qui m'ont amené, lorsque je me suis trouvé devant le fait de la guerre de 1939, à ces poèmes que j'ai commencé d'écrire dès septembre [1939].

We have discussed what he calls his 'préoccupations antérieures'. Here he acknowledges the effect of his political development on them and, in the expression 'suite dialectique', implies the resolution of certain contradictions. This passage makes clear that his realization of the need to employ 'un langage de tradition nationale' came after *Front rouge*. This is much more precise than the account given previously to Francis Crémieux, and we will see the factors that in the 1930s influenced the poet in adopting traditional language and (with certain modifications) form.

Front rouge was written in the course of Aragon's first visit to the Soviet Union in 1930, parts one to three in September-October of that year, the fourth part in December. Confirming what we have said earlier, Aragon tells us in 1975, in 'Une préface morcelée 4':

A son départ, *Front rouge* n'est pas dissemblable de plusieurs des poèmes de *La Grande Gaité*. Ni dans la manière d'écrire ni dans le caractère imprécatoire de la violence, qu'on trouve assez généralement dans les écrits surréalistes antérieurs. Et pas que dans les miens (1975a, p. 148).

Such is the violent character of some of the writing - e.g. 'Descendez les flics / Camarades / descendez les flics' (1975a, p. 160) - that the police seized the poem on its publication in November 1931 and Aragon was charged with encouraging military disobedience and incitement to murder. *Front rouge* is also characterized by rabid anti-clericalism, something that Aragon was later to eschew: we will see a quite different attitude to religion in *Le Crève-Coeur*.

In 1975 Aragon very importantly describes the motivation of *Front rouge*: 'faire ici servir [sic] la poésie à la défense, à l'apologie d'un peuple dont je découvrais le caractère émouvant' (1975a, p. 148). This was an approach that was bound to be criticized by the Surrealists.

In *Misère de la poésie* in 1932, Breton was to analyse the nature of the poem and condemn precisely those aspects that show it to be a precursor of *Le Crève-Coeur*:

Force m'est donc, considérant aussi le tout de ce poème, sa référence continuelle à des accidents particuliers, aux circonstances de la vie publique, me rappelant enfin qu'il a été écrit lors du séjour d'Aragon en URSS de le tenir non pour une solution acceptable du problème poétique, tel qu'il se pose de nos jours mais [...] pour un poème de circonstance [sic] (in Nadeau 1948, p. 216).

In 'C'est là que tout a commencé' written in 1964, Aragon was to say (1965a, pp. 13-14):

Quand se brisèrent les liens entre les surréalistes et moi, je l'ignorais, c'était en moi le réalisme qui revendiquait

ses droits. (Ce poème médiocre *Front rouge* à propos duquel ils feignirent de prendre feu en est la grossière image première, ici se fait le retournement de l'écriture, l'aveu même de son point de départ dans la réalité extérieure, et c'est aujourd'hui [...] que je comprends le mérite [sic] de cette démarche gauche, et claudicante, de cet acte, mal situé, de ce geste incomplet, qu'on avait beau jeu de me reprocher.).

The content of the poem may be characterized by violent invective, but its form shows Aragon making interesting experiments with rhyme that would be valuable when he came to write *Le Crève-Coeur*, e.g. :

un air un air UR
 SS un air joyeux comme le fer SS
 SR un air brûlant c'est l'es
 pérance c'est l'air SSSR

or

Le bruit du marteau le bruit de la faucille
 montent de la terre est-ce
 bien la faucille est-ce est-ce
 bien le marteau L'air est plein de criquets
 Crécelles et caresses

URSS (1975a, pp. 163, 167, emphasis in text).

However the other poems of *Persécuté persécuteur* (which followed in 1931), have little end-rhyme and no sustained regular metres. They attack the familiar surrealist targets ('la famille l'armée / la religion la patrie / la propriété les propriétaires

/ Ah fusillez-moi ça [1975a, pp. 198-199]), again with a political extremism that the poet was later to disavow:

Je chante le Guépéou nécessaire de France [...]
 Vive le Guépéou contre dieu chiappe et la *Marseillaise*
 Vive le Guépéou contre le pape et les poux
 (1975a, pp. 256-7).

But there can also be heard a tone of bitter sadness at the unhappiness in the world, as in 'Le Progrès':

Splendeurs vous maquillez inutilement cette existence
 épouvantable [...]
 je mesure la gloire la lumière le bonheur avec la jauge du crève-
 coeur (1975a, p. 205).

The theme of love is also evoked and already, as later in *Le Crève-Coeur*, there is no escape from the distress of other people, thus in 'Lycanthropie contemporaine' (1975a, p. 234):

J'aime et je suis aimé Rien ne nous sépare
 Pourquoi donc être triste au coeur splendide de l'amour
 Le monde hoche sa tête Je Sais Tout stupide
 J'aime et cependant la vie est intolérable à mourir
 J'aime et cependant il faudra tout à l'heure que je hurle
 Je traîne à mes pas le manteau fantomatique des arrières-
 pensées
 Une chaîne de perfectionnements à la douleur morale
 cliquette à mes pieds épouvantablement malheureux
 J'aime et nous nous aimons mais au milieu d'un naufrage.

Significantly also for *Le Crève-Coeur*, the date and place of many of the poems are given within the text.

In *Hourra l'Oural*, written in 1933-34 but recalling a journey made in 1932 to the USSR, there is a considerable amount of rhyme and regular metre. The collection is an enthusiastic response to the developments in the Soviet Union. Typical is 'Valse du Tcheliabtraktrostoi' (1975b, pp. 73-79) in which the Stakhanovite feats of cement workers are lyrically celebrated.

Still present is the violence of tone towards perceived enemies. This comes out above all in 'Journal du diamant (fragments)' which records the execution of the Russian royal family and the destruction of the bodies. For the diamond worn by the tsarina:

Je dois dire que c'est agréable
un luxe pas de tous les jours
un grand bain de vitriol (1975b, p. 99).

Most important is the continued contempt for the concept of *la Patrie* which is associated with the hated bourgeoisie and all that is reactionary. Aragon's position is tellingly expressed in 'Réponse aux Jacobins' (1975b, p.142):

Je salue ici
l'Internationale contre la Marseillaise
Cède le pas ô Marseillaise
à l'Internationale car voici
l'automne de tes jours voici
l'Octobre où sombrent tes derniers accents.

The decisive influence in changing Aragon's attitude towards *la Marseillaise* and towards religion was that of Maurice Thorez. Aragon recounts (1975a, p. 405) how, already in 1933, the General

Secretary of the PCF gave him a dressing-down for publishing the extremely anti-clerical *Aux Enfants rouges* (1975a, pp. 409-413):

Il me dit regretter que je perde mon temps à bagarrer contre la religion, les prêtres, les fort nombreux Français qui croyaient en Dieu.

In fact it took Aragon some time to adapt himself to what seemed to him a new policy of his party, for in 1935, in a lecture called 'Les Ecrivains dans les soviets', he was still referring to the cause of Claudel as 'celle de la pourriture catholique' (1975b, p. 240). But these changes in policy were spelt out 'avec, en 1936, le discours de Thorez où fut rendue publique la politique dite de la main tendue, le caractère national de *notre* politique (Jeanne d'Arc, l'héritage culturel de France, le drapeau tricolore)' (1975a, p. 406).

The clearest statement of the lessons that Aragon had learned from Thorez and, as he says himself, from participating in the day-to-day popular struggles of the time, is to be found in 'Discours', a speech that he gave on 16 July 1937 to *Le 2e Congrès international des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture*:

Je plaide ici pour le réalisme. [...]. Et c'est au nom de ce réalisme que je veux exalter [...] l'ensemble de réalités qu'on appelle *une nation* [sic], et je veux essayer de montrer ici comment la vie crée entre les hommes des rapports nationaux qui sont les conditions mêmes de la naissance d'une culture, ce qui est dire que je prétends ici

démontrer qu'il y a identité entre défense de la culture et défense de la nation (1977, pp. 377-8).

He goes on to recount how 'nationalists' had stolen what had in fact been born of the French Revolution, and how many of his generation had identified the sacred concept of the nation with circles that repelled them:

Il faut savoir cela pour comprendre cet anarchisme qui marque la littérature d'après-guerre, et dont j'ai eu ma large part, et ses sarcasmes, et sa dérision de valeurs détournées. Jusqu'au nom de mon pays pour moi qui était à ce point sali que je n'employais qu'en mauvaise part le mot de *français* [sic]. Nous leur abandonnions notre drapeau, notre histoire. Nous les aidions par notre erreur à nous dépouiller (1977, pp. 379-80).

The fact that the bourgeoisie had turned to fascism to restore its fortunes had played a major part in opening the eyes of those who had above all been the victims of the falsifications of the war period. Of this bourgeoisie, he says in the same lecture:

Comme aux jours de Valmy, nous l'avons trouvée toujours prête à faire appel contre son propre peuple à l'exemple et aux armes de l'étranger, et la dérision du langage nationaliste est devenue telle, de Hitler à Doriot, que même les plus sourds ont entendu sonner à nouveau les notes cristallines de la vérité nationale et que nous avons recouvré notre patrimoine par l'excès même de l'impudence de nos spoliateurs (1977, p. 380).

The analysis here is striking for its similarity to the one to be made of Vichy by the PCF and by Aragon three years later. It prefigures the poet's defence of national culture in *Le Crève-Coeur* and later.

Remarkably he even foreshadows the famous litany of *Le Musée Grévin* when he now says:

Je te salue, ma France, pour cette lumière dans tes yeux qui ont vu tomber la Bastille, je te salue pour tes yeux venus du fond des âges et les tendres chansons qui soulèvent ton sein de froment et de lait, pour *Il pleut bergère* et pour la *Carmagnole*, pour Racine et pour Diderot, *Nous n'irons plus au bois* et Maurice Chevalier. Je te salue, ma France, pour Jeanne, la bonne Lorraine, et Babeuf qui mourut aussi d'avoir eu le coeur trop grand. Je te salue, pour le chantant parler que tu portes à travers le monde, où nous retrouvons nos amours et les paysages de notre printemps.

(1977, p. 382, italics in text).

Here we find the themes of his Resistance poetry, the recourse to the cultural wealth of his country from the mediaeval period to the contemporary popular song, as well as some core ideas of *La Rime en 1940*, *Arma virumque cano* and *La Leçon de Ribérac ou l'Europe française* (which will be dealt with below in the commentary on the poems of *Le Crève-Coeur*).

In this same 'Discours' he points out the similarity of the situation of France to that of Spain (which was engaged in a struggle with its Fascists). This link is important. It takes us back to 'Ne rêvez plus qu'à l'Espagne', which Aragon calls an

'essai de poème en prose écrit au retour d'Espagne'. It was published in November 1936. In its opening we see a cardinal motif of Aragon's poetry of the Second World War:

Au plus loin que nous écoutions battre le coeur de la poésie française, nous entendons encore retentir le grand appel brisé de la *Chanson de Roland*, qui s'élève des gorges pyrénéennes. Nous avons perdu l'habitude d'écouter par là, par ces portes occitanes de notre pays, le cri de la douleur et de l'héroïsme; et la clameur de l'ancien olifant, qui vint briser le coeur de la belle Aude aux bras blancs, n'avait pour nous que la valeur affadie d'une légende. Aujourd'hui que d'Irun et de Saint-Sebastien se sont élevées les voix tragiques dont l'écho ne peut s'affaiblir, Roland, le paladin, le compagnon de Charlemagne, a changé de visage, il est sorti du cadre ancien de l'épopée et, dans la vie où meurent les hommes de chair et de sang, il est devenu le frère du peuple de France, le grand peuple espagnol auquel chacun d'entre nous pense (1977, pp. 241-242).

In a paper (given at the University of Glasgow in 1992) Olivier Barbarant has made a convincing case for seeing in Aragon's contacts with Spain during the Civil War an influence on the poetry of *Le Crève-Coeur* and after. This influence can be glimpsed in Aragon's article of October 1938 on '*Bolívar* par Jules Supervielle':

Et dans son art même, ce que j'appelai tantôt l'*épinial*, sans aucun accent péjoratif, me fait penser à cette passion que les jeunes poètes de la révolution espagnole ont pour leur

épinal [sic] à eux, et je songe à notre ami Rafaël Alberti, qui me montrait ces feuilles d'images commentées de couplets qu'on appelle des alleluias en Espagne, et à ces *romance* qu'il a su ressusciter, comme Federico Garcia Lorca [...], à ce folklore espagnol qui renaît quand tombent les bourreaux du peuple, à ce folklore qui fleurit dans le combat (1977, pp. 239-40).

This becomes especially significant when Aragon tells us in 'Quelque chose de changé' (1977, p. 216) that in Spain in 1936 he did write poems but that he tore them up or lost them. Olivier Barbarant suggests that these were attempts influenced by what Alberti and Lorca were doing and were experiments that enabled Aragon to be ready to write *Le Crève-Coeur*.

In 'Le Chant' (1977, pp. 331-336) Aragon reflects on the events of 1936-37 and says:

J'ai cherché ma voie entre les tombeaux et les chants de la profonde Espagne... un jour chez nous, et je l'ai toujours su, le chant français allait être d'exigence, et les nôtres sur la terre de France, à leur tour, nous sommeraient d'élever la voix. Et de chanter (1977, p. 336).

To aid him in that task, as Garaudy (1961, p. 258), Sadoul (1967, pp 41-42) and Daix (1975, p. 311) all point out, Aragon engaged in the later 1930s in a passionate study of French mediaeval literature.

In 'Pour ne pas quitter avril' in 1977, Aragon reveals the importance of another influence on the reflexions that were to shape the poetry of *Le Crève-Coeur*. This was an 'Essai' by Brecht

published in *Commune* in April 1936. Aragon says 'je découvre quel rôle il n'a jamais cessé de tenir alors et depuis pour moi' and he goes on to quote it:

'Quiconque veut de nos jours combattre le mensonge et l'ignorance doit surmonter au moins cinq difficultés.

Il doit avoir le courage d'écrire la vérité, bien qu'elle soit partout étouffée, posséder la clairvoyance pour la reconnaître, bien qu'elle soit partout camouflée, connaître l'art d'en forger une arme et savoir choisir ceux entre les mains desquels elle peut devenir efficace; il doit avoir aussi la ruse de leur transmettre la voix de la vérité. Ces difficultés sont énormes pour ceux qui écrivent sous le règne du fascisme, mais elles subsistent également pour ceux qui ont été chassés ou qui ont fui, ainsi que pour les écrivains des pays de libertés démocratiques' (1977, pp. 95-96).

Aragon then comments:

J'y penserai longtemps à ce texte, plus tard, quand notre pays sera occupé par les armées de celui que Brecht a dû fuir...comment faire? Comment dire? Au besoin, comment mentir pour dire le vrai? Mais, quand en vint le temps, Brecht n'était plus en France, je ne pouvais plus lui demander comment tourner les difficultés de mentir pour dire le vrai...comment tromper ceux qui sont la force pour donner la force à ceux qui ne savent pas que la force est en eux .

Dans les idées alors régnautes, il y avait comme une condamnation généralement admise de la *contrebande* [sic]..

Comme si la vérité était une espèce de dépôt sacré, dont l'ennemi avait la priorité...Et pourtant je savais, je sentais bien venir le temps où la contrebande serait l'art même de subsister, d'aider les autres à vivre et à penser, l'arme même de l'incroyable victoire. Il m'arrivait de penser que seul Brecht aurait pu pour cela me donner la main (1977, p. 97).

In the period after *Hourra l'Oural*, Aragon published few poems. In '1935' he recalls (1975b, pp. 210-211):

Je prenais de plus en plus conscience de la faiblesse de ce langage adopté, au moins le croyais-je, pour violer l'oreille et les songes d'un nombre croissant de ceux qui pourraient me lire, et s'engager dans la voie que j'imaginai la meilleure, la plus apte à changer le monde [...] même en considérant déjà comme une chose nouvelle le poème à la manière d'*Hourra l'Oural* mais sentant bien qu'il ne s'agissait-là encore que d'une amorce de chemin, au-delà de quoi passer aux *Cloches de Bâle*, par exemple, comme voie poétique [sic] vers ce discours à tout le monde, que ne pourraient jamais devenir les poèmes de *Persécuté Persécuteur*, ou ceux de la *Grande Gaité*.

Of the poems Aragon did publish in the period, of special interest is 'Le Songe d'une nuit d'été' (1977, pp. 61-2), which he thinks was written in 1935, although published in 1936. It is a poem ostensibly about the Soviet Union, but there is, according to the poet (cf. 1977, p. 66), a deliberate ambiguity in the expression which allows him to evoke also Elsa. There is a

lyricism in 'Le Songe d'une nuit d'été' that is lacking in his other poetry of the time, a lyricism that looks ahead to *Le Crève-Coeur* and in one of the images even to a line of 'Vingt ans après' ('Elle seule surnage ainsi qu'octobre rousse'):

Ses longs cheveux plus lourds que l'or des sables
 Sont l'automne du monde étrange de l'amour
 Ses longs cheveux où meurt la rouge mémoire d'Octobre [...]
 Son nom met à mes lèvres la caresse
 De quatre lettres le mystère
 De quatre lettres Elle a
 Quatre lettres à son nom d'amoureuse
 Quatre lettres elle
 Qui porte un nom d'amour elle
 Qui porte un nom de fleur
 Qui porte un nom d'espoir elle.
 Qui porte un nom de femme et de triomphe.

Although at this time he took the path of the novel to reach a wide public, he still believed in the efficacy of poetry, translating significantly poems of Brecht (whose country had fallen to the Fascists) and Alberti (whose country was engaged in a desperate struggle against them). He knew that France's turn would come to face the storm. And so it was that when he resumed the writing of poetry, 'Il a fallu, je le sais, des événements terribles, pour m'y ramener, avec la volonté d'une voix qui cherche à surmonter l'orage, et parle dans l'obscurité de la lumière à venir' (1975b, p. 211).

This is the voice that speaks in *Le Crève-Coeur*.

The Political and Historical Circumstances

With his conversion to Communism, Aragon moved firmly to circumstantial poetry and *Le Crève-Coeur* belongs to this domain. In 'Les Poissons noirs ou de la réalité en poésie', published in 1946, he pours scorn on the critical approach which would seek to abstract a poem from its circumstances:

Or, nous vivons à une époque où règne cette étrange conception lunaire que la poésie n'est pas de circonstance quoique en ait dit Goethe; que la poésie commence où la circonstance se perd, et que plus on comprend un poème et moins il est poétique. Que la poésie à être expliquée perd son caractère poétique. Et coetera. Ce qui est, contre le poète, le triomphe du jongleur, de celui qui confond, qui répète à son idée, *interprète*, et ne comprend pas. D'où naît ce fameux mystère poétique, qu'on entretient, et qu'on proclame mystérieux d'essence, imperçable, irréductible [...]. Tout est alors antipoétique qui est de son temps, qui marque le fait, la date, la réalité. On parle de poésie pure, les personnages n'ont plus droit à la vêtue, leurs fesses de marbre paraissent la seule garantie d'éternité, de cette éternité aux circonstances opposées. Et l'on voit communier dans une haine commune du réel les tenants de la fatrasie et les amants de la beauté académique [...].

Presque tous les postulats de la poésie non circonstancielle depuis 1918 se basent sur des interprétations hasardeuses, des calembours, des citations abusives prises à un certain

nombre de poètes comme Nerval, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Apollinaire. Depuis que ces poètes ont cessé d'être la propriété de jeunes gens fort enthousiastes, mais ignares, et sont passés aux mains implacables des commentateurs scientifiques, un grand nombre des *obscurités* de Rimbaud, de Mallarmé, de Nerval, par exemple, ont cessé tout à fait d'être obscures, parce que leurs commentateurs en ont retrouvé les *circonstances* (1979c, pp. 170-172 italics in text).

Speaking of the first months of the war, Aragon (1968, p. 137) tells Dominique Arban: '*Le Crève-Coeur* est comme un journal de ces mois-là'. In *La fin du 'Monde réel'* (1967, p. 301) he asserts: 'Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse comprendre quoi que ce soit de moi, si l'on omet de dater mes pensées ou mes écrits'.

Thus an introduction to the political and historical circumstances of *Le Crève-Coeur* is essential and should not be seen as taking us away from the 'poetry', quite the contrary.

If the turning-point in Aragon's political development was the colonial war in Morocco of 1925-26, the next determining factor was the attempt by fascist organizations to storm the French Parliament building on 6 February 1934. It was crucial because of its effect in changing the policy of the PCF from one of *classe contre classe*, according to which the Socialists were seen as 'social-fascistes', to one of alliance with other democratic parties in a Popular Front. This was a strategy inspired by the collaboration of Communists and Socialists in demonstrations after 6 February against the threat of fascism.

It was Maurice Thorez who, on 10 October 1934, after the signing of a pact of unity of action between the PCF and the Socialists on 27 July, proposed extending the link to the Parti Radical in the creation of a 'Front Populaire pour le pain, la liberté et la paix'. This was an idea which became reality the following summer and was consecrated in the singing at a mass rally on 14 July 1935 of *La Marseillaise* and *L'Internationale* (we have seen the effect on Aragon of this reconciliation with *la Patrie*).

At the elections of April-May 1936 the parties of the Popular Front were victorious. That summer, strikes forced significant pay rises from employers and legislation gave workers the forty-hour week and paid annual holidays.

But the initial success of the Popular Front bore within it the seeds of a terrible defeat to come:
 Les jours ensoleillés de l'été 1936 s'inscrivaient dans la mémoire ouvrière comme un moment privilégié de l'histoire, comme la grande fête du peuple. Ils ouvraient les portes d'un avenir qui paraissait exclure tout retour en arrière. Qui pouvait penser alors que cette grande avancée sociale allait être le lever de rideau sur le déclenchement trois années plus tard de la Seconde Guerre mondiale? (Crémieux et Estager 1983, p. 12).

The death knell of the Popular Front sounded when Edouard Daladier, head of the Parti Radical, took over as Prime Minister in April 1938. He followed an ever more anti-Communist line and carried out policies that were concessions to the *grande bourgeoisie* for whom the summer of 1936 had been a nightmare. At

home, there were savage cuts in public spending but tax rewards for capital; abroad the signing of the Munich Agreement of September 1938. This latter act was supposed to have averted war by forcing Czechoslovakia to surrender the partly German-speaking territories of the Sudetenland demanded by Hitler. It was interpreted by the Communists (and their bitter enemies) as a measure aimed at encouraging the Führer to turn eastwards where he would inevitably come into conflict with the Soviet Union.

The isolation of the PCF in the French Parliament, and thus the dissolution of the Popular Front, can be seen in the figures for the vote of confidence given to Daladier on his return from Munich: for the Premier 537; against, 75 - of whom 73 were Communists. Here is the prelude to the excommunication that was pronounced on the PCF when the war broke out.

In March 1939, Hitler showed his contempt for Chamberlain and Daladier by seizing the rest of Czechoslovakia and then threatening the territory of Poland. The British Prime Minister, under pressure from public opinion, issued a unilateral guarantee of Polish integrity.

In April, negotiations began in Moscow for a tripartite alliance between the USSR and France and Britain. It is vital to examine these negotiations in some detail as they are a key element in Aragon's interpretation of the Germano-Soviet non-aggression pact of 23 August 1939 which was ^{to} have an immense influence on the circumstances of *Le Crève-Coeur*.

Aragon and the PCF accused the Western powers (rightly, as British diplomatic documents show) of deliberately employing

delaying tactics in the tripartite Moscow talks. Chamberlain's duplicity was revealed with the leaking of the secret discussions that took place in London in July between, on the British side, Sir Horace Wilson (a close confidant of the British Prime Minister) and R.S. Hudson of the Department of Overseas Trade, and, on the German side, Dr. Wohltat, an economic adviser to the Reich's four-year plan. According to the leak, London offered Berlin substantial credits and the freedom to annex the Ukraine. In fact, the British proposed a new division of the world (including Russia and China) in return for a non-aggression pact with Germany which would enable the United Kingdom to rid itself of its commitments to Poland (these details emerged fully with the publication after the war (USSR, 1948) of the papers of Dirksen, the German ambassador in London at the time the talks took place).

In France, on 1 July, Foreign Minister Bonnet had had a conversation with von Welczeck, the German ambassador. Its content shows the negative attitude of someone at the heart of the French negotiations for an agreement with Russia. According to von Welczeck (Lambert 1956, no. 603), Bonnet 'indulged in no great illusions as to the value and realization of a Triple Alliance'. In a minute by Bonnet himself of this conversation (France, 1939, no. 149), published soon after the outbreak of the war, we learn that the French Foreign Minister, in order to impress von Welczeck with what he called the movement of national unanimity behind the French Government, told him that 'les élections seraient suspendues, les réunions publiques arrêtées

[...] les communistes mis à la raison'. Here is an indication that the repression of the Communists that began with the signing of the Germano-Soviet non-aggression pact in late August 1939 had been planned in advance.

In the tripartite talks going on in Moscow, the Soviets eventually insisted on military conversations taking place before the political discussions, endlessly drawn out by the British and French, were completed.

No more pertinent contrast to Chamberlain's flights to see Hitler the previous year could have been provided than the departure of the French and British military missions by boat from England to Leningrad, whence they arrived in Moscow on 11 August. The fact that the British sent a minor figure as the head of their delegation was taken by Berlin's ambassador in London as a confirmation of the sceptical attitude of Chamberlain's Government to the negotiations.

This did not escape the Russians either nor the fact that the leader of the British mission brought with him no written credentials of any kind. His secret instructions explain this lack of status: 'The British Government is unwilling to enter into any detailed commitments which are likely to tie our hands in all circumstances. Endeavours are to be made to confine the Military Agreement to the broadest possible terms. Something on the lines of an agreed statement of policy may meet the case' (Woodward, 1953, no. 638, appendix v, p. 763, para. 15).

Very soon the Soviets raised the key question, namely how they were to defend Poland if they could not enter her territory.

Without permission to do this, they would have to wait until Germany had overrun Poland and then fight Germany on the defensive on Soviet soil. In the meantime, Russian towns including Moscow would be vulnerable to the *Luftwaffe* operating from Poland. The British instructions, should the question of access to Polish territory be raised, were to tell the Russians to approach the Poles themselves. As Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, was to say in a speech on 31 August, the Russians were being asked to beg the Poles to be allowed to come to their aid.

On 17 August the talks were adjourned pending Poland's reply to British and French approaches on this matter. The Poles refused their consent in spite of the enormous pressure the two Western powers could have exerted on her. On 22 August the negotiations broke down as Polish assurances could not be given to the Russians.

The Germans were of course anxious to prevent or weaken any tripartite alliance against themselves. In May they considered approaching the Soviets on political questions via commercial talks but the Wilhelmstrasse feared the tactic would be so obvious as to call forth mirth.

During the tripartite negotiations in Moscow, the Germans began pressing the Russians very hard to allow von Ribbentrop, Hitler's Foreign Minister, to come and negotiate a non-aggression pact. Molotov put the Germans off, obviously waiting to see if the talks with Britain and France would bear fruit. On 20 August Hitler made a direct request to Stalin to receive von Ribbentrop no later than the 23rd of the month. On 21 August, at 5 p.m.,

Stalin agreed. On the 22nd, a communiqué was issued announcing the German Foreign Minister's arrival for the 23rd.

The timetable shows that the Russians had despaired of reaching a meaningful agreement with the Western Powers and, fearful of being abandoned to Hitler's tender mercies in the same way as Austria, Czechoslovakia and Spain, had decided to accept the German offer. The timing of the Soviet decision is confirmed by the memorandum (Lambert, 1954, no. 186, para. 6) drawn up on 22 August by von Weizsäcker, Secretary of State at the Foreign Office in Berlin. He had told the Japanese ambassador the previous midnight that:

Our economic, and also certain political, discussions had been going on for some time. But the negotiations for a non-aggression pact were of very recent origin. It was only in the last two or three days that the possibility of this had been raised [Emphasis added].

On the morning of 23 August, Havas, the BBC and AP published three reports from Moscow of the previous day to the effect that 'competent Soviet Russian quarters' gave an assurance that von Ribbentrop's visit for the conclusion of a non-aggression pact was 'in no way incompatible with the continuation of negotiations between British, French and Russian military missions for the purpose of organizing resistance against aggression' (Lambert, 1954, no. 198). According to Soviet sources, 'these two acts in no wise cancel each other out [...]. The Anglo-Franco-Soviet pact, supplemented by military agreements, was meant as a brake on Germany should she persist in her aggressive designs. It is

repeatedly stated that there is no question of concluding a pact to support an aggressor' (ibid.).

Aragon found the Havas despatch on his desk when he arrived that morning at *Ce Soir*, the Communist afternoon daily of which he had been co-editor with Jean-Richard Bloch since 1937. Aragon always maintained that he did not consult with anyone before writing the article he now produced in response to the news of the pact. It is an article condemned then and since as justifying an alliance between the Nazis and the Soviets. The fact that in English-speaking countries the Germano-Soviet non-aggression pact is generally known as the Nazi-Soviet pact, whereas the piece of paper brought back by Chamberlain from Munich is called the Anglo-German declaration and the accord signed on 6 December 1938 in Paris between von Ribbentrop and Bonnet is referred to as Franco-German, gives an indication of the partisan attitude hostile commentators often display towards Aragon's article. If we look at it in detail, we see that his editorial does anything but acclaim an 'alliance'.

Aragon's headline is 'Vive la paix!', and he greets the proposed talks between Germans and Russians as a success for the peace policy of the Soviet Union. The planned non-aggression pact is a crushing blow to the anti-Soviet, anti-Communist crusade of Berlin, Rome and Tokyo, a crusade hypocritically supported in Paris, London and elsewhere by Hitler's allies, the Munichites, who, to protect themselves, had been pointing the Führer in the direction of the Ukraine (here there is a reference to the leaked Hudson-Wohltat talks of July).

The pact is not a success for fascism. It is an admission that Hitler does not want to face the Soviet Union in war despite the encouragement of his Munichite friends.

There is a lesson for Britain and France in the speed with which von Ribbentrop is going to Moscow. The former have been dawdling for five months, inventing reasons for not signing with the USSR. They too should send Ministers and not mere underlings. Aragon urges London and Paris to sign quickly, it is still possible:

Le pacte tripartite (qui n'est pas un simple pacte de non-agression mais bel et bien une alliance, et demeure la pièce maîtresse du Front de la Paix) viendra compléter merveilleusement un pacte de non-agression germano-soviétique. Car le pacte tripartite n'a jamais été envisagé par les peuples de France, d'Angleterre et d'URSS, comme une arme de guerre, mais comme une arme de paix, comme une arme contre l'agression, contre le reniement de leur signature par les spécialistes de l'agression [a reference to Hitler's reneging on the Munich agreement].

He dismisses any comparison between the proposed Germano-Soviet non-aggression pact, which does not suppose any abandonment on the part of the USSR, and the 'friendship' pacts signed with Hitler by the Governments of France and Britain, which were based on the capitulation of Munich, the betrayal and abandonment of Czechoslovakia.

In short, Aragon's article exudes anti-fascism, and in no way attempts to justify an alliance between the Soviets and Nazi Germany.

Aragon did not see the Pact as affecting *Ce Soir's* anti-fascist, anti-aggressor stance. For the edition of 25 August he wrote:

Il existe entre la France et la Pologne un traité d'assistance mutuelle. C'est-à-dire que si la Pologne est victime d'une agression la France doit venir à son aide. Et tout bon Français qui ne veut pas voir se répéter la honte de Munich, souhaitera comme nous que la France tienne ses engagements internationaux.

For the edition of the following day, he made clear:

Depuis que ce journal existe, nous avons fait ici une politique antihitlérienne. Nous entendons, considérant Hitler comme l'ennemi no. 1 de la France, continuer cette politique.

J'ai dit hier ma ferme conviction de la compatibilité du pacte germano-soviétique et du jeu normal du traité d'assistance mutuelle franco-soviétique, qui en cas d'agression allemande contre la Pologne, la France se portant au secours de celle-ci, mettrait l'URSS à nos côtés (quoted 1989a, tome 3, p. 1049).

Again the anti-Hitlerism is crystal-clear. What Aragon did not know was that the tripartite negotiations had broken down irretrievably. The 1935 Franco-Soviet pact could come into play only at France's behest.

The French public did not see this article of Aragon's because, on the evening of 25 August, the Government decreed the banning of *Ce Soir* and *L'Humanité*, the latter being seized at dawn on the 26th. The 'justification' for this seizure was 'national defence'. It is difficult to understand how the latter would have been compromised by the banned edition of *L'Humanité*. Its headline was 'Union de la nation française contre l'agresseur hitlérien', and the paper carried Thorez's statement in the name of the Communist deputies which said that, if Hitler started a war, 'qu'il sache qu'il trouvera devant lui le peuple de France uni, les communistes au premier rang, pour défendre la sécurité du pays, la liberté et l'indépendance des peuples.' Was the Government's action in banning the Communist papers not rather the first step in the plan of repression revealed by Bonnet to von Welczeck on 1 July?

Molotov in his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 31 August commented on the Germano-Soviet Pact, declaring that 'there is no question of a mutual assistance pact as in the case of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet conversations, but only of a non-aggression pact' and went on to explain:

The Soviet Union concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany because, among other things, the negotiations with France and England had led to insuperable differences of opinion and had ended in failure owing to the fault of Anglo-French ruling circles (Woodward, 1954, Appendix iii, p. 620).

Despite the signs of the coming witch-hunt, the Communist Deputies approved by a standing ovation Daladier's request for supplementary military funds on 2 September, the day before his Government declared war on Germany, which on 1 September had attacked Poland.

The turning-point in the attitude of the PCF came when it was dissolved by Government decree on 26 September 1939. The reason given for this dissolution was the claim that the Soviets had collaborated with the Germans to partition Poland.

The non-aggression treaty between Germany and the USSR had a secret protocol which set out the two countries' respective spheres of interest in Eastern Europe. Clause 2 says:

In the event of a territorial and political transformation of the territories belonging to the Polish State, the spheres of interest of both Germany and the USSR shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula, and San (Lambert, 1954, No. 229).

At the end of August 1939, it was all too obvious that Hitler intended to crush Poland. The Soviets could claim that they had done their best to prevent this, but that their offers of help had been spurned. The proposed line of demarcation between German and Soviet spheres was almost exactly the one put forward by Lord Curzon after World War One as the western border of the Soviet Union. It encompassed the territories of the Western Ukraine and of Belorussia that had been torn from the Soviets in 1920 by Poland with the help of the French General Weygand.

By 17 September, the Nazi forces had all but wiped out the Polish army: Warsaw was about to fall. Poland's allies had done nothing to divert the German attack. France was contracted to intervene militarily at the latest on the sixteenth day after the commencement of hostilities. In fulfilment of these commitments, British and French planes flew over Germany and dropped leaflets. It was the opinion of Sir Kingsley Wood, the British Air Minister, that bombing would be an illegal attack on private property. General Gamelin, the French Commander-in-Chief, planned to go on the offensive in 1941 when, he reckoned, the allied forces of Britain and France would have parity with those of Germany.

On 17 September, the Soviets told the Germans that they would begin advancing to the line agreed in the secret protocol. This meant that the German forces had to fall back, a fact used in Soviet propaganda of the time to sustain the story that the Red Army was liberating populations that would otherwise have fallen into the hands of the Nazis. That this was merely a cover-story is shown by the secret German documents of the time (Lambert, 1954), but the French Communists could not conceive that their ideals were being betrayed by Stalin and were all too ready to believe the Soviet account. They could find a certain support in the broadcast of Winston Churchill on 1 October in which, describing the line on which the Russians now stood, he said 'an Eastern Front has been created which Nazi Germany does not dare assail' (in Gilbert 1983, pp. 49-50).

The French Government used the Soviet action as an excuse to ban the PCF. The typical reaction of the Communist militant on reading the news of this in the press was that of Fernand Grenier, a member of the Chamber of Deputies: 'J'enrage en lisant les commentaires de tous ces valets de plume, ces munichois d'hier' (1969, p. 56).

The charge of hypocrisy made here was well founded. British and French diplomatic documents show that Poland's fate was a matter of indifference to important elements of these Governments. For example, on 26 September, the very day on which the PCF was dissolved, Birger Dahlerus, a Swedish businessman who had been active for some time in secret contacts between Britain and Germany, reported to Hitler that Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, the Counsellor to the British Legation in Norway (and previously of the Berlin Embassy until the outbreak of war), had told him that the British Government could very well conduct negotiations with Germany. Poland was considered lost (Lambert, 1954, no. 138).

The inactivity of the French army in the prosecution of the struggle against Hitler at this time is brought out by Roland Dorgelès who baptised it a 'drôle de guerre' in an article of October 1939 devoted to a visit he had made to Lorraine:

'Drôle', elle l'était effectivement. Non dans le sens d'amusant [...] mais dans celui de bizarre, de surprenant, surtout aux yeux de ceux qui avaient fait la précédente [...]. Dès mon retour sur le front, je m'étais étonné du calme qui y régnait. Les artilleurs du Rhin regardaient,

bras croisés, les convois de munitions allemands circuler sur l'autre rive, et nos aviateurs survolaient les usines de la Sarre aux fourneaux flamboyants sans lâcher de bombes; visiblement, le souci essentiel du haut commandement était de ne pas provoquer l'ennemi. Obéissait-il à des ordres occultes? (Quoted in Grenier 1969, p. 16).

Not only was there inactivity at the front, there was a co-operation with the Nazis that the French soldiers must have found rather difficult to comprehend. Thus Georges Sadoul records in his diary on 20 September 1939:

Le barrage de Kembs, sur notre rive du Rhin, n'a pas cessé de fonctionner, mais en vertu des conventions anciennes il continue de distribuer son électricité entre la France, la Suisse et l'Allemagne. Ainsi, la même centrale éclaire-t-elle la ligne Siegfried et la ligne Maginot, de l'un et de l'autre côté d'un fleuve où les soldats des deux armées, face à face, pêchent à la ligne. Quelle drôle de guerre (1977, p. 38).

The French historian, Germaine Willard, wonders, too (1969, pp. 47-48):

Pourquoi laisser partir les trains de minéral de fer français en Allemagne? Pourquoi évacuer, sans combat, sans même avoir vu l'ennemi, les territoires occupés début septembre? Pourquoi assister, impassibles, à la construction de la ligne Siegfried qui se poursuit à un rythme accéléré, sans aucun camouflage? Pourquoi réprimander ces soldats de

la ligne Maginot 'coupables de s'être opposés par la force à une incursion de chars ennemis' ?

Where the French Government was virulent in its anti-Communism, it was strangely complacent in its treatment of those who were pro-Hitler. Germaine Willard in her article 'Les Contradictions de la drôle de guerre' (1972, p.25) asks some questions on this point and gives some answers:

A-t-on pris des mesures à l'égard des douze cents officiers, et non les moindres, qui étaient liés à la branche militaire de la Cagoule? Non. A-t-on inquiété les parlementaires qui avaient constitué un 'Comité de liaison' pour la conclusion immédiate d'une paix munichoise avec l'Allemagne? Non. A-t-on frappé les hommes du Comité France-Allemagne qui continuaient à fréquenter les salons de la bonne société, la rédaction des journaux et la haute administration? Pas davantage [...]. Bien mieux, les prohitlériens sont placés à des postes officiels. Il n'est pas sans intérêt, par exemple, de savoir que Drieu la Rochelle, qui sera condamné à mort pour trahison en 1944, est mobilisé à la Censure; que Deloncle, un des chefs de la Cagoule, inculpé en août 1939 de 'complot ayant pour but de changer la forme du gouvernement et d'exciter à la guerre civile', est affecté au ministère de l'armement, le 5 septembre 1939; que d'après le rapport Serre [sur les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945], la haute administration ait été truffée de 'complices préalables de la capitulation'.

In view of all this, it is not surprising that the PCF eventually accepted the thesis of the Comintern, transmitted at the end of September, that this was an inter-imperialist war. However, it is important to understand that this did not mean that the PCF (and indeed the Communist parties of the other belligerent countries) renounced their anti-fascism or that it meant practising defeatism. This is an essential point for understanding *Le Crève-Coeur* and will be treated in detail later.

After its enforced dissolution, the PCF was reconstituted on 28 September as the *Groupe ouvrier et paysan*. Given the attacks on the Communists that so contrasted with the passivity shown towards Hitler and his friends in France, the new group sent a letter, dated 1 October, to Herriot, president of the Chamber of Deputies. It asked for a debate on the forthcoming peace initiatives announced in the Germano-Soviet communiqué of 28 September. The intention here was to question the Government on its true aims in this war which it was certainly not waging against its declared enemy. The Communists saw a new turn of events in the proposed participation of the Soviet Union in any negotiations:

Nous voulons de toutes nos forces **une paix juste et durable** et nous pensons qu'on peut l'obtenir rapidement, car en face des fauteurs de guerre et de l'Allemagne hitlérienne en proie à des contradictions internes, il y a la puissance de l'Union Soviétique qui peut permettre la réalisation d'une **politique de sécurité collective susceptible d'assurer la**

paix et de sauvegarder l'indépendance de la France (Quoted in Crémieux et Estager 1983, p. 146, emphasis added).

The anti-Hitlerism here is evident, as is also the hope that perhaps now, at last, the collective security proposed by the U.S.S.R. before the Nazi attack on Poland but rejected by the Western Powers, would come to pass. The Comintern's Belgian journal *Le Monde* made this clear on 30 September in its comment on the Germano-Soviet communiqué issued two days previously: 'L'URSS contraint Hitler à renoncer à son projet de domination du monde et elle propose de mettre fin à la guerre' (Crémieux et Estager 1983, p. 147).

The Communists were well aware of the dangers to 'l'indépendance de la France' in the conduct of the Government. In the Chamber of Deputies on 25 August 1939, Gabriel Péri, the foreign affairs spokesman of the PCF had warned that, without a consistent policy of anti-fascist defence, '[la guerre pourrait] facilement prendre le caractère d'une aventure équivoque qui [risque] d'aboutir à la défaite' (quoted Willard 1969, p. 48). And when the defeat did come, *L'Humanité* of 1 July 1940 was to demand an account from 'ceux qui, après l'encerclement de la Pologne, ont refusé de faire la paix sans se préparer à faire la guerre.'

The parliamentary debate asked for did not take place. Instead, with the excuse of the letter, the Government proceeded, in circumstances of illegality, to arrest 35 of the Communist Deputies on 6 October and to incarcerate them in La Santé prison.

Foreseeing such a possibility, the Party's leadership had taken the precaution of sending some of its members underground, including its General Secretary, Maurice Thorez. He was spirited away from his regiment on 2 October. Aragon in *Les Communistes* suggests (1966a, p. 300) that Thorez faced even greater danger than imprisonment: he might have been assassinated as had the Socialist leader, Jean Jaurès, in August 1914 for his opposition to the First World War.

The press reported the arrests in terms that must have affected Aragon deeply. Grenier noted on 7 October 1939:

De nombreux 'blancs' dans les articles de journaux consacrés aux poursuites [...]. La censure a cependant laissé passer la déclaration d'Albert Petit, député-maire de Bagneux (Seine), protestant, en son nom et en celui de nos camarades, contre le qualificatif de traîtres attribué à des élus dont beaucoup sont d'anciens combattants de la guerre 1914-1918 (1969, p. 62).

Thorez was accused of having deserted to Germany. In fact he had crossed into Belgium, where he remained until the end of November 1939, when he went by plane via Copenhagen to the Soviet Union. *L'Humanité*, which had been forced underground, responded on 26 October to the hostile campaign in the following way:

Sur les instances de son Parti Communiste dont il est le Secrétaire Général, Maurice Thorez, menacé d'arrestation comme les autres députés Communistes, a quitté le régiment auquel il était affecté. Déserteur! a crié la presse

bourgeoise. Déserteur! a crié la presse socialiste et réformiste d'union sacrée.

Non, Maurice Thorez n'est pas déserteur. Il a, au contraire, regagné le poste de combat que lui a fixé son parti pour la défense du peuple. Il a ainsi agi en véritable militant révolutionnaire.

Thorez himself made his Party's position clear in an interview he gave to Sam Russell of the British *Daily Worker*. In its French version the interview appeared in Brussels, in *Le Monde*, of 28 October 1939 (quoted in Crémieux et Estager 1983, pp. 160-161).. Thorez says: 'Nous, communistes, nous sommes anti-hitlériens, anti-fascistes.' Asked by Russell if other comrades will not be tempted to leave the army to pursue the struggle underground, he replied:

Non, mon cher camarade, sois sans crainte, les communistes savent où et comment ils doivent lutter. Il fallait assurer envers et contre tout la direction du parti, c'est à cette préoccupation que j'ai obéi et tous les travailleurs qui pensent aux luttes qui se préparent m'approuvent. Les membres du parti luttent et lutteront là où sont les masses populaires [...]. Cela signifie que les communistes ont leur tâche toute tracée parmi les soldats à l'armée.

This is the message Aragon had received personally from Thorez at the beginning of the war and, as we shall see, it determined his conduct as a soldier and as a poet.

On the German front the French authorities constantly reported: 'Rien à signaler'; but on the Home front a real battle

was being conducted against the PCF and the gains made by workers in the summer of 1936 under the first government of the Popular Front. Thus:

A la mi-octobre, 317 municipalités communistes sont dissoutes et remplacées par des délégations spéciales, 2500 conseillers municipaux et 87 conseillers généraux sont déchus de leurs mandats. Des milliers de militants sont emprisonnés. Trente-neuf députés sont écroués à la Santé! (Crémieux et Estager 1983, p. 165)

The position of the labour conscripts ('les ouvriers requis') in the factories is brought out in an excerpt from an article of 2 December 1939 by the Communist Deputy Arthur Ramette:

L'usine est devenue un bain où l'ouvrier 'requis' n'a d'autre droit que celui de se taire et d'obéir. M. Pomaret, ministre du Travail, a expliqué que le requis ne choisit pas son patron, ne peut pas le quitter et que seule l'administration peut le déplacer d'office quand elle le juge utile. Il doit exécuter obligatoirement toutes les heures supplémentaires qui lui sont ordonnées. Son employeur peut, en cas de faute, le punir en lui infligeant une retenue sur son salaire (ibid.).

Crémieux and Estager comment (1983, p. 165):

Le fait de protester contre une injustice par un arrêt de travail plus ou moins prolongé, est un 'acte de sabotage' passible de tribunaux militaires. A l'abri de cette caporalisation des usines, le patronat reconquiert tout le terrain perdu en 1936.

Thus, at the end of September 1939, the 40-hour week was abolished; 45 hours were to be paid at the rate for 40. In plants deemed to be working for national defence, the working week was increased to 60 or even 72 hours. A 15% tax was levied on net wages (ibid., p. 140). Again the authors comment:

Sur le plan politique on assiste à la mise en place d'un régime autoritaire préfigurant celui de Vichy. Doté de pleins pouvoirs, le gouvernement cesse de réunir la Chambre des députés, les élections partielles sont interdites. La liberté d'expression est abolie. Le pouvoir a toute licence de révoquer les fonctionnaires, d'assigner à résidence, d'ouvrir des camps de concentration. La liberté individuelle disparaît dans ce système. Des dizaines de milliers d'antifascistes étrangers, notamment des Espagnols et des Allemands, sont enfermés dans des camps de concentration soumis à un régime inhumain (ibid, p. 166).

The anti-Communist fever of the period was fuelled by the presentation in the news media of the Finno-Soviet conflict which broke out on 30 November and ended on 12 March 1940 when Finland accepted Moscow's peace proposals. A furious campaign was set in motion to aid the 'democratic little Finland' of Marshal Mannerheim, the same Finland that was to fight alongside Hitler from June 1941. Massive amounts of weapons were sent by the French Government, and by Hitler's closest ally, Mussolini, whose planes were allowed to fly over French territory to reach Finland. An impression is given by Henri de Kérillis, the right-

wing nationalist Deputy, in the book he published in New York in 1942, *Français, voici la vérité*:

Une tempête indescriptible souleva les consciences bourgeoises. L'esprit de croisade souffla en furie. Il n'y eut qu'un cri: guerre à la Russie! D'un coup les plus pacifistes [i.e. towards Hitler] devinrent les plus bellicistes. Ceux qui n'avaient pas voulu 'mourir pour Dantzig' voulurent 'mourir pour Helsinki' [...]. C'est à ce moment que le délire anti-communiste atteignit son paroxysme et prit des formes épileptiques (quoted in Crémieux et Estager 1983, p. 172).

This was the mood when, on 16 January 1940, Etienne Fajon took his place in the Chamber of Deputies to argue against the proposal to exclude the Communist representatives of whom he was one. In 1969 he recalled the scene:

Je note en passant le fait - vérifiable au *Journal Officiel* des 12 et 17 janvier 1940 - que nos accusateurs les plus véhéments dans le débat de déchéance étaient des fascistes et des Munichois notoires, de futurs dignitaires du régime de Pétain et chantres de Hitler. Je relève parmi ces orateurs les noms de Chiappe et de Tixier-Vignancour, de Flandin et de Philippe Henriot, ceux aussi de deux députés socialistes qui allaient devenir des traîtres, Barthélémy et Chasseigne, divisés sur le point de savoir quel genre de supplice il fallait choisir pour les communistes, entre la guillotine et la balle dans la nuque (1970, pp. 66-7).

It is in the light of such attacks by such opponents that the PCF accepted the Comintern's thesis that this was an inter-imperialist war with which the Communists should have nothing to do.

This did not diminish the patriotism nor the anti-fascism of the Communist Party despite all sorts of attempts to portray it then (and since) as the ally of Hitler. Grenier recorded the smear tactics of press of the time. He noted on 17 October 1939 that

l'Oeuvre continue ses élucubrations: 'Le Reich attendrait de ses alliés russes une action en direction de l'Iran et des Indes' (1969, p. 70).

And again on 28 October:

Et *Paris-Soir* de continuer à inventer chaque jour des 'nouvelles sensationnelles', par exemple celle-ci dans son numéro du 26 octobre: 'Hitler remplacera-t-il le national-socialisme par le national-communisme en adhérant à la IIIe Internationale?' (Ibid., p. 75).

If we consult the French Communist Party's publications of the period we see that its position never wavered. *L'Humanité* on 1 December 1939 wrote:

La nouvelle invention de nos adversaires, c'est de dire que la propagande communiste sert les intérêts hitlériens contre la France [...]. Nous répéterons sans nous lasser [...] Les communistes sont les seuls à avoir de tous temps combattu l'hitlérisme et ses agents en France [...] les communistes sont les seuls en France à souhaiter la révolution

prolétarienne en Allemagne [...]. Le Parti Communiste allemand est le seul parti qui lutte en Allemagne pour cette révolution'.

At the beginning of June 1940, because of the incompetence (or treachery) of her military and political rulers, France faced collapse with the rapid advance of Hitler's armies since his attack on 10 May. On 6 June, the PCF sent Jacques Solomon to make known to Anatole de Monzie (until the day before, a Minister in Reynaud's Government) the Party's plan to defend Paris which it considered betrayal to abandon to the invading fascists. According to this plan, the war had to be transformed into a national one for liberty and independence; the imprisoned Communists and workers must be freed; the agents of the enemy must be arrested and subjected to exemplary punishment; the population should be armed and Paris turned into an impregnable citadel. The plan was not accepted, the military command and the Government abandoned the capital on 11 June. That night Paris was declared an open city and, on the 14th, it was surrendered to the Germans without a fight. As Alistair Horne points out (1969, p. 396), there is a contrast with Paris in 1870-71 where resistance inspired the provinces to continue the war with Prussia, and with other cities in the face of Hitler's attack: Warsaw, London, Leningrad, Stalingrad.

The position of the PCF at this period is best represented by the declaration of 13 June 1940, drawn up by Maurice Thorez. It was rediscovered by Stéphane Courtois in its English translation in *The Communist International*, No. 7, published in July 1940.

Retranslated into French it is quoted by Crémieux and Estager (1983, pp. 221-225):

Aux côtés du peuple, dans l'armée, plus d'un million de communistes et de sympathisants communistes versent leur sang [...] La bourgeoisie a conduit notre pays au bord de la destruction. Aujourd'hui, au moment où l'impérialisme allemand est en train de réaliser son projet de réduire la France à l'esclavage, la seule chose dont la bourgeoisie française se préoccupe, c'est la sauvegarde de ses privilèges, de son capital et de sa domination de classe [...]. Elle est prête à trouver des accommodements avec l'envahisseur, à se servir des baïonnettes allemandes pour se protéger du règlement de comptes que le peuple, indigné, lui réserve [...]. Nous, communistes [...], avons toujours lutté contre la rapacité de la politique impérialiste française envers les autres peuples et particulièrement envers le peuple allemand. Et c'est avec le droit, les raisons et l'énergie les plus fortes que nous lutterons contre l'asservissement de notre peuple par des impérialistes étrangers. La classe ouvrière et le peuple de France n'accepteront jamais l'asservissement par l'étranger [...]. Notre peuple ne périra pas. Sa volonté et son amour de liberté ne seront pas brisés par les forces obscures des traîtres, des exploités, des envahisseurs et des conquérants.

The dominant message which emerges from this denunciation of both internal and external enemies of the nation (the French

bourgeoisie and German imperialism), is a call to arms, a will to resist the invader.

On 7 July 1940, three days before the National Assembly by 569 votes to 80 (in the absence, of course, of the Communist Deputies), and 17 abstentions, gave full executive and legislative powers to Pétain at Vichy, *L'Humanité*, with the headline - 'A bas le Gouvernement des pourris' - was to publish a statement by the leaders of the PCF, Maurice Thorez and Jacques Duclos, saying:

A l'heure, où n'hésitant pas à violer la légalité, des ministres indignes veulent faire de Vichy le cimetière de nos droits et de nos libertés: **Français: unissez-vous, réalisez le front de la liberté, du travail, et de l'indépendance de la France** [emphasis in text].

The PCF of the period when Aragon wrote *Le Crève-Coeur* has often been presented as the active or *de facto* ally of the Nazis - this as a consequence of the Germano-Soviet non-aggression pact. It is accused of entering the Resistance, as a party, only with Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, and thus of not giving primacy to the national interests of France but rather to those of Moscow. Yet Aragon, in the course of the six weeks between the German attack and the armistice of June 1940, was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* twice and the *Médaille Militaire*. He immediately began a literary resistance. At first this took the form of 'contraband' references in poems and articles published legally. When this was no longer possible, he went underground to carry on his fight. Was this conduct

independent of or even at odds with the policy of his party at the time?

If the PCF was the ally of Hitler, it must have been extremely masochistic. The Germans never ceased to arrest its militants, and those who had been imprisoned under Daladier and Reynaud, the Prime Ministers of the period covering the outbreak of the war and the fall of France, were either handed over to Vichy or were kept in the Occupied Zone as hostages by the Nazis. In September 1940, *L'Humanité* had the following to say:

Notre pensée va aux milliers de camarades connus et inconnus qui, dans les prisons des deux zones, dans les camps de concentration qui déshonorent la France, payent de leur liberté leur attachement à la cause du peuple [...]. Enfin, on notera que voici quelques mois à peine, les communistes étaient traités par toute une racaille aux ordres de Daladier et de Reynaud 'd'agents hitlériens'. Or aujourd'hui, les communistes sont seuls dans la zone occupée, comme dans l'autre, à être emprisonnés, cependant que dans les deux zones la presse communiste est interdite.

In the same month, *L'Humanité* told of the terrible conditions in which these militants were being held by describing the fate of two of the Communist Deputies:

Parmi ces militants, placés au secret à la Santé, avec 10 minutes de visite par semaine, se trouvent deux grands mutilés de guerre: Jean Duclos député mutilé à 100% 22 fois opéré de la face à qui on refuse tous soins pour ses yeux ou plutôt pour l'oeil qui lui reste et qui dans la solitude du

cachot se voit devenir aveugle, F. Brun mutilé de guerre amputé des jambes qui se traîne sur ses moignons dans sa cellule [Emphasis in text].

Hardly the way for 'allies' to be treated.

In his authoritative work on the Resistance, Henri Noguères (1967, vol. I, pp. 489-493) quotes two letters from Vercors to De Gaulle refuting the latter's contention that the Communist Party 'jusqu'en 1941, ne s'engagea pas dans la lutte'. Vercors recalls how the first letter he received, in August 1940, calling on him to resist, was from the Communist, Jean-Richard Bloch (who had been Aragon's co-director on *Ce Soir*), and how, at the first meeting at which he was present, in October that year, a meeting of which Communists were leading organizers, 'il nous fut lu des lettres d'Eluard et d'Aragon, tous deux en Zone libre'.

Noguères's own opinion on the question is worth noting: Dire que 'les communistes' ont attendu le 22 Juin 1941 pour s'engager dans la lutte contre l'occupant, dire qu'il n'y a pas eu, jusqu'à cette date, une résistance animée par le Parti communiste, affirmer que les seuls communistes qui ont agi avant l'entrée en guerre de la Russie l'ont fait par réaction individuelle, à l'insu de leurs dirigeants ou même contre les consignes données par ces derniers, c'est, nous pensons l'avoir montré, pécher par ignorance (1967, vol. I, p. 438).

Perhaps in the light of this we can accept Aragon's own statement in an article in *Ce Soir* of 1944 (quoted 1953, II, pp. 295-299):

Récemment au micro de Radio Grenoble, j'ai dit qu je devais à Maurice Thorez d'être l'homme que je suis, et que je tenais publiquement à lui rendre hommage de cette médaille militaire gagnée en 1940 aux heures les plus sombres de notre pays.

Recalling how he had seen Thorez at the outbreak of the war, Aragon continued: 'Tu vas être mobilisé, me dit-il, fais ton devoir...'. Cette phrase, elle m'a accompagné dans l'armée, à la guerre. J'ai fait de mon mieux pour répondre à la confiance de Thorez. Il ne s'est plus trouvé par la suite qu'un Drieu la Rochelle pour oser douter de mon patriotisme [...]. Eh bien! me comprendra-t-on si je dis que c'est ce *Fais ton devoir* qui m'a poussé à écrire les poèmes du *Creve-Coeur*? Que c'est ce *Fais ton devoir* que j'ai traduit de mon mieux, suscitant par tous les moyens, légaux et illégaux, dans la France asservie, la fierté nationale et le patriotisme? Que c'est ce *Fais ton devoir* qui m'a donné le dessein et la force de rallier autour de moi les hommes de l'esprit, les écrivains, les savants, les artistes qui furent mes collaborateurs de 1940 à l'heure de la libération? Me comprendra-t-on si je dis qu'à chacun de mes actes, à l'heure du danger comme à l'instant d'écrire, je me suis toujours demandé: 'Que penserait Maurice Thorez de tout cela?' Et que je n'ai eu qu'une idée, être digne de lui pour être digne de la France? [Emphasis in text].

Thus Aragon's conduct was not independent of or at odds with the policy of his party. This radio broadcast also makes irrefutably clear that the political and historical circumstances

are an integral part of the **composition** of *Le Crève-Coeur* and must not be considered as extraneous to the poetry, or as somehow getting in its way. Thus it will be necessary to elucidate the particular circumstances of each individual poem.

In judging the political analysis Aragon makes in *Le Crève-Coeur*, we must remember that he does not have the benefit of hindsight and that 'the end of history' had not arrived. When he learnt the truth of Stalin's crimes, the poet suffered bitter regret for the mistakes his trust in the Soviet leader had caused him to make, but he never changed his views on the reasons for the persecution of the PCF during the period when he was writing these poems.

Themes

Aragon tells us (1968, p. 137) that there are two parts to *Le Crève-Coeur*: 'L'articulation se fait sur un poème daté, qui est le poème du 10 mai [1940] même' (i.e. 'Le Poème interrompu').

The major theme of this first section seems to be summed up in the title of one of its poems, 'Les Amants séparés' (1979b, p. 116-118).

It is a theme expressed on a personal level, as at the end of 'Vingt ans après' (1979b, p. 105):

O mon amour toi seule existes
 A cette heure pour moi du crépuscule triste
 Où je perds à la fois le fil de mon poème
 Et celui de ma vie et la joie et la voix
 Parce que j'ai voulu te redire Je t'aime
 Et que ce mot fait mal quand il est dit sans toi.

It is also at the centre of the unhappiness of so many of the soldiers, torn from the embrace of the women they have left behind:

Femmes qui connaissez enfin comme nous-mêmes
 Le paradis perdu de nos bras dénoués
 Entendez-vous nos voix qui murmurent Je t'aime
 Et votre lèvre à l'air donne un baiser troué

(1979b, p. 109).

We have seen Aragon's desire to reach as wide an audience as possible, to move towards 'la poésie pour tous' (1968, p. 131).

The theme of the parted lovers is obviously universally

accessible. Clear even to Drieu la Rochelle, Aragon's former friend who, after the armistice, was put in charge of the *NRF* by the Germans. On 11 October 1941, he wrote of Aragon (1979b, p. 403) in *L'Emancipation nationale*:

Pendant la guerre [i.e. till the armistice of June 1940] il a cessé d'être écrivain patriotique, selon le mot d'ordre communiste, et n'a publié avec affectation que des vers d'amour.

What Drieu does not seem to realize is that in poems like 'Vingt ans après', 'Le Temps des mots croisés' or 'Petite suite sans fil' (all published already on 1 December 1939), love is opposed to war, that the lovers have been separated by the war, and that the poet is attacking it and those who have caused it.

This was a much more dangerous theme, for it represented the standpoint of the PCF, which had been outlawed by Daladier. For Aragon to express this theme openly meant imprisonment and the silencing of his voice. Thus he has recourse to 'contrebande' to speak to those who sympathise with his views. We shall see later, in the discussion of the individual poems, how he uses this code to communicate his message.

However, if *Le Crève-Coeur* were directed only at the poet's political comrades, we may be sure that it would not have sold so many copies. The theme of the separated lovers, too, is only part of a larger theme that penetrates the entire collection: 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux' or 'l'impossibilité du bonheur dans le malheur commun' (1964, pp. 91-92).

For Aragon, love is not a matter merely of individual happiness.

We have seen him replying to the Surrealists' questionnaire of 1929 by saying, 'je place tout mon espoir dans l'amour comme dans la révolution de laquelle [...] il n'est plus aucunement distinguable' (1974d, p. 393). For him, happiness in love could only be achieved when social justice created the conditions for everyone to enjoy it. There is a duty on the individual not to withdraw from the unhappiness of others, but to contribute to the transformation of the world, so that one day the couple would be the basis from which would emanate the desire for a community of happiness to be shared by all of society:

J'ai dit que je considérais le couple comme la formation supérieure de l'homme et de la femme. L'avenir sera, du moins je l'espère, le temps où règnera le couple (1964, p. 92).

That time had certainly not come when Aragon was writing the poems of *Le Crève-Coeur*; rather,

La nuit du moyen âge
Couvre d'un manteau noir cet univers brisé
(1979b, p. 110).

This is the climate of love in the first part of *Le Crève-Coeur*. In the second part, the disastrous defeat has taken place, France is in the yoke of the foreign invader, the ideas of German Fascism seem triumphant. Here, too, happy love is impossible. Thus, in 'Elsa je t'aime', the tragedy that has befallen France comes between the lovers (1979b, p. 157):

Il ne reste plus rien des mots de la romance
 Regarde dans mes yeux qui te voient si jolie
 N'entends-tu plus mon coeur ni moi ni ma folie.

The collection ends with a sad refrain:

Evite évite évite
 Les souvenirs brisés
 Au biseau des baisers
 Les ans passent trop vite (1979b, p. 158).

But this is not the lingering message of *Le Crève-Coeur*.

In the first part, although he is all too aware of the destructive forces that threaten to destroy the lovers, still the poet can say to Elsa:

Mais peut-être qu'un jour les mots que murmura
 Ce coeur usé ce coeur banal seront l'aura
 D'un monde merveilleux (1979b, p. 118).

In the dark days of March 1940, when he knows only too well the dangers facing his country from within and without, he expresses his faith in the eventual triumph of a new society over the sufferings intrinsic in the present one (1979b, p. 125):

Et l'on verra tomber du front du Fils de l'Homme
 La couronne de sang symbole du malheur
 Et l'Homme chantera tout haut cette fois comme
 Si la vie était belle et l'aubépine en fleurs.

In the second part, after the débâcle, the poet evokes the 'Tapisserie de la grande peur', but he refuses to retreat into sorrow:

Je reste roi de mes douleurs (1979b, p. 147).

In both parts of *le Crève-Coeur*, it is his love that gives Aragon the will to combat those whom he identifies with oppression (1979b, p. 110):

Je ne suis pas des leurs enfin parce que l'ombre
Est faite pour qu'on s'aime et l'arbre pour le ciel.

His belief in love is the source of a strength in adversity that the men of Vichy cannot have (1979b, p. 152):

Ils doutent du soleil quand le sort les accable
Ils doutent de l'amour pour avoir vu la mort.

His love for Elsa is real, but as we have seen, it has a function that goes beyond individual happiness. It frees him from egoism and makes him love the world. And so it cannot stand in the way of his commitment to his political beliefs.

In 'Petite suite sans fil II', Michel Apel-Muller (1991, p.50) discovers the temptation of what Chrétien de Troyes calls 'récréance', the diversion by love of the knight from his duty. Thus Aragon, in the poem (1979b, p. 113), evokes the Crusader Renaud who fell under the spell of Armide and was temporarily deflected from his place in the battle for Jerusalem. Aragon's message here would thus be: 'Faites l'amour, pas la guerre!' (Apel-Muller, 1991, p. 50). This is in the context of November 1939, and the war at this point is an imperialist one, as far as Aragon is concerned.

We know that, when the fighting came, the poet was decorated three times for bravery. After the armistice, however, he was faced with the choice of 'récréance'. This is expressed in 'Zone libre' (1979b, p. 148):

Ah ne m'éveillez pas trop tôt
 Rien qu'un instant de bel canto
 Le désespoir démobilise.

It is a temptation that he finally refuses. Here love plays a double role. It is while he is in the arms of Elsa that he hears someone outside murmur 'Une vieille chanson de France' (1979b, p. 149). It is the contrast between his idyll of love and the fate of France that awakens him from the 'dream' in which he had 'forgotten' the catastrophe of June. But it is his love, too, that inspires him to respond to the call to duty.

In the second part of the collection, the 'national' forms chosen by Aragon for his poetry of 'contrebande' are the ideal vehicle for him to express the national sorrow and to defend the national identity.

Here love again plays an essential role. It is with 'Les Croisés' (1979, pp. 153-155) that the poet begins to exploit the French Middle Ages in a positive way. He evokes Eleanor of Aquitaine in her function of 'Reine des cours d'amour'. Through her the poet contrasts the values of France's cultural heritage with the 'Blut und Eisen' of the Nazis. Through her he contrasts 'le culte de la femme' (1979b, p. 306) of the mediaeval troubadours with the 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche' status of women in the Third Reich, 'la morale courtoise' with 'la barbarie régnante' (1979b, p. 306) to be found where Hitler's writ prevails. But this exaltation of woman is not to be understood as an expression of weakness. In 'La Leçon de Ribérac' (1979b, p. 305)

Aragon gives his interpretation of Chrétien's message in the story of Perceval:

ennemi de la force brutale, de la violence qui opprime, il nous donne le premier dans l'histoire la leçon de Perceval, et paraphrasant à peu près une formule moderne, je la résumerai dans ces mots: *Un homme qui ne s'exerce pas au maniement des armes est indigne de vivre*, que l'histoire a sévèrement confirmés [italics in text].

Thus at the end of 'Les Croisés', Aragon issues a call to arms to defend what Eleanor really represents:

Eléonore

C'était ton nom Liberté Liberté chérie (1979b, p. 155).

This is 'contrebande' aimed at as wide an audience as possible and it raises an important question. How could such an appeal not be noticed by the authorities? The answer is that it was noticed. The same Drieu la Rochelle who scorned Aragon for publishing during the (Phoney) war only 'des vers d'amour' was not at all deceived by the message of 'La Leçon de Ribérac'. In his article of 'L'*Emancipation nationale* quoted above, Drieu goes on to say of Aragon (in 1979b, p. 404):

Ici derrière le laudateur échauffé du Moyen Age nous voyons le communiste déjà réapparaître. Et pas un communiste quelconque, le communiste militariste et belliciste de 1935-1939.

In a fascinating article (1982b), Wolfgang Babilas explores the complicities of Resistance writers and censors, especially in

the Non-occupied Zone. *Le Crève-Coeur* itself was able to be published in Paris and sold all over France.

To Babilas's extensive data might be added the following piquant detail. In Pierre Seghers's *Poésie 41*, a hotbed of the literary Resistance, there appeared in No. 3 (February-March) 1941 an editorial statement reading:

Monsieur le Maréchal Pétain a bien voulu, de sa main, adresser 'Ses compliments et remerciements aux Collaborateurs [sic] de Poésie 41'. Nous transmettons à tous nos amis ce témoignage de l'intérêt que le Chef de l'Etat porte aux poètes. C'est pour notre oeuvre de foi, le plus précieux des encouragements.

In this very number appeared Aragon's 'Romance du temps qu'il fait' (1979b, p. 129-132) which Sadoul himself (1967, p. 30) thought an attack on Pétain and 'les "collabos"'. For her part, Elsa Triolet contributed an article (ostensibly about translating) in which she talked of the need, if people were to understand each other, to be able to decode a language.

The very fact that writers used publications which were sanctioned by the authorities made them suspect in the eyes of some opponents of the Nazis and of Vichy. And so, because he took the view that he would let his voice be heard while he could, Aragon was paradoxically the target of an ultra-left Resistance group in Marseilles, which in the summer of 1942 decided to liquidate him. Fortunately, he disappeared before the mission could be carried out. Most ironic of all is the fact (told to

Babilas by the poet himself) that the Moscow *Literaturnaya Gazeta* denounced him as a traitor (Babilas, 1982b, p. 57).

The 'contrebande' of the second part of *Le Crève-Coeur* is not so difficult to decipher, but some of that found in the period of the 'drôle de guerre', when the censorship seems to have been more severe, is hermetic. Again this poses the question of whether such writing is 'poésie pour tous'.

Some of the allusions are so hard to penetrate that even Georges Cogniot, a leading cultural organiser of the PCF, who was to be the editor-in-chief of *L'Humanité* after the war, was unable (in a personal interview) to elucidate some of the stanzas of 'Romance du temps qu'il fait'.

The important strands of Aragon's thought are clear enough, however, even if they gain immensely in resonance from close study. The big themes of love, of the anguish of separation, of national sorrow, the determination to resist the invader and his lackeys, the hope for the triumph of justice and freedom over tyranny and war, are not obscured.

To these themes could be added another two, typical of his writing: the awareness of age and the suffering of jealousy.

The first can be found above all in 'Vingt ans après' where Aragon reflects (1979b p. 104) on the terrible fate of his generation:

n'est-ce

Pas sa pénitence atroce pour notre aïnesse

Que de revoir après vingt ans les tout petits

D'alors les innocents avec nous repartis.

Jealousy eats at his heart in the separation from Elsa as he waits anxiously for a letter in the desolation of Crouy-sur-Ourcq:

Ah parlez-moi d'amour voici les jours où l'on
Doute où l'on redoute (1979b, p. 112).

This survey does not by any means exhaust the complexity of *Le Crève-Coeur*'s themes, a complexity that led Aragon to dedicate the collection to his wife with the words:

A ELSA, chaque battement de mon cœur
and to write on the personal copy he gave to Pierre Seghers (1974, p. 119):

Ce journal de la fausse guerre
ce journal de la fosse aux ours
et ce livre du seul amour.

Some of these complexities will be further explored in the detailed discussion of each poem.

LA RIME EN 1940

This essay first appeared in Pierre Seghers's *Poètes Casqués* on 20 April 1940. That it was written very shortly before its publication is shown by the fact that, in this original version, the poet expects, as a reaction to what he has to say about rhyme, 'ce hochement de tête qui accueillera au printemps 1940 de semblables considérations' [emphasis added].

Variants

At the point where in 1979b, page 163, the text of *La Rime en 1940* has 'Univers inconnaissable par les moyens actuels de la science', the manuscript (MS) does not have the word 'actuels'. It has been added subsequently to the 'tapuscrit' (TS). In the same sentence, the MS has 'nous t'atteignons', whereas the TS and 1979b, page 163, have 'nous l'atteignons'.

Where in 1979b, page 167, there is a quotation from 'J'attends sa lettre au crépuscule', line seven of this in MS and TS reads 'Qui suis l'avenue et'.

Note 2 in 1979b, page 167, is absent from MS, TS and from the original publication in *Poètes casqués 40* of 20 April 1940. Note 2 does appear in the publication of *La Rime en 1940* in the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* of April 1941.

MS, TS and *Poètes casqués 40* have 'au printemps 1940' where the edition of April 1941 and 1979b, page 168, have 'au printemps 1941'.

Where 1979b, page 168, has 'les desseins d'un Victor Hugo, ignorés de lui-même au temps de Nourmahal-la-Rousse et qui

pourtant le menaient droit', MS has 'les desseins d'un Victor Hugo qui les ignorait lui-même au temps de Nourmahal-la-Rousse, avant de devenir pair de France, et qui pourtant le menaient droit'.

Commenting on the article, Georges Sadoul says (1967, pp. 34-35):

La Rime en 1940 [...] était surtout consacré [sic], suivant son titre, à une défense et rénovation de la rime, notamment sous sa forme 'enjambée'. L'essai avait un autre sens, précisé dès son premier paragraphe qui disait: 'La poésie est scandale à ceux qui ne sont pas poètes (...). Ce n'est pas le moindre de leurs crimes aux yeux de ceux qui chasseraient bien les poètes de la République, que ceux-ci se livrent aux confins de la pensée et de la chanson à un jeu qui déconcerte la raison pratique (...).' Déconcerter la 'raison pratique', trouver le moyen d'exprimer malgré la censure une volonté de Résistance (avant la lettre), tel était bien le dessein que précisaient les dernières lignes: 'Une lettre de plus à la rime, c'est une porte sur ce qui ne se dit point. Un jour viendra, j'en suis sûr, où cela sera clair pour tout le monde, comme sont aujourd'hui clairs les desseins d'un Victor Hugo, ignorés de lui-même au temps de Nourmahal-la-Rousse, et qui pourtant le menaient droit, par les batailles livrées dans le champ de pommes de terre de mots, au rocher surhumain de Guernesey, sans lequel, dit Barrès ou à peu près, l'avenir ne l'aurait point aperçu.'

La cascade des 'de' dans le champ de pommes de terre des

mots [sic] ne dissimule pas le clair objectif que se fixait Aragon, à l'exemple non de Barrès, mais de Hugo. Il avait choisi Guernesey et l'opposition aux pouvoirs officiels mais les nouveaux *Châtiments* qu'il commençait à publier plutôt que de les faire imprimer en Belgique et colporter dans des corsages, il les rédigeait de telle façon que leur technique poétique ouvrait une porte *sur ce qui ne se dit point* [sic] mais qui était compris par le lecteur attentif.

The date of *La Rime en 1940* is very important because from 20 March the trial of the Communist Deputies arrested in October 1939 and since was being held *in camera*. On 3 April they were condemned to five years in prison. On 6 April came the *Décret-loi Sérol* by which the Minister of the Interior announced: 'Peine de mort contre tous ceux qui imprimeraient, stockeraient ou distribueraient des tracts communistes' (Sadoul 1977, p. 17).

Aragon's article expresses clandestinely 'une volonté de Résistance' against such attacks on the liberty of those whom he considers to be acting in the true national interest of France.

As we have seen, the poet had been preparing his *contrebande* for some time and an essential element of it was to be the use of rhyme. The national character given to the policy of the PCF by Thorez, the stress he put on the cultural heritage of France, had had an important influence on Aragon's thinking. At the end of March and beginning of April 1940, the poet was discussing the technique of *contrebande* with Georges Sadoul. The latter reports (1967, p. 28) how Aragon had realized that:

la poésie pouvait devenir un moyen de 'parler à la foule', d'une façon ou de l'autre, à condition d'employer le plus souvent les vers réguliers et les rimes, auxquels les grandes masses sont habituées, alors qu'elles rechignaient encore devant les recherches d'avant-garde.

In *la Rime en 1940* Aragon goes over the reasons for the decline of rhyme in French poetry since the end of the nineteenth century and suggests ways of rescuing and renewing it. In 1945, in 'De l'Exactitude historique en poésie', he was to make clear that he counselled the use of rhyme at this period because it was suited to the purpose he had in mind and it was not to be seen as sacred:

Si une certaine forme s'est adaptée à la poésie d'une époque de ma vie, et de la vie de mon pays, jamais je n'ai pensé tourner cette forme en religion, comme le font ridiculement les écoles poétiques (1979c, p. 71).

Rhyme was therefore a tactic in his clandestine struggle against the war he saw as being waged not on Hitler but against the French working class (via the Communists) by a bourgeoisie he had accused already in 1937 of being ready to turn to foreign arms to defend its privileges.

Rhyme not only gave him the means of communicating with the masses, it was in itself an essential feature of the national culture he wanted to protect. In 1942 in *Arma virumque cano*, he told those who had read *La Rime en 1940*:

Si le problème de la rime est tout d'abord celui sur lequel j'ai voulu m'exprimer en 1940, c'est parce que l'histoire du

vers français débute où apparaît la rime, c'est que la rime est l'élément caractéristique qui libère notre poésie de l'emprise romaine, et en fait la poésie française (1979b, p. 180).

In the meantime, France had fallen under 'l'emprise allemande' and rhyme was a weapon against that, but in April 1940 he was defending his comrades against the monstrous charge of treason levelled against them by the newspapers which would soon be enthusiastically collaborating with the Nazis. And so, because it was a national feature associated with the very identity of French poetry, rhyme was not only a means of delivering *contrebande*, it was in itself *contrebande*. To use it to defend his party was the equivalent of waving the *tricolore* with the red flag, of singing *la Marseillaise* and *l'Internationale* as on 14 July 1935.

In *La Rime en 1940*, Aragon considers the invention of rhyme as an undeniable advance in the possibilities of human expression. The extraordinary thing is that a moment came when it was no longer the enemies of poetry but poets themselves who condemned it. In the next sentence, this extraordinary turn of events is called 'Ce moment naturel de la réflexion poétique (1979b, p. 159).

This is elucidated by Aragon in *Arma virumque cano* where he tells us that: 'il n'y a poésie qu'autant qu'il y a méditation sur le langage, et à chaque pas réinvention de ce langage. Ce qui implique de briser les cadres fixes du langage, les règles de la grammaire, les lois du discours' (1979b, p. 178).

He considers as necessary the long path taken by the classical line of French poetry, from its dislocation by Hugo to the free verse of the Symbolists, through the various *arts poétiques* of the previous half-century, from *Les Illuminations* to the Surrealists. All these moments were perfectly legitimate. The long path was necessary 'pour qu'on reprît en connaissance de cause la longue histoire du vers français [...] comme le sanglot organique et profond de la France' (1979b, pp. 178-179). He goes on to make clear that he is not being poetically reactionary in his recourse to rhyme:

Je tiens à répéter qu'il n'y a aucunement là de ma part le désir d'éclipser quelque poésie que ce soit, quelque poète que ce soit [...]. Je reconnais le bien-fondé de passablement d'aventures poétiques, encore trop mal comprises, et trop souvent décriées. J'atteste qu'elles m'ont été précieuses, et je proteste contre qui voudrait amputer de la plus folle de ses fumées l'histoire de notre poésie: il la tuerait toute entière (1979b, p. 191).

Thus it was natural that a moment came when rhyme was called into question by poets. In *La Rime en 1940*, Aragon tells us that this process began with Verlaine's rhymed witticism in his 'Art poétique'. Aragon goes on to quote this wrongly, as it should read (Verlaine 1948, p. 207):

O qui dira les torts de la Rime?
 Quel enfant sourd ou quel nègre fou
 Nous a forgé ce bijou d'un sou
 Qui sonne creux et faux sous la lime?

It is strange that Aragon's ear should not have heard that Verlaine's lines are of course all nine-syllable *impairs* and do not contain three *décasyllabes* as in his version (1979b, p. 160):

Ah! qui nous dira les torts de la rime?
 Quel enfant malade ou quel nègre fou
 Nous a donc forgé ce joujou d'un sou
 Qui sonne creux et faux sous la lime?

With the help of the kind of use made of it, after the acrobatics of Banville, by the likes of Edmond Rostand (the author of the verse play *Cyrano de Bergerac*), rhyme, over the past fifty years, had attained the negation of its poetic value. This is the assessment of the Surrealists although, Aragon suggests, the masterpiece of surrealist poetry properly speaking is perhaps represented by the 'Jeux de mots' that Robert Desnos perfected. In them, rhyme reaches its acme and penetrates the entire line.

Here we find a fascinating link between twelfth and twentieth centuries. In June 1941 Aragon published *La Leçon de Ribérac ou l'Europe française*. In it he recalls the admiration of Dante for the verse art of Arnaud Daniel, a troubadour of the twelfth century. Arnaud Daniel practised

l'art fermé, cette incroyable invention de règles nouvelles, de disciplines que le poète s'impose et fait varier à chaque poème, ce dessin des rimes qui ne sont pas là tant pour sonner d'un vers sur l'autre, car elles se répondent après six ou huit vers, d'une strophe sur l'autre, mais à raison de trois par vers parfois, deux rimes intérieures pour une

rime terminale [emphasis added], ou suivant une variation dans leur succession qui épuise toutes les dispositions possibles d'une strophe sur l'autre (1979b, pp. 291-2).

Aragon was to develop his own highly complex system of internal rhymes (cf. *Arma virumque cano* in 1979b, pp. 181-189) for *Les Yeux d'Elsa*, in order to practise his version of Arnaud Daniel's *clus trover* which we know he had been studying. And so if, in *La Rime en 1940*, Aragon (1979b, p.160) quotes Desnos's feats of internal rhyming -

Gal, amant de la Reine, alla (tour magnanime),

Galamment de l'arène à la Tour Magne, à Nîmes -

we can suspect that Aragon is on the way to following the example of Arnaud Daniel who, by the *contrebande* of his 'art fermé', was able to sing of his love for great ladies in the very presence of their husbands. By the time *La Rime en 1940* appeared, some of the poems that were to form *Le Crève-Coeur* had been published and they showed that Aragon, by the use of rhyme, had already begun to communicate his message under the noses of the censors.

In *La Rime en 1940*, Aragon reflects on the disappearance of rhyme from contemporary poetry, although not from song. The distaste for rhyme is the result above all of the abuse made of it for purely gymnastic purposes, so that rhyming is now in most men's minds the contrary of poetry. The degeneration of rhyme in French poetry comes from the fact that it is fixed, that all rhymes are thought to be known, so that nobody can invent any new ones, and thus rhyming means imitating or plagiarizing.

He tells how Apollinaire, in particular, had tried to rejuvenate rhyme by his redefinition of masculine and feminine endings. But this was not enough to cure the ills of rhyme. Soon the new possibilities were charted. In fact, Apollinaire had not really invented anything. Popular poetry and song had already made use of the resources of rhyme that he merely systematized. Aragon then gives some examples of this.

Here we should turn to some important comments on popular poetry and song that Aragon makes later in *Arma virumque cano*. He notes how some of the most intelligent and best disposed critics had said that *Le Crève-Coeur* had affinities with song, proof of which was seen in the way Aragon uses the vocabulary of song in the titles of some of the pieces of the collection: 'chant, complainte, etc.' (1979b, p. 192).

He corrects this notion:

Mais vrai, je n'ai jamais cru écrire des chansons. Si j'ai cherché dans le langage de la poésie populaire, des chansons anciennes, quelques lueurs que la poésie savante ne donne pas, c'était pour en faire un profit tout métaphorique; et nullement pour recommencer le folklore, qui ne peut se constituer sur ordre ou de propos délibéré. J'adore *Auprès de ma blonde* et *J'ai descendu dans mon jardin*, mais il faut bien le dire de façon colorée: on nous scie les pieds avec le folklore ces temps-ci. Le folklore est devenu une certitude pour un tas de gens, qui se sont jétés là-dedans comme dans les Ballets russes de 1912 (1979b, p. 192).

If the poet talks here of 'un profit tout métaphorique', he means that in *Le Crève-Coeur* he uses some of the language of popular poetry and old song in order to get over his clandestine message. As he says in *Arma virumque cano*:

Mon Dieu, si le vocabulaire musical suffit à faire la musique, vous m'en verrez fort étonné [...]. C'est au sens de Virgile que je dis *je chante* quand je le dis. *Arma virumque cano*... 'Je chante les armes et l'homme...' [...]. Et mon chant ne peut se refuser d'être; parce qu'il est une arme lui aussi pour l'homme désarmé, parce qu'il est l'homme même, dont la raison d'être est la vie. Je chante parce que l'orage n'est pas assez fort pour couvrir mon chant, et que quoi que demain l'on fasse, on pourra m'ôter cette vie, mais on n'éteindra pas mon chant (1979b, pp. 192-4).

When Aragon wrote these words his country had been occupied, but they can be related equally to the sentiments of *La Rime en 1940*. There, his *contrebande* is his only weapon against the anti-Communist repression of the period.

In this essay of April 1940, he says the traditions of popular song and poetry intersect with the experiments of poets to show that rhyme is not in fact worn out. There is a whole new world in which scientists provide rhymes by discoveries and inventions like radium, helium, iridium and selenium.

J'élève la voix et je dis qu'il n'est pas vrai qu'il n'est point de rimes nouvelles, quand il est un monde nouveau. Qui a fait entrer encore dans le vers français le langage de la TSF ou celui des géométries non-euclidiennes? Presque chaque

chose à quoi nous nous heurtons dans cette guerre étrange qui est le paysage d'une poésie inconnue et terrible est nouvelle au langage et étrangère encore à la poésie (1979b, p. 163).

Here we remember the poetry that Apollinaire made from the terrors of World War One. Aragon was not going to beautify those of World War Two which was still 'cette guerre étrange', this 'drôle de guerre' in which Hitler was left in peace and the guns of the French Government were turned against the poet's comrades.

Aragon sees poetry as a means of penetrating the strange, new world:

Univers inconnaisable par les moyens actuels de la science, nous l'atteignons par le travers des mots, par cette méthode de connaissance qui s'appelle la poésie, et nous gagnons ainsi des années et des années sur le temps ennemi des hommes (1979b, p. 163).

This statement is elucidated by what the poet says in 'La Fin du "Monde Réel"' (1967, p. 316):

Enfin, n'est-ce pas là la méthode poétique par définition, qui, lasse de ne pouvoir acquérir des choses que [par] la lente connaissance scientifique, s'impatiente et procède par la métaphore, cette forme de l'intuition qui a fait si souvent précéder la découverte par une hypothèse hardie que nous appelons *l'image* [sic].

He says something similar (1964, p. 15) to Francis Crémieux, when he talks of:

ma méthode de connaissance: écrire pour connaître, et par là communiquer à autrui ce que j'ai appris. Cela tient sans doute à ce que 'écrire' est pour moi tout autre chose que ce qu'on imagine: la fixation, la mise au point de la connaissance, non point sous une forme détaillée, non point comme une somme scientifique, mais comme ce raccourci, le raccourci de l'image, le raccourci de la poésie, qui contient en lui toutes les possibilités, les ramifications de la connaissance.

Here we see that Aragon is the heir of Hugo and Baudelaire.

We glimpse Aragon's faith in this method of attaining knowledge when we discover that the manuscript of *La Rime en 1940* has simply 'Univers inconnaissable par les moyens de la science', the qualification 'actuels' having been added to the typescript version before publication.

In *La Rime en 1940* he says the dignity of rhyme is restored because it is the means of introducing the things of this new world into poetry (1979b, pp. 163-164):

Alors la rime cesse d'être dérision, parce qu'elle participe à la nécessité du monde réel, qu'elle est le chaînon qui lie les choses à la chanson, et qui fait que les choses chantent.

Aragon developed this point in 'Sur une définition de la poésie' in 1941:

Pour moi (et d'autres sans doute), la rime à chaque vers apporte un peu de jour [...] sur la pensée: elle trace des chemins entre les mots, elle lie, elle associe les mots

d'une façon indestructible, fait apercevoir entre eux une nécessité [emphasis added] qui [...] donne à l'esprit un plaisir, une satisfaction essentiellement raisonnable.

Entendons-nous: je parle de la rime digne de ce nom, qui est à chaque fois résolution d'accord, découverte, et non pas ce méprisable écho mécanique, qui n'est qu'une cheville sonore, et qui n'a pas plus droit de cité en poésie que le mirliton n'est poète, que n'est le faiseur de bouts-rimés (1979b, pp. 315-316).

That rhyme 'makes things sing' is what endows it with essential importance in Aragon's strategy of 'contrebande' through poetry. This is what he means when he says in *La Rime en 1940*:

Jamais peut-être faire chanter les choses n'a été plus urgente et noble mission à l'homme, qu'à cette heure où il est plus profondément humilié, plus entièrement dégradé que jamais (1979b, p. 164).

Here he is saying that it is through poetry that man can sing against the degradation of human values in this repressive climate. And he thinks there will be others besides himself who will be aware of this:

Et nous sommes sans doute plusieurs à en avoir conscience, qui aurons le courage de maintenir, même dans le fracas de l'indignité, la véritable parole humaine, et son orchestre à faire pâlir les rossignols. A cette heure où la déraisonnable rime redevient la seule raison. Réconciliée

avec le sens. Et pleine de son sens comme un fruit mûr de son vin (ibid.).

Amid the 'din of indignity', the squalid and furious campaign being conducted against the Communists but in favour of what Aragon considers an imperialist war, he and others will maintain the true voice of humanity through the resources of poetry. And vital among those resources is rhyme, now reconciled with meaning and no longer the empty exercise of a Banville or a Rostand.

Aragon relates how in the immediate past the decomposition of the line of poetry had become as habitual as the mechanical counting of syllables in eighteenth century verse and he thinks that 'la poésie logorrhéique de ces dernières années' will probably suffer the same fate as the eclogues of yore (ibid.). This 'logorrhoea' is a reference to the automatic writing of the Surrealists, what Etiemble (1966, p.8) calls rather unkindly 'la logorrhée-diarrhée de l'automatisme'.

Aragon believes that freedom whose name was usurped by free verse is now resuming its rights, not in an attitude of carelessness but in the labour of invention. Here a comment of Aragon's in *Arma virumque cano* may be of help:

La liberté est une chose sacrée, j'ai horreur de la licence. Cela est vrai aussi dans la prosodie. Et c'est précisément l'amour de la liberté qui me dicte de la défendre où je puis. Ce que je fais ici, priant tous ceux qui me lisent de ne jamais croire tout le mal qu'on leur dira d'elle, la confondant avec la licence, et la poésie avec la logorrhée (1979b, p. 190).

Aragon's liberty allows him to choose the path of rigour and he turns away from '[le] vers aberrant, individuel, décomposé, qui a perdu ses caractéristiques chantantes et que le peuple ne peut entendre, qui ne résonne pas dans le coeur du peuple' (1959, p. 190).

Far from believing that rhyme has had its day, that there is nothing left to be invented, he thinks (in *La Rime en 1940*) that we are now entering a period as rich and as new as the Romantic era, when the classical line was dislocated and yielded to new, often unwritten rules. After the typical Romantic innovation of Hugo's *enjambement* in *Hernani*, now Aragon advocates modern *enjambement*, which goes one better in that it is not only the meaning that sits astride the end of one line and the beginning of the next, but the sound, the rhyme. The 'rime enjambée' brings an unlimited increase in the number of French rhymes because it allows the transformation of all, or nearly all, of Apollinaire's masculine rhymes ending in a vowel into his feminine ones, by appending the first consonant or first group of consonants of the following line. It does the opposite of the popular song which neglected the final consonant of a word in order to rhyme it with a word ending in a vowel (1979b, pp. 164-165).

Most interestingly from the reader's point of view is Aragon's assertion that '[la rime enjambée] précipite le mouvement d'un vers sur l'autre pour des effets qu'utilise la voix, et que le sens supérieur du poème vient dicter' (1979b, p. 165). This shows that Aragon is very conscious of the effect gained from reading

his poetry aloud and that this is a consideration of his composition.

The following statement in *Arma virumque cano* confirms that the elements of his poetry are carefully assembled, that his poems take into account all the ones he has previously written or read:

Pour moi, je n'écris jamais un poème qui ne soit la suite de réflexions portant sur chaque point de ce poème, et qui ne tienne compte de tous les poèmes que j'ai précédemment écrits, ni de tous les poèmes que j'ai précédemment lus (1979b, p. 177).

In *La Rime en 1940*, he recommends also the use of 'rime complexe', whereby the rhyme-sound is split up among several words (e.g. 'ivresse / vivre est-ce'). This kind of rhyme is not new, but it had only been used timidly in the past for fear of ridicule. The simultaneous deployment of 'rime enjambée' and 'rime complexe' permits the use of all words in the language without exception, even those which had never been rhymed before. And all forms of the language can be used, even those (like the second person singular of all verbs beginning with a vowel) which were ruled out by classical and Romantic verse, but legitimized now that the hiatus is assimilated to the diphthong through rhyme, thus 'tu es' can be paired with 'tuées'.

Wolfgang Babilas (1973, p. 352) considers Aragon's re-use of traditional forms, such as rhyme, as part of the poet's technique of collage (the borrowing of pre-existing elements for a new context where they may be transformed in meaning):

Il faut comprendre que, du point de vue de la technique scripturale, ce réemploi de formes 'traditionnelles' et 'nationales' n'est rien d'autre que justement la réécriture appliquée à des formes préexistantes. C'est leur réécriture 'au bien', car Aragon leur fait subir des modifications structurelles importantes - voir son article 'La Rime en 1940': en les libérant de contraintes traditionnelles, il préfigure, par l'écriture, la libération nationale. Ainsi, cette réécriture de formes revêt une signification politique comparable à celle qu'a l'évocation de figures et d'événements médiévaux dans ces mêmes années de guerre.

At the moment when he was writing *La Rime en 1940*, Aragon was not yet thinking of the liberation of his country from the foreign yoke but from the internal repression to which his comrades (and thus, in his view, the working class) were subject.

'Contrebande' now dominates the final section of the article. He ceases his examples, 'certain d'avoir montré la voie aux chercheurs d'équations poétiques nouvelles, et déjà assuré de ce hochement de tête qui accueillera au printemps 1940 de semblables considérations' (1979b, p. 168). He knows that those who are seeking after ways of renewing rhyme in order, like him, to get over a clandestine message will have understood. Conversely, the censor will most probably have shaken his head at what seems an abstruse and thus harmless treatise.

The change of year between the original publication in *Poètes casqués 40* and the publication in *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941 is commented on by Jean Ristat (in Aragon 1989a, vol 3, p. 1359,

note 1): '*Printemps 1940* est devenu *printemps 1941* pour cette deuxième publication sans que l'on sache si cela correspondait à une volonté de l'auteur'. The change may well have been deliberate because the publication of all of the poems of *Le Crève-Coeur* now made the intentions of the article much clearer to those wishing to oppose the Germans and Vichy. In April 1940, there cannot have been many poets who would have shared Aragon's views.

The poet relates how, a hundred years previously, Musset had protested against the strictness of those who demanded a supporting consonant more to rhyme than before. Musset considered them as enemies of liberty, as muzzlers of thought. Aragon wishes there were only those over-fastidious in the matter of rhyme to muzzle this lady in stone who surmounts the statue of the poet of *les Nuits*, in the Place du Théâtre-Français, at the Palais-Royal. Here Aragon is of course alluding to the much more dangerous muzzlers of thought who have closed down the Communist press and have not allowed the public to hear the defence of the Communist Deputies who have just been on trial.

Thus he says (1979b p. 168) that, by a strange reversal of values, the improvement of rhyme and verse technique to-day puts at the service of that which is inexpressible (i.e. is not allowed to be expressed) the resources of its infinite nuances of meaning. An additional letter to rhyme opens a door to what is not (may not be) said.

Aragon means that the development of rhyme with the infinite possibilities conferred by the invention of 'rime enjambée' and

the renewal of 'rime complexe' gives the poet the chance to get over his clandestine protest against the attack on liberty.

He is sure that this contraband message will some day be clear for everyone, just as are now clear the intentions of a Victor Hugo (of which the latter was himself ignorant at the time he wrote 'Nourmahal la Rousse', a poem of 1828). They were to lead him to the superhuman rock of Guernesey, but for which, according to Barrès, the future would not have set eyes on him.

The allusions here are to the development of Hugo. When he wrote 'Nourmahal la Rousse', he was in receipt of a royal pension. Later he became the intimate of Louis-Philippe who, in 1845, made him a peer of France. This reference is made clear in the manuscript version of *La Rime en 1940* which reads: 'Hugo [...] au temps de Nourmahal-la-Rousse, avant de devenir pair de France' [emphasis added]. Then came the opposition to Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, the flight to Brussels in 1851, the residence in exile in Jersey and, from 1855 until 1870, on Guernesey. This development had been evoked by Aragon in 'Hugo réaliste', a speech of 1933:

Et là nous retrouvons Hugo. C'est cet Hugo-là qui, dans l'exil, prend sa véritable figure. Un salaud de notre pays, qui s'appelait Maurice Barrès, a dit une chose assez définitive sur Hugo, 'Qu'aurait été Hugo sans le rocher de Guernesey?' (1975b, p. 280).

In the same speech, Aragon goes on to talk of *Les Châtiments*, as does Georges Sadoul in his comment (noted above) on this final

passage of *La Rime en 1940. Les Châtiments* were actually written on Jersey in 1852-53, before Hugo went to Guernesey.

Aragon's meaning has, indeed, become clear. Just as we now know that the Hugo who had previously been a royalist was heading towards his true destiny as the poet who attacked tyranny, so everyone will some day recognize that, in this apparent treatise on rhyme, Aragon's real motive is to develop the weapon of poetry against repression and to encourage others to do likewise. There is a belief in the ultimate victory of his struggle that comes out in the words here: 'Un jour viendra, j'en suis sûr, où cela sera clair pour tout le monde' (1979b, p. 168).

At the end of *La Leçon de Ribérac ou l'Europe française*, in 1941, Aragon was to complement his message to other poets, whose task was now to resist the German invader and Vichy. He urges his fellow poets to make use of the cultural wealth of France, to follow the example of Arnaud Daniel, whose *clús trover* or 'art fermé', characterized by the inventiveness of his rhymes, enabled him to get over his clandestine ideas:

Alors leur langage, préparé dans les laboratoires de l'art fermé, 'en donnant à chaque mot une importance exagérée' [sic], deviendra clair pour tout le monde et pour eux-mêmes, et ce sera la véritable aube française, qui ne connaît pas les frontières et se lèvera si haut qu'on la verra du bout du monde' (1979b, page 309).

Introduction to 'Vingt ans après'

Aragon recounts (1965, p. 24) how, after he had written his editorial of 23 August 1939 on the Germano-Soviet Pact:

Entre mon bureau de la rue de Port-Mahon et chez moi, rue de la Sourdière, je fus assailli par des gens habillés en officiers, avec des placards de décorations. C'étaient des hommes de Bucard [leader of a fascist 'ligue' who was to be executed in 1946 for collaboration with Hitler]. On me conseilla de ne plus coucher chez moi. Les huit jours qui précédèrent la mobilisation, nous avons donc habité, Elsa et moi, à l'ambassade du Chili, où l'on nous avait aimablement invités. C'est là que j'écrivis les cent et quelques dernières dernières pages [des *Voyageurs de l'impériale*], données au fur et à mesure à la dactylo sans relire. [...]. J'étais mobilisé le 2 [septembre].

He was initially sent as a warrant officer to the *220e Regiment Régional de Travailleurs*. Malcolm Cowley describes the situation (Josephson, 1946, p. 9):

At first he was punished for his political opinions by being assigned to a labour regiment composed chiefly of Czech and Spanish refugees, people not trusted to bear arms at the front but merely to dig fortifications.

These circumstances are relevant to our understanding of the state of mind of the poet when he began writing *Le Crève-Coeur*.

In an interview (Seguin, 1968, p. 68), Aragon himself recalled:

J'étais à Coulommiers [sic] à ce moment-là, comme un personnage suspect pour les raisons que vous savez; on m'a mis dans des régiments qui étaient surveillés par la Sûreté générale, et il y avait toutes les chances que je ne m'en sorte pas et qu'on me monte des coups divers qui permettent de m'arrêter.

An idea of the poet's feelings at the time can be gained from those of Armand Barbentane, a character in *Les Communistes*. A journalist on *L'Humanité*, he has been sent to Coulommiers, to just such a regiment as Aragon's. He returns to his quarters to find that his trunk has been searched:

On a encore tout mis sens dessus dessous dans sa cantine.
Deux fois en trois jours.

L'étrange sentiment de se trouver à la fois isolé, et responsable pas seulement pour soi, mais pour tous les autres. Pour tout le parti. Armand sait profondément que chaque communiste doit être à la même enseigne que lui. Mais lui, tout de même, il y a l'article qu'il a écrit la veille de la saisie du journal. C'est comme s'il avait parlé le dernier. Il a parlé le dernier. Il est responsable pour tous. Et puis, les gens d'en face, ils vont vouloir leur faire dire n'importe quoi, leur mettre des mots dans la bouche... Déjà quand on avait des journaux, alors maintenant qu'on n'en a plus! On est là, c'est comme un front, le front de la provocation possible, organisée...

Chaque communiste peut être le point de départ d'une provocation contre le parti' (1966a, p. 169).

Aragon must have been very worried not only for himself but much more about what would happen to Elsa if he were arrested, and this no doubt contributes to the anguish that he expresses in the first poems of *Le Crève-Coeur*.

Certainly the impression given to Georges Sadoul when he visited Elsa in Paris in mid-December was anything but positive:

On a collé Aragon dans un drôle de régiment. Il y a de tout, et principalement des cagouleurs. A la popote un officier revient un jour, rigolard, et raconte très haut: - J'ai rencontré un vieil ami, le commandant...du IIème Bureau. Il m'a demandé où j'étais: 'Ah, oui, ce régiment où tous les officiers ont plus ou moins un casier judiciaire chargé' (Sadoul, 1977, p. 104).

This was an ideal atmosphere for the feared provocation to take place. Aragon was fortunate, however, to find some officers who held him in respect. He wonders in *L'Homme Communiste II*:

Vous en souvenez-vous, mon Commandant, qui avez refusé mon dossier à la Sûreté, mon Colonel qui étiez un brave homme, et vous, Monsieur le Médecin-Chef, qui m'avez montré le mouchard qui me surveillait? (1953, pp. 295-6)

Vingt ans après

Written at Crouy-sur-Ourcq, this poem was first published in the *NRF* of 1 December 1939.

Variants

Stanza 3, line 3: MS2, *Epreuve*, TS and *NRF* (1 December 1939) all have 'Spectres du plein midi Revenants du grand jour'.

Stanza 7, line 2: MS2, TS and *NRF* (1 December 1939) all have 'S'inscrit toute entière Et le songe dévie'.

Stanza 7, line 4: MS2, *Epreuve*, TS and *NRF* (1 December 1939) all have 'Père avec l'ombre de celles que tu aimas'.

Stanza 8, line 2: *NRF* (1 December 1939) has 'Elle seule surnage ainsi qu'Octobre rousse'.

Stanza 11, line 2: MS2, *Epreuve*, TS and *NRF* (1 December 1939) all have 'Tu passais tendrement ta main sur mon visage'.

Stanza 11, line 4: MS2, *Epreuve*, TS and *NRF* (1 December 1939) all have 'T'attardant à l'endroit où mes cheveux sont gris'.

At the end of the poem, MS2 and TS have 'Crouy-sur-Ourcq, 8 Octobre 1939'.

The date, '8 Octobre 1939', given in the MS2 and the TS, the indication in line four of the poem ('Octobre électroscope a frémi mais s'endort') and the information in Aragon's 'Bibliographie' attached to *Le Crève-Coeur* all point to October 1939 as the date of composition of 'Vingt ans après'.

However, on a number of occasions, Aragon has said that *Le Crève-Coeur* was begun in September 1939. To Francis Crémieux, he speaks (1964, p. 134) of 'les premiers poèmes du *Crève-Coeur* qui sont de septembre [1939]'. Similarly (1968, p. 137), he tells

Dominique Arban of 'ces poèmes que j'ai commencé d'écrire dès septembre. Tous les premiers poèmes du *Crève-Coeur* ont été écrits après le 1er septembre [1939] et avant le 10 mai 1940'. Even more precisely he informs Fernand Seguin (1968, p. 68): 'Le premier poème du *Crève-Coeur* a été écrit vers le 10 septembre, donc très rapidement'.

The manuscript of 'Vingt ans après' does not belong to the group of manuscripts designated 'Manuscrit restauré BN 1981' which are obviously earlier versions of the poems. Thus the date of 8 October given on it does not necessarily mean that the poem was composed in its entirety then. It may have been begun in September and revised to take account of the events of the beginning of October.

Stanza 1

The important autumnal imagery introduced here is exploited throughout the poem. It is used firstly to pinpoint the period of composition, and to express Aragon's sense of the mood prevailing. Time has reverted to its slow, monotonous pace, like that of a wagon drawn by oxen (here described as 'roux' as a reflection of the seasonal impressions). The monotony of time passing slowly is, as we shall learn later in the poem, a source of pain to Aragon and his fellow conscripts. The separation from their loved ones is felt all the more keenly by these soldiers because of the inactivity to which they are mostly condemned. Thus the beauty of the autumnal detail - 'Le ciel creuse des trous entre les feuilles d'or' - may perhaps be taken as ironic when one knows that Aragon's regiment (and many, many others) had

as its main task at that moment the digging of holes amid the falling leaves, an activity the soldiers rightly considered pointless in the circumstances.

The situation is evoked in *Les Communistes* (1966b, pp. 16, 47-48) where the difficulty of the officers in finding work for their men is brought out:

Et l'oisiveté est la mère de tous les vices. Parce que, si on exécutait à toute pompe le plan des travaux, qu'est-ce qu'on leur donnerait à faire? Creuser des fossés anti-chars dans le Mulcien, pas moyen de s'exciter là-dessus, et allez dire à ceux qui se les appuient que la défense de Paris en dépend! [...] Ces pauvres bougres qui font des tranchées contre un ennemi à quatre cents kilomètres.

Another purpose for the digging was suggested to Aragon at the time. It was recorded by Sadoul (1977, p. 104):

A cette même popote [Crouy-sur-Ourcq] arrive un autre jour un commandant de gendarmerie. On parle des fortifications que l'unité est en train de creuser dans la vallée de l'Ourcq, et qui est, prétend-on la septième ligne de soutien derrière la ligne Maginot.

- Mais vous n'y êtes pas, dit le commandant. Tout le monde sait bien que cette ligne de fortifications a un tout autre but. Il faut tout de même prévoir l'éventualité où les troupes de la ligne Maginot, révoltées, remonteraient sur Paris. Il faut des défenses pour empêcher la jonction de se faire.

In the last line of the first stanza, by using the word 'électroscope', an instrument for detecting the presence of electric current or charge, Aragon gives an example of the incorporation into poetry of modern, technical terms that he was to call for in *La Rime en 1940* (already in 1928, in 'Ramo dei morti' ((1974d, p. 287) we find 'spectroscope'). The use of 'electroscope' is very effective in bringing out the contrast between the sudden quivering of activity that had taken place at the beginning of October and the plodding rhythm that once again characterises time as conveyed in the pre-industrial image of the ox-drawn cart.

The 'electrifying' events to which Aragon is referring included the arrest of the Communist deputies on 6 October (if we recall, MS2 of this poem is dated 8 October).

A discussion on the legality and motives of the letter they had sent to Herriot and which had been used to imprison them takes place at a high-society dinner party in *Les Communistes* (1966a, 293-294). It throws some light on Aragon's understanding of the situation:

'La trahison est patente, - dit le Capitaine de Saint-Garin,- ils se font les avocats des propositions de l'ennemi.' Visconti hoche la tête: 'Voyons, mon Capitaine, les propositions de paix qu'on peut nous faire, il faut bien que ce soit ceux qui nous font la guerre qui nous les fassent [...]. Puisqu'on a la faiblesse de se placer sur le plan de la démocratie, que des parlementaires remettent une note au président de la Chambre...ce n'est pas

démocratiquement une raison de les priver de leurs libertés démocratiques [...]. Les députés communistes voudraient qu'on fasse la paix. Et ils spécifient, pas n'importe quelle paix, une paix juste et durable... Nous sommes tous pour ça.

- Oh, - proteste Simon, - pas pour la même paix!

- Eh bien, mon cher Simon, si je comprends... à première vue... eux, ils voudraient faire la paix pour ensuite combattre Hitler avec Staline... ou rétablir une paix qui leur permette de continuer leur propagande... nous, nous voudrions faire la paix avec Hitler contre Staline... voilà toute la différence! Daladier voudrait faire faire la guerre à Hitler contre Staline...'

Stanza 2

The autumnal atmosphere and mood of apathy of the first stanza now becomes one of inner decadence. The poet, in 'Jours carolingiens', makes the first of many allusions in *Le Crève-Coeur* to France's history. The reference at this point is not to the heroism of a Roland, but to the weakness, the powerlessness (here attributed to Aragon and his fellow veterans, these 'rois lâches') of the 'rois fainéants' who succeeded Charlemagne and under whom his empire was fragmented, especially after the war of 840-3 which split France and Germany into separate kingdoms. That Aragon may have had in mind the relevance of these dates to the years 1940-43 is not unlikely when one has encountered the amazingly prophetic details of an extract from *Le Trésor Des Jésuites*, a play written jointly by Aragon and Breton and

published in 1929. On the terrace of a café, some customers are perusing the newspapers they have just bought:

Cinquième Consommateur (lisant le journal). - C'est du propre! Encore un satyre de dix ans! Voyons tout de même le communiqué. 'Rien à signaler sur l'ensemble du front mondial.' C'est d'un mortel, cette guerre! [...].

Sixième Consommateur. - Que nous réserve 1940? [sic] 1939 [sic] a été désastreux. Vingt et un ans déjà depuis ce qu'on appelait si drôlement la Grande Guerre! Faut-il regretter les chevaleresques combats des tranchées ou leur préférer les peu glorieuses exterminations immobiles d'aujourd'hui? Voilà la question. (1974d, pp. 362-363, and quoted Sadoul 1977, pp. 97-98)

The 'boeufs lents' mentioned earlier are recalled in the line: 'Nos rêves se sont mis au pas mou de nos vaches', and 'mou' reinforces the sense of 'lâches'. The dreams of Aragon and of a vast section of the French people had been fostered by the heady days of initial triumph of the Popular Front in the summer of 1936. They were dreams encouraged by Thorez at the Congress of the PCF held in Arles at the end of December 1937, where his message was 'le chemin de notre parti est bien celui qui conduit à la France libre, forte et heureuse'. The visions expressed by Thorez were to be recalled by Aragon in 1942 in 'Plus belle que les larmes' (1979b, p. 252):

Il y a dans le vent qui vient d'Arles des songes
Qui pour en parler haut sont trop près de mon coeur

According to Aragon in *Les Communistes* (1966a, pp. 125-130), it was a reaction against those hopes raised in 1936 - of a new world of social progress and freedom from war - which had been the determining factor in the conduct of the *grande bourgeoisie* since then. The argument is summed up by Crémieux and Estager (1983, p. 12):

Un lien étroit existe entre la politique munichoise de la grande bourgeoisie française, politique qui allait conduire à la guerre et à la défaite, et les réactions de classe de cette même bourgeoisie devant les événements de l'été 1936. Les capitulations successives devant Hitler, la primauté de l'antisoviétisme dans la politique extérieure se nourrissent de la haine du Front populaire. On ne peut comprendre les choix des dirigeants français avant la guerre et pendant cette guerre, ni leur attitude à l'égard du Parti communiste français sans se référer à cet esprit de revanche sur le Front populaire qui marque leur politique.

In the word 'lâches' of line 5 of 'Vingt ans après', there is a sense of self-reproach felt by the poet and his comrades that they had not done enough to defend their dreams. In *Les Communistes* (1966a, pp. 129-130), Aragon lets the character Blanchard, a communist militant who had fought in Spain, give his view of what might have been done:

En trente-six, on était les plus forts, la bourgeoisie reculait...Le parti, il a dit: tout n'est pas possible. Il avait raison, le parti. Tout n'est pas possible. Mais ce qui était possible, c'était de défendre ce qu'on avait gagné, de

ne pas compter sur les autres pour veiller sur le grain...Tout d'un coup, on a fait confiance à des réunions d'en haut...Je ne suis pas contre les chefs [...]. Il y a ceux qui sont nos chefs, ceux qui dirigent notre affaire à nous ...mais nous ne les avons pas soutenus par en bas en face de ceux qui ont fait de toujours les affaires de la bourgeoisie...Qu'est-ce qui nous a pris? On était ivres, le succès [...] ça grise...On n'est pas restés unis ensemble, comme dans nos usines sur le tas, il n'y a pas eu de comités populaires du Front populaire, c'est pourquoi il n'y en a plus, de Front populaire [...].

Just as their dreams appear to have lost their impulse, have become as lethargic as the movements of the cows in the fields, so these fields themselves seem to represent the limits of the horizon of these men. An impression of the time can be gained from an entry in the *Journal de Guerre* of Georges Sadoul, who was stationed at the time in a village near Nancy:

On reste étendu sur la paille à bâiller, on prend le goût du cafard et du rien faire. On se lave de moins en moins, on ne se rase plus, on n'a plus le courage de balayer, de débarrasser la table après manger, des flaques de vin, des vieilles croûtes, des coulures de bouillon figé, des os rongés (1977, p. 87).

But if there was a lack of awareness of people dying 'au bout des champs', it was also because, in fact, practically no fighting was taking place. On 22 October 1939 Sadoul (1977, pp. 63-64) recorded what he had read that day in *Paris-Soir*:

Qu'après six semaines de guerre on puisse faire tout le long du front une sorte de grande promenade de tourisme militaire, voilà qui justifie le mot de *guerre chinoise* que prononçait [...] un officier, ou cette réflexion: Nous sommes embarqués dans une guerre qui ressemblera peut-être davantage à une guerre du XVIIIème siècle qu'à celle de 1914. Une de ces guerres avec des à-coups et de longues périodes stagnantes, où, entre deux opérations, on prend ses quartiers d'hiver. [...]. On pouvait craindre que cette molle et morne période qui s'est écoulée depuis la guerre et une propagande insidieusement défaitiste n'aient eu pour résultat d'affaiblir les caractères et les réflexes de la défense. On pouvait craindre aussi que les raisons du conflit fussent plus difficiles à saisir.

Sadoul (ibid.) comments: 'Pas un mot sur les opérations militaires sur le front. On ne parle que de la guerre diplomatique. Nous prenons vraiment nos quartiers d'hiver.' He then reflects (ibid.) a recent discussion with a friend: 'Notre guerre ressemble, pour des raisons homologues de décadence sociale, aux guerres du XVIIIème siècle qui sont les dernières du système féodal'.

Thus we see that Aragon was not alone in thinking of these days as 'Jours carolingiens'.

That the final line of the second stanza ('Et ce que l'aube fait l'ignore le couchant') is the poetic translation of a view held by others at the time can be seen in an experience that Sadoul (1977, p. 53) noted on 9 October:

Sur les conseils d'un caporal, après l'appel, j'ai voulu gagner Nancy par une route inconnue. Je marche longtemps sur le macadam des banlieues. Un brouillard à trente mètres m'entoure d'un cercle magique [...]. Très démoralisé [...]. Ce brouillard me paraissait l'image de ma situation actuelle. Isolement total, absence de perspectives sur ce que sera demain.

In the poem itself, the inversion of subject and verb in the second half of this line (8) stresses the absence of continuity, of direction, being expressed here.

Stanza 3

The poet now vividly brings out the emptiness of these soldiers' lives, the lack of solidity, the apathy, the colourlessness, their sense of being less than ghosts, as they wander through houses evacuated of their former inhabitants. These men are like ghosts but without the distinguishing features of clanking chains, white sheets or moaning noises. They are bereft of ideas, they are pale, noonday phantoms, wraiths of a period in which they had had identities, a period now departed, the era of hopes and dreams characterized by the song *Parlez-moi d'amour*. Of its words (to be exploited at greater length in 'Petite suite sans fil II') perhaps the most relevant here are the following: 'Il est si doux, mon cher trésor, d'être un peu fou. La vie est parfois trop amère si l'on ne croit pas aux chimères'. These men's vision of the future had indeed proved a chimera, and even their present seems insubstantial. As Aragon says in *Le Musée*

Grévin: 'Que ne puis-je [...] Du Paradis perdu retrouver la mémoire' (1979c, p. 216).

That this sense of ghostliness in their present existence was not confined to the men of Aragon's regiment is shown by an almost identical impression reported in his *Journal de guerre* by Sadoul in September 1939. He speaks of 'la salle de bal où nous sommes cantonnés, une sorte de vaste grange, salle de bal banlieusarde, au sol couvert de paille', and then recounts an experience there:

Je me suis réveillé de bonne heure. Je regarde la salle de bal, dont les vitres sont assombries par de la peinture bleue. Les hommes, vus à contre-jour, n'ont pas plus d'épaisseur que des ombres chinoises. Ils se groupent autour de la vapeur lumineuse qui monte des bidons remplis de café chaud. De temps à autre un jour frisant donne un peu de relief à ces silhouettes pâles (1977, pp. 34 and 45).

Stanza 4

It is no longer of love that men speak but of war. Aragon and those others of his generation in this regiment find themselves in the situation of twenty years previously. How ironic had been the conviction then that World War 1 was 'la der des ders'. These men have the feeling that they are resuming the habits of twenty years before, as though these were coats hanging in the cloakroom of oblivion. A reflection of this can be found in *Les Communistes* in the experience of Armand Barbentane, a communist journalist sent to just such a regiment as Aragon was:

Etre tout d'un coup jeté, comme ça, dans cette vie absurde, avec ses conventions, ses règles, ses déguisements... Pour Barbentane, cela fait tout le temps image avec l'autre guerre, ça le ramène à vingt ans en arrière (1966a, p. 167).

Aragon now compares the situation of himself and his fellow veterans to that of Jean-Henri Latude. The latter was an adventurer who, in the hope of gaining a reward, warned Madame de Pompadour in May 1749 of the arrival of an explosive device that he had in fact sent to her himself. For his pains, he was imprisoned without trial for 35 years (from 1749 until 1784). In this historical reference we have an example of 'contrebande'. Sadoul, in his study on Aragon (1967, p. 26), tells us: 'Le poète parle certes ici de ceux qui, comme lui, furent mobilisés en 1939 comme en 1919, mais il pense aussi à d'autres Latudes, ceux de la Santé ou d'ailleurs, ceux d'octobre et ceux d'un prévisible avenir' (*italics in text*). And Pierre Seghers (1974, p. 43) commenting on this stanza asks:

Latude? Par le moyen de la légende populaire et de l'allusion, une sorte de contrebande ferait-elle *subrepticement* [sic], dès 1939, son entrée? Latude... Une boîte explosive, un colis piégé adressé à Mme de Pompadour, trente-cinq ans de prison sans jugement. Latude? N'est-il ici que pour la rime? Trois évasions devenues célèbres, mais de quel prisonniers, de quels légendaires autant qu'insaisissables hors-la-loi, de quelles évasions Aragon parle-t-il? En ce début d'hiver 1939, en France, quels incarcérés tirent des plans dans leurs cachots?

The allusion is to the recently imprisoned Communists (Sadoul 1967, p. 25) and to them could be applied also the following words from 'L'Enfer' in *Les yeux et la mémoire* (1980, p. 116) - 'ce Latude/ Qui rêve dans la nuit les menottes aux poings' - for, as Grenier noted on 14 October, 'L'Epoque révèle, contrairement aux autres journaux, que nos camarades ont été conduits à l'instruction menottes aux mains' (1969, p. 68).

An echo of the reference in the poem can be found in an undated number of *L'Humanité* that appeared in December 1939 after the publication of 'Vingt ans après' in the *NRF* of the first of that month:

Les communistes [...] sont persécutés et 150 ans après la Révolution française, la France terre de la liberté, devient terre de camps de concentration [...]. Il y avait [...] des camps de concentration pour les étrangers mais il n'y en avait pas encore pour les Français. Désormais, cette lacune est comblée puisque par décret le gouvernement vient de remettre en vigueur la lettre de cachet de l'ancien régime.

The next comment of the newspaper is one with which Aragon would certainly have agreed: 'Ainsi, le peuple de France qui fit le Front populaire contre le fascisme se voit désormais appliquer les méthodes fascistes'.

As far as the comparison with Latude applies to Aragon and his fellow *anciens combattants*, it underlines their sense of imprisonment in a past they had hoped to escape, just as Latude himself had three times broken out of his dungeon only to be recaptured. There is no sense of life in the repeated gestures

they are compelled to perform. The lethargy and alienation from life that had been brought out in the previous four stanzas is reaffirmed in the line:

Et semble-t-il ça ne leur fait ni froid ni chaud.

The impression of weariness is appropriate to these veterans returning to this experience 'Vingt ans après', and the autumnal atmosphere has its counterpart in their awareness of the season of life they have reached. This is an aspect that will be developed further by Aragon later in the poem.

Stanza 5

Throughout 'Vingt ans après' the incidence of verbs expressing repeated actions is high: e.g. in stanza 1, 'retrouvé' and 'rattelé', in stanza 4 'reprenons' and 'refont'. In stanza 5 it is exemplified in

L'ère des phrases mécaniques recommence

As in World War 1, the brainwashing, the humiliation, the deformation of human values begins again. In Aragon's first war (recalled in *Le Roman Inachevé*):

Tout y sonnait mortel et faux

Et qu'opposer sinon nos songes

Au pas triomphant du mensonge

Nous qui n'avions pour horizon

Qu'hypocrisie et trahison (1980, p. 285)

He is all the more aware of the lies, hypocrisy and betrayal in his present situation for having experienced the previous conflict, but now it seems that he has been robbed of the dreams that were his refuge from the terrible reality in the past. (The

'trahison' of which he speaks in the lines just quoted is 'la trahison des clercs' discussed in the chapter above on the origins of *Le Crève-Coeur*.) In 1939 he intends by means of 'contrebande' to combat the official lies. As he was to express it in *Le Roman inachevé*:

Arrache le masque des phrases
 Et sous le velours des idées
 Montre ta face défardée (1980, p. 287).

In 1939 the propaganda is disseminated not merely by the newspapers but also by the radio. *Les Communistes* (1966b, p. 94) describes 'cette tempête d'injures et de mensonges dans les journaux, la pression insensée de la radio'. But for Aragon, this *bourrage de crâne* is not merely the strident nationalism, the dehumanisation of friend and foe alike that had characterized the previous World War; now the campaign is directed above all in France against the Communists and against the Soviet Union, seen by those who, like Marcel Déat had been unwilling to 'die for Danzig', as the proper target.

The ceaseless repetition takes over individual thoughts, man surrenders his pride and constantly on his lips is not an authentic ballad (*romance*) but an inane tune dinned into him by the wireless. In his *Journal de Guerre* (1977, p.56), Georges Sadoul talks at length about the songs on the lips of the soldiers of his regiment:

En 1914, avant *La Madelon*, c'était la gaillarde et entraînante *Viens, Poupoule* qui prédominait et qui, chantée à *la Marne*, faillit devenir un nouvel air national. A cette

guerre-ci, la chanson qu'on entend partout, c'est une très triste romance d'amour qu'a popularisée la radio, et que tous, depuis les premières semaines, fredonnent dans les rues et les chambrées avec une obsédante mélancolie:

'J'attendrai, le jour et la nuit, J'attendrai toujours -
J'attendrai ton retour'. Le retour, que nous désirons tous.

Stanza 6

Here the poem insists both on the age of these veterans and on the shortness of the period that has separated the two wars, a thought expressed also in *Le Roman Inachevé* in 1956 along with some comments that could well be seen as appropriate to Aragon's attitude in 1939:

La guerre c'était hier car quarante ans ça passe vite sur la carcasse la guerre d'il y a quarante ans et cette autre qui vint en l'an quarante est-ce que nous ne sommes pas tous les enfants de ce monstre qu'on croit mort à chaque fois qu'il n'est qu'endormi n'avons-nous pas au front de notre tête au fond de notre chair à notre nuque prête à ployer à nouveau la marque du monstre dont nous sommes sortis la guerre et nos bouches pâles parlent contre le ventre qui nous a portés qui nous a faits à sa semblance horrible et rien n'est plus pacifique à l'entendre que le soldat couvert du sang versé qui jure que c'est fini plus jamais il ne versera le sang d'autrui même si on lui joue de la musique même si on lui raconte des histoires de fantômes si on lui donne de belles bottes neuves pour cacher cette tristesse des pieds las
(1980, pp. 290-291).

Yet here they are, these forty-year-olds, being punished for having survived to this age by having to witness the sight of those who had been mere innocent babes at the time of the previous conflict now setting out with them into another massacre. This, of course, ran counter to everything Aragon had hoped for. Extracts from 'Vingt ans après' were appended to the wartime American translation of *Les Voyageurs de l'impériale*, the novel Aragon had hastily completed in the days immediately before his mobilization. Pierre Daix (1975, pp. 298-299) comments on the final lines of the novel and what must have been in Aragon's mind as he wrote them:

Aux dernières lignes, Pascal part pour la guerre de 1914, au moment où la tragédie se répète pour Aragon:

'Non, on se bat pour en finir. C'est la dernière guerre. Il ne faut pas que nos enfants reviennent ça. C'est pour eux qu'on se bat. Quand Pascal pense que Jeannot, un jour, pourrait être comme lui un numéro matricule quelque part dans l'infanterie, son coeur se serre, ses yeux se brouillent. Jamais, jamais! S'il faut crever, on crèvera, mais le petit ne connaîtra pas ça...' Aragon n'est pas Jeannot. Il n'avait pas de père dans l'infanterie, il s'adresse à tous ceux qui, comme lui, n'auront connu que vingt ans de paix entre une guerre et l'autre.

Aragon brings out the pain of those who have not succeeded in preventing the catastrophe from being repeated. It was a feeling expressed also by Sadoul (1977, p. 38) in his diary at the time:

Mercredi 20 septembre. Dans le tram qui me descend de Vandoeuvre, un petit garçon de trois ou quatre ans, blond, frisé, les yeux bleus, de petites dents blanches très écartées. Je lui fais des risettes.

La mère, qui doit avoir son mari mobilisé, dit soudain d'une voix rauque, un peu étranglée:

-Allez, il la fera aussi, la guerre, ce petit-là...

Horrible mot, auquel je ne trouve rien à répondre.

The vision of what awaits the young men is a source of torment for the soldiers of Aragon's age because they have already experienced the horror of the First World War:

J'ai vu la Woèvre à tombe ouverte j'ai vu la Champagne
dépouillée de gencives sur ce ricanement de squelette et la
forêt d'Argonne avec l'épouvante des patrouilles égarées les
sables la tourbe de la Somme et le long dos d'âne disputé du
Chemin des Dames cette arête vive du massacre (1980, p.
291).

The wish (later given expression in *Le Roman inachevé*) that the dead of that war would leave in peace those who had survived and and the infants of the time had remained unfulfilled:

Demeurez dispersés dans nos champs saccagés

Vous gisants que des croix blanches perpétuèrent [...]

L'ordre est mis à jamais dans les grands ossuaires

Spectres de mon pays reposez reposez

Laissez sur vous tomber la dalle et le suaire [...]

N'arrêtez plus les enfants qui s'en vont en classe

Les pauvres survivants ont le droit d'être heureux

Ne les réveillez pas de vos bouches de glace

Ne venez pas troubler le pas des amoureux

Laissez l'oiseau chanter laissez l'ombre être douce

Laissez les jeunes gens s'en aller deux par deux

Que la tombe s'apaise et se couvre de mousses

Que la terre mouillée en étouffe les bruits

Voyez l'herbe se lève et le taillis repousse (1980, p. 300).

But the forces of war, unleashed by the fascists, had in the meantime devastated Spain:

Et j'ai vu l'intermède espagnol jetant ses cadavres sur la
route de Valence nocturne et bleue Madrid plein de coups de
feu le torrent d'hommes qui reflue aux défilés avec les
larmes de l'enfance au Boulou (1980, p. 291).

Now the children of France were to suffer.

Again, in this stanza, the effect of the verbs indicating repetition, a return to a previous situation, is very important (cf. in line 3 'revoir' and line 4 'repartis'). There are also examples of the *rime complexe* of which Aragon speaks in *La Rime en 1940*: in lines 1 and 2 'espace à peine', recalled in 'n'est-ce pas sa pén(itence)' with the help of *rime enjambée*, and 'n'est-ce' rhyming with 'ainesse'. These rhymes certainly call attention to key words in the stanza, as does the effective *enjambement* in lines 3-4 - 'les tout petits/D'alors' - which insists on the fact that the new conscripts were but babes when these veterans

first saw battle, especially with the slight pause created before the telling apposition of 'les innocents' that follows.

Stanza 7

With this stanza comes the full justification of the title taken from the novel of Alexandre Dumas père which tells of the musketeers setting out for another adventure twenty years after those recounted in *Les Trois Mousquetaires*. The title is ironic in that, when they read the story as boys, Aragon and his fellows could not conceive that it would have this totally unexpected significance for them, that it would sum up their whole life.

The words 'Vingt ans après' naturally lead the poet to reflect on the past, and so his thought or imagination wanders on to another track, to the memory, the shade, of a woman whom he had loved.

Interestingly, the manuscript of this poem has 'celles que tu aimas'.

There are at least two possible women to whom this final line of the stanza might refer: to *l'Amie éclatante et brune* evoked in *Le Roman inachevé* or to Nancy Cunard.

According to Daix (1975, p. 174), the first of these was an American whom Aragon had encountered in 1922 but whom he had been unable to approach for three years because she had been the lover of his friend, Drieu La Rochelle. Thus Aragon's relationship began with her in 1925. These circumstances are suggested in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, pp. 324-5):

Si longtemps entre nous deux un autre homme avait jeté son ombre

Il nous semblait qu'aucune nuit pour nous joindre fût aussi
sombre

Assez profonde aucune mer sous le rideau des goémons

Trois ans nous nous sommes cherchés mon *Amie éclatante et brune*
Aux soirs d'éclipse elle m'était le soleil ensemble et la lune
Et son parfum m'est demeuré longtemps dans les Buttes-Chaumont.

The next two stanzas of *Le Roman inachevé* are in keeping with the shadowy reminiscence, the sense of an experience that has run its course, expressed in 'Vingt ans après' in the words 'l'ombre de celle que tu aimas':

A reculons j'ai regardé s'enfuir ma reine blanche et noire
Elle est partie à tout jamais nonchalamment dans le miroir
Et je ne l'ai pas appelée et je ne l'ai pas retenue

C'est étrange un amour qui finit sans même un soupçon de plainte
Ce silence établi soudain quand la musique s'est éteinte
Et ce n'est que beaucoup plus tard que l'on saura le mal qu'on eut.

Aragon's affair with Nancy Cunard is situated by Daix between the winter of 1925-26 and mid-September 1928. She was the Anglo-American daughter of the owners of the Cunard shipping line. She was very wealthy and had had many lovers; the penniless Aragon was keenly aware of the insecurity of his situation. He recalls in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 337):

Elle n'aimait que ce qui passe et j'étais la couleur du temps.

Nevertheless, his passion for her was intense (ibid.):

Une femme c'est une porte qui s'ouvre sur l'inconnu

Une femme cela vous envahit comme chante une source
 Une femme toujours c'est comme le triomphe des pieds nus
 L'éclair qu'on rejoint à la course.

It took him a long time to admit his true position in her life
 On se refuse longuement
 De n'être rien pour qui l'on aime (1980, p. 343).

The intensity of the sense of degradation of his very spirit
 by this woman who flaunted her other lovers in his face comes out
 (1980, p. 364):

Car tu sais ce que c'est D'abord les gens s'amuse
 D'un jeune homme inconnu dont les mots sont de feu
 Et lui ne comprend qu'un baiser vous abuse
 Que c'était pour un soir et qu'on change de jeu

On l'aura trimbalé disons quelques semaines
 Avec les fournisseurs et les valets des chiens
 Il aura pour cela gagé son âme humaine
 Cette musique en lui dont il ne reste rien.

Nancy had often visited Venice where, in September 1928, Aragon
 accompanied her. Her life-style there is described by Anne
 Chisholm (1979, p. 116):

Nancy would take a *palazzo* or part of one [...]. She would
 probably arrive with a lover, invite other friends to join
 her, and plunge into the round of carnivals, nightclubs and
 masked balls. Eventually the parties would be over for that
 year, the summer visitors would leave, and Nancy would have,
 perhaps, a new lover for a short season.

Aragon's emotional humiliation was exacerbated by the fact that he was financially in dire straits. He was expecting a cheque from the sale of a Braque painting, but he waited every day in vain for its arrival.

In these circumstances, Aragon attempted suicide but was fortunately rescued by one of their friends who, having become suspicious of the poet's absence, did the rounds of the hotels until he found the unhappy lover unconscious from having taken an overdose of drugs. Aragon was discovered in time to be saved. He immediately planned another attempt but failed to obtain the necessary barbiturates. On his return to his rooms, he found the long-awaited cheque: 'Je me suis dit, bon, je vais pouvoir du moins m'en aller, je dépenserai cet argent et puis...Je croyais vraiment recommencer' (1968, p. 61).

It seems likely that Aragon is referring to Nancy when he remembers 'celle que tu aimas' in this stanza of 'Vingt ans après'. The phrase recalls similar expressions in 'Poème à crier dans les ruines', written soon after the end of Aragon's unhappy affair:

Je me souviens de tant de choses

De tant de soirs

De tant de chambres [...]

Je me souviens

Je parle donc au passé Que l'on rie

Si le coeur vous en dit du son de mes paroles

Aima Fut Vint Caressa [...]

Aima aima aima mais tu ne peux pas savoir combien

Aima c'est au passé

Aima aima aima aima aima (1974d, pp 297-299).

The bitter unhappiness of the poet even before the suicide attempt of September in Venice comes out in 'Gobi 28', which he wrote at the end July that year (1974d, p. 283):

Je ne veux plus rêver je déteste

le sommeil je ne veux plus

Rêver

Plus rien ne m'est cher pas même l'amour.

After the experience of September, he was to negate the central belief of his life:

Crachons veux-tu bien

Sur ce que nous avons aimé ensemble

Crachons sur l'amour (1974d, p. 301).

Stanza 8

In this stanza Aragon ceases to represent directly the viewpoint of his fellow veterans and moves to more strictly personal considerations, even if they do include aspects that could be seen as having general validity.

Only when we know of the experience with Nancy, can we fully appreciate the immediate contrast between the past tense of 'celle que tu aimas' and the evocation of Elsa Triolet in his present. With the insistence on her singularity, there seems to be a final rejection of the past, dead love in favour of the dominating importance of his wife:

Il n'en est qu'une la plus belle la plus douce

Elle seule surnage ainsi qu'octobre rousse

Elle seule l'angoisse et l'espoir mon amour.

To the traditional compliments of lovers Aragon joins an expression that associates the red tints in her hair to the warm hues of the October landscape. When we remember a line of 'Le Songe d'une nuit d'été' (1977, pp. 61-62) which celebrates both the USSR and Elsa ('Ses longs cheveux où meurt la rouge mémoire d'Octobre'), we can see that the version of the original publication of 'Vingt ans après' in the *NRF* ('Elle seule surnage ainsi qu'Octobre rousse') really meant 'Octobre rouge'.

If Apollinaire says of his 'jolie rousse' (1965, p. 314),

Ses cheveux sont d'or on dirait

Un bel éclair qui durerait,

Aragon, too, often celebrates this aspect of his wife's beauty.

For example, in 'Cantique à Elsa' (1979b, p. 273) we find:

Brûlante toison d'or comme un champ de colza

Le premier je décris et le premier je nomme

Hier inconnue aux astronomes

Ta constellation Chevelure d'Elsa;

or again in 'Elsa au miroir' (1979b, pp. 318-319):

Elle peignait ses cheveux d'or Je croyais voir

Ses patientes mains calmer un incendie [...]

Le peigne partageait les feux de cette moire

Et ces feux éclairaient des coins de ma mémoire.

Now, as he thinks of her at Crouy-sur-Ourcq, she alone surfaces (like his faith in Communism) above all the inner doubts and confused impressions, she contrasts in her vivid reality with

the ghost-like existence he and these other soldiers have been leading. Her reality is felt all the more keenly in her absence, in the emotions it inspires - hope for the future but anguish in the present separation.

Stanza 9

As there are two parts to this poem, so Aragon maintains that there have been two halves to his life: before and after he met Elsa.

She was born Ella Kagan into a family of Jewish intellectuals in Moscow in 1896. Before her marriage in 1917 to André Triolet, a member of the French military mission to Russia, she had become deeply involved in the progressive artistic circles of her native city. She was, for example, a close friend of Mayakovsky, to whom she had been introduced by her sister Lili. Within a few years, Elsa and her first husband separated. After a period spent principally in Berlin, she came to Paris where in Montparnasse she met Aragon on 5 November 1928. The poet was thirty-one, which explains to a certain extent line one of this stanza:

Tu n'as de l'existence eu que la moitié mûre.

In 'mûre' there is once again a facet of the autumnal imagery found throughout the poem. Aragon comments on this word by describing the period of his life with Elsa as 'les ans réfléchis', 'the reflective years' that he is to contrast so vividly with the violent period of Dada and Surrealism which had preceded them. He says of these years with Elsa that they were 'Parcimonieusement comptés mais heureux', as earlier he spoke of 'une vie où l'on parlait d'amour'. Their unity as a couple is

stressed by the final line of this stanza, where we are told people spoke of them as 'Eux deux'.

This impression is tempered somewhat by Aragon's account in 'Une Préface Morcelée 2' (1975a, pp. 41-55) of the beginnings of his association with Elsa:

Je dois énormément à Elsa et simplement d'avoir survécu en un temps où je me tenais à peu près pour assuré de recommencer assez vite ce que j'avais manqué d'accomplir à Venise deux mois et quelques jours plus tôt. Mais à la fin cela m'agace (comme, bien plus encore, cela l'a toujours fait à Elsa, pendant les quarante-deux années de notre vie commune) - cela? je veux dire deux choses: que notre vie ait été cette idylle qu'on prétend, et du même coup que je doive à Elsa mon destin politique (1975a, pp. 44-45).

Aragon goes on to relate how on his return to Paris after the experience of Venice, he had, by the end of October, begun to believe he had found, in a young Austrian dancer called Lena Amsel, a woman who would erase the memory of the past. After his meeting with Elsa he had even acquainted her with Lena. Both women were persuaded that he was still in love with Nancy Cunard.

This must have seemed the case when, one evening in a night club with Elsa, he encountered Nancy and promptly abandoned his new love for his old. He tells (1975a, pp. 50-51) how these hesitations went on for two months until he took Elsa to Belgium for the Christmas holidays:

Je savais bien maintenant, malgré mes airs détachés, que j'aimais Elsa, elle seule, et j'eus le mauvais goût de lui

dire: 'Pour toujours...'. Elsa me regarda de ce regard bleu, lucide, et répondit d'un air d'indifférence: 'Bah, si ça dure un an, ce sera déjà bien joli!' On sait le reste .

André Thirion (1972, pp. 154-171), who shared a flat with Aragon, Sadoul and others at the rue du Château at the time when the relationship began, describes Elsa as the huntress and the poet as the somewhat reluctant prey.

These accounts do rather undermine the impression of the 'coup de foudre' that Aragon gives elsewhere, for example in *Les Yeux et la mémoire* (1980, p. 101):

Et tu vins en novembre et sur quelques paroles
Ma vie a tout d'un coup autrement tourné.

When, in *Le Roman inachevé*, he looks back (1980, p. 399), he is in no doubt about the deciding influence that Elsa has had on his life:

Tu m'as trouvé comme un caillou que l'on ramasse sur la plage.

Stanza 10

He is quite clear that she has lost nothing by not knowing the 'mauvais jeune homme' that he had been, as he says (1980, p. 397) also in *Le Roman inachevé*:

Prends ce fruit lourd et palpitant
Jette-z-en la moitié véreuse
Tu peux mordre la part heureuse
Trente ans perdus et puis trente ans
Au moins que ta morsure creuse
C'est ma vie et je te la tends.

He explains (1968, p.95) to Dominique Arban:

Quand nous nous sommes connus, j'étais quelqu'un d'assez impossible. Il a fallu bien de la patience à Elsa pour me supporter alors, une patience qu'elle n'a pas eue toute la vie comme à cette époque, du moins qu'elle n'a pas eu à avoir, j'espère. Elsa se trouvait devant un homme sortant d'un monde pour entrer dans un autre. Il lui a fallu de la patience pour supporter à la fois les habitudes de l'un et de l'autre, j'entends ma façon de me plier aux exigences de l'un et de l'autre monde. D'autant que si elle supportait mal les impératifs du milieu surréaliste, elle n'était pas communiste. Je veux dire qu'elle n'était pas du parti. Elle n'en est pas, jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

By the time he came to write *Le Roman inachevé*, Aragon's view of his Surrealist period was more balanced than the presentation in 'Vingt ans après' but he could still not forget certain negative aspects, the elements of self destructiveness, the divorce from reality (1980, p. 318):

Voyez voyez ces enfants ridicules et grandioses [...]
 Perdus perdus dans le labyrinthe inventé
 La proie d'eux-mêmes d'eux-mêmes minotaures.

However, time had brought a willingness to see the positive side too (1980, p. 321):

Malgré tout ce qui vint nous séparer ensemble
 O mes amis d'alors [...]
 Nous avons comme un pain partagé notre aurore
 Ce fut au bout du compte un merveilleux printemps.

In 'Vingt ans après' he dismisses the Aragon of that 'marvellous spring' as a mere shadow, recalling the earlier 'ombre de celle que tu aimas': that past love and that past self are now 'Perdus dans la forêt des signes perdus' (1980, p. 318).

As he says in *Les Yeux et la mémoire* to Elsa:

Avant toi je n'étais qu'une ombre inassouvie

L'errement de moi-même aveugle et sourd (1980, p. 101).

Stanza 11

If Aragon reflects here in a general way on the mutability of human beings, he soon returns to his personal situation, to the repeated gesture that expresses the meaning of Elsa's tenderness towards him, as she effaces the worry from his look and consoles him for the grey streaks in his hair. The events that were about to ensue were to accelerate the ageing process in him: the following autumn he was to write to people he knew in America, signing himself - 'Your old friend (my hair is now completely white)' (Josephson 1946, p. 12).

Stanza 12

The imperfect tense of 'Tu passais tendrement la main sur mon visage' in the previous stanza makes all too keen the awareness of his separation from her now and here his emotional response is expressed not only in the words he uses but in the abrupt change from the previous four-lined stanza form to one of six lines. The void of the 'spectres du plein midi revenants du plein jour', of the shadows of past love and past youth, contrast with the reality of Elsa, of his feelings for her. She represents the only true values to which he can turn in this sad dusk not only of an

October day but of a whole era, of a season of dreams. The pain of not being able to speak of his love directly to her overcomes him. It makes him lose the thread of his poem, his voice fails him, he sees no direction in his life, no joy, because she is no longer at his side. When it is read aloud, the lengthened final stanza, which forms a single sentence, convincingly conveys the impression of a voice strained with emotion

In the feeling that Aragon expresses for Elsa, there is the triumph of love over its negation in the experience of Venice in September 1928. There is perhaps no better comment on what the poet is trying to say to Elsa in this final stanza than the following words of *Arma virumque cano* (1979b, p. 195):

Mon amour, tu es ma seule famille avouée, et je vois par tes yeux le monde, c'est toi qui me rends cet univers sensible et qui donne sens en moi aux sentiments humains.

Aragon comes over in this poem as a representative of his generation but also as an individual with a love that is both extraordinary and exemplary.

J'attends sa lettre au crépuscule

Written at Crouy-sur-Ourcq in October 1939, this poem was first published in the *NRF* of 1 December the same year.

Variants

Stanza 2: in the *Epreuve* and in *NRF* (1 December 1939), this stanza is formed by lines 12-21 (i.e. 'Que les heures tuées [...] Les terres remuées'); lines 22-23 form a separate couplet; lines 24-26 are also separated from lines 27-30 which are then followed (as in 1979b, p. 107) by the single line 31 ('Rien dit le vaguemestre').

In the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* of April 1941, lines 18-23 ('Qui suit l'avenue [...] Triste triste et rêvant') form a stanza 3; then lines 24-31 as found in 1979b, p. 107.

Stanza 1

This is technically and visually an ingenious piece that brings out the boredom, sadness and pain of Aragon and his fellow conscripts at Crouy-sur-Ourcq. The poem seems to follow on immediately from the 'crépuscule triste' of the final stanza of 'Vingt ans après'.

The texture of the twilit sky is evoked in the words 'cretonne/Pompadour' which refer to a brocaded cotton used in wall hangings or tapestry. 'Pompadour' (see the remarks made below on the word 'coiffure' in the final stanza) might also conjure up a picture of the clouds turned back in a high roll as in the hairstyle named after the mistress of Louis XV.

Another, contraband allusion may be concealed here. In *Les Communistes* (1966a, p. 242), at the point relating to the period when the poem was composed, there is an account of a gathering of *le Tout-Paris*. One of the guests arouses particular interest among certain of the ladies present: 'Mais c'est la Pompadour, *darling!* Vous ne reconnaissez pas la comtesse? Rien ne se mijote plus dans le pays sans elle! Elle va faire rétablir les lettres de cachet [cf. the discussion above on 'Latudes' in 'Vingt ans après'], et elle nous enverra tous en prison!' Thus, is Aragon in the first two lines of the poem additionally suggesting that the time is reigned over by this modern Pompadour? If there is a covert reference, it may be to Hélène, Comtesse de Portes (the mistress of Paul Reynaud, who was to become Prime Minister in March 1940). Her fashionable political salon was a meeting place of the notorious *Comité France-Allemagne*.

A note of familiarity (or disrespect?) is now introduced with the expression 'et comment', which also allows Aragon to make a typically clever rhyme in line 5.

In the dusk, he can see a little car negotiating the drive through the grounds of the château in which the regiment is billeted. A more detailed impression is given in *Les Communistes* (1966b, p.33-34):

La 3e Compagnie occupe le château de Malemort. Dans cette humide fin d'automne, un lieu à la mesure, à la démesure de son nom. On y accède, laissant la route nationale, par une interminable allée en ligne droite, formée d'arbres géants [...], une allée défoncée, avec une terre rouge [...].

L'allée, tracée pour mener à quelque demeure somptueuse, se perd dans les champs; mais, par un crochet de la dernière minute, un chemin plus modeste emmène à quelque deux cent mètres de côté le promeneur, qui tombe sur un tout autre paysage où, de nouveau, l'on pressent une résidence presque royale, peut-être déchuë, mais enfin le nom de Malemort, le château promis s'accommodent de ces grandes douves tracées au-delà de champs tombés aujourd'hui à des cultivateurs [...]. Quelques grands charmes font un porche aux champs au-delà de ces fossés, on aperçoit le dessin militaire de ces défenses d'eau, doublés de talus à la Vauban [...]. Le château, on tombe dessus à la dernière minute: précédé d'une énorme prairie qui a pu être une pelouse embrassée de deux chemins abandonnés [...]. Et derrière une nouvelle barrière d'eau, faite pour être le miroir d'un château Louis XIV, ce n'est qu'une maison bourgeoise, large, à deux étages, sans grand style ni beauté. Le vrai Malemort a brûlé quand les Impériaux ont envahi la France de Napoléon [...]. Et la maison de plaisance est le vaste campement de la 3e Compagnie, hommes, bureaux, infirmerie, chambres d'officiers, popote et cuisines [...]. Au milieu de la France, de la guerre [...], on vit ici hors du temps, une vie de tortue, dans un cadre qui, mieux qu'aux guerres napoléoniennes ou à la grandeur du Roi Soleil, fait rêver au siècle des Armagnacs et des Bourguignons. Ici le Capitaine Balpêtré et ses officiers mènent une vie féodale, oubliée [...]. Ici, autour d'eux, cette compagnie semble une armée

perdue, oisive, nostalgique [...]. On a beau s'ingénier à employer les hommes, ils n'ont qu'à flâner, braconner [...]. Les journées se font languettes malgré la saison, et bien que courtes à regarder la montre. Pour ceux qui manquent de cigarettes, c'est à crier.

It is not difficult to understand how, in this atmosphere of faded feudal grandeur, Aragon comes to think of 'la Pompadour' and, at the same time, treats the mention of her name a little irreverently.

Spanning the end of line 3 and the beginning of line 4 of the poem, 'auto/Na' constitutes the first example here of 'rime enjambée' (the rhyme being with 'cretonne' of line 1), and Aragon deliberately isolates 'Navigue' to give a visual impression of the dilatory progress of the vehicle.

A complex rhyme is now made between 'et comment' of line 2 and 'écho ment' in line 5, drawing further attention to these words which already stand out typographically. The car which is approaching is bringing the mail and the poet longs for its arrival. He thinks it is nearer than it is, and then realises that the echo he hears is in fact not from the still distant van but the sounds of evening from the surrounding woods.

More contraband may well lie here. In the words 'l'écho ment' there is perhaps an attack on the newspaper *L'Echo de Paris*. It was conducting a virulently anti-communist campaign at the time, and Aragon's attitude to its reporting of the political situation must certainly have been negative.

In line 6, the word 'entonne' immediately attracts attention. With its meaning of 'to strike up', it seems too forceful for the context of woodland song. It is, however, appropriate to another anthem, one very dear to Aragon. In the section of *Les Communistes* which evokes his life in the 220e RRT, (1966a, p. 192), he gives an instance of an occurrence that was not rare at the time he was writing this poem. He describes troops being marched (1966a, p. 192):

Un officier va et vient le long de la colonne sur un cheval bai à crinière blonde, une bête de labour. Il semble leur crier quelque chose. Les sous-offis qui encadrent la troupe, en tenue, eux, ont l'air de gardes-chiourme, ils s'agitent. Et il monte du piétinement une espèce de murmure. Tout d'un coup, Sivry prend le bras d'Armand, avec stupeur: 'Vous les entendez? - dit-il.

-Quoi?

- Ils chantent!' En effet, ce chahut morne est un chant [...]. Sur la route, là, à cent cinquante mètres, ce convoi... on ne peut pas dire cette compagnie... chante sourdement *L'Internationale*.

Sadoul (1977, p. 70) recounts a similar experience in a troop train bound for Vesoul on 6 November 1939: 'Dans le compartiment voisin du nôtre, plusieurs soldats, à mi-corps hors de la portière, hurlent *L'Internationale*, à l'ébahissement des voyageurs qui sont sur les quais. Le petit sous-lieutenant qui nous convoie fait la sourde oreille.'

Occurrences of this kind gave the lie to reports in newspapers such as *Le Jour-Echo de Paris* that the PCF, just because it was banned, had perished and had lost all support. In fact, the authorities were worried that this was not the case. Thus, in early November, Léon Bailby, the owner of the above journal, was expressing the view that 'le communisme constitue encore à l'heure actuelle le plus grave danger qui menace la patrie...C'est à l'intérieur de notre pays, partout où dix hommes sont rassemblés, à l'usine, aux champs, à l'armée, que le traître, l'appointé de Staline essaie de s'introduire et que trop souvent, il y parvient' (Grenier 1969, p. 81).

In the light of such circumstances, it is possible that when he evokes here 'le parc monotone/Où rêve un régiment', Aragon is not merely stigmatising the fact that France's soldiers were being kept in morale-sapping inactivity but is also hinting at the massive regiment of Communists and Communist sympathisers that he believes has not been destroyed but is merely waiting to reorganise. In *Les Communistes* (1966b, p. 93) he describes some of the clandestine activity of his party comrades during the early months of the 'Phoney War':

Pour un qu'on arrête, dix qui repoussent! Ils recrutent, vous ne vous rendez pas compte. Si stupéfiant que ça paraisse, ils recrutent! On ne dit pas les choses dans les journaux. Bien sûr, à Passy ou aux Champs-Élysées...mais dans les quartiers ouvriers, la banlieue, les usines, tous les jours il surgit de nouveaux tracts, des papillons collés. Il y a des cellules clandestines qui éditent et

diffusent jusqu'à deux fois par jour des proclamations. Ils vendent dix sous leur *Humanité* illégale, dix sous. Ils ont atteint le tirage de l'*Huma* légale...

The section of the poem, 'Que les heures tuées...Les terres remuées', is of particular technical interest. It is cited by Aragon himself in *La Rime en 1940*, as an example of the use of 'la rime enjambée', of 'la rime complexe', and of 'la légitimation de l'hiatus par la rime composée, et son équivalent sonore parfait (*Et tu es - tuées*), l'absurdité de la vieille prohibition démontrée par un exemple parallèle qu'eût autorisé la prosodie traditionnelle (*l'avenue et - nuées*). L'hiatus est ramené à la diphtongue' (1979b, p. 167 and note 2).

It is interesting to learn from Aragon's remarks here that he regarded this section of ten lines (12-21) as a 'strophe', because they did indeed form one stanza at the first publication of the poem in the *NRF* of 1 December 1939. The following two lines ('Y vois-tu ma maîtresse/Triste triste et rêvant') formed a separate couplet, before being assimilated to this stanza in the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* in 1941. In fact, these two lines, by their endings, belong to the rhyme scheme of the next stanza.

The unrelenting tedium of the 'Phoney War' at Crouy-sur-Ourcq is brought out (in lines 12-14) by the reluctant death of the hours 'killed' there by the soldiers, and we can hear an obvious echo of the words 'Meurent mal' in the name 'Malemort' given to the 'château' described in *Les Communistes*.

Aragon now introduces (in line 15) the first of the many classical allusions in *Le Crève-Coeur*. In *La Rime en 1940*, Aragon says: 'J'élève la voix et je dis qu'il n'est pas vrai qu'il n'est point de rimes nouvelles, quand il est un monde nouveau' (1979b, p. 163). But he is ready to turn to any epoch and to any sphere of human activity. As an example, we shall see in later poems how important a part religious expression plays in the work of this atheist. The reference in 'Et tu es/ Mon âme et mon vautour [...] /Mélancolique amour' is to the punishment meted out to Prometheus, to the ever renewed suffering imposed on him by the vulture that daily tore at his liver as he remained chained to a pillar in the Caucasian mountains. The image is very effective in portraying the anguish of the poet: his love is the very centre of his being ('Mon âme') and the source of constantly recurring torment ('mon vautour') because he, too, is a captive, in the endless desolation of Crouy-sur-Ourcq, longing for news of Elsa. (As he says in 'Vingt ans après': 'Elle seule l'angoisse et l'espoir mon amour'). The 'rimes enjambées' of 'Ourcq/[...] vautour/C [...] amour/Qu' are very successful in stressing the links between these words in the thoughts and feelings of the poet.

By an imaginative process reminiscent of his surrealist past, the poet now (in lines 16-21) creates a series of unexpected transformations. He condenses his melancholy feelings of love in the fine droplets of vapour (like tears?) that form the evening mist which rolls along the avenue like a lorry (thus recalling the earlier 'petite auto' which carries all his hopes of a letter

from his wife) and then, like a master mariner setting off on a long voyage (and here Aragon takes up the word 'Navigue' of line 4), moves away from the ploughed earth up into the clouds (in the 'terres remuées', which he obviously wants to escape, there is perhaps an allusion to all the futile digging the soldiers had been compelled to carry out and possibly, as well, to the unwelcome stir of events caused by the outbreak of war). The comparisons are hardly less striking than those in the lines of Laforgue's 'L'Hiver qui vient' (1975, p. 184) that may have helped to inspire them:

Oh! leurs ornières des chars de l'autre mois
 Montant en don quichottesques rails
 Vers les patrouilles des nuées en déroute.

Once in the sky, this 'Capitaine' may spy the poet's sad and dreaming mistress, a conceit that is part of a traditional form of expressing longing (cf. Reynaldo Hahn's 'Si mes vers avaient des ailes').

Final stanza

Aragon sustains this manner in the final full stanza. (Here one could see a justification for saying that the previous two lines form part of a sense-unit that comprises the final ten lines: indeed, the rhyme pattern of the poem indicates a structure of three ten-line stanzas). The poet asks whether the gilded light of the sun on the clouds is the representation of his loved one's hair (cf. the remarks earlier on 'un ciel de cretonne/Pompadour') as she wears it on earth. The physical passion he has experienced with her (and which he so desires to renew) is brought out very

vividly in the description of the gold of her tresses (by association with 'dorure') as a 'trésor mordu souvent'.

In the ensuing four lines (27-30), he addresses the wind in a bid to learn what message it carries from her. The answer comes in the form of a wish (corresponding to his own desires) that he might remain at her side as he had before the Polish campaign had begun, the nostalgia for 'une vie où l'on parlait d'amour' and the lack of enthusiasm for the war already suggested in 'Vingt ans après'.

At the end, this 'ethereal communication' proves all too insubstantial as the post orderly, having at last arrived in his little van, informs the poet that there is no letter for him. The final line, made more effective still by the pause that precedes it, is cuttngly cruel after all the intense longing conveyed in the fantasy of the previous section.

The ingenuity of the rhyming reaches a climax in these final ten lines. Aragon perpetuates the rhyme in 'estre' (in fact, four times he produces the *rime riche* of 'restre') by splitting it between lines: 'maîtresse/Tr'; '(dorure) est-ce/Tr'; 'terrestre'; 'Reste/R'; 'l'est/R'.

And so this poem can be seen as a particularly good example of the fusion between the modern and the traditional mode that Aragon thought necessary for his message.

Le Temps des mots croisés

This poem was written in October 1939 and was first published in the *NRF* of 1 December the same year. On 1 December also, the poem was read by Madeleine Renaud at the *Comédie Française*.

Variants

Stanza 11: *Epreuve* (for *NRF* and stamped 10 November 1939) has five lines here and includes line 1 of stanza 12, which is thus reduced to three lines.

Stanza 1

In line 2 the poet would seem to be referring with the words 'vous veillez' to the 'midnight sun', but the lack of punctuation creates an ambiguity, so that the reader could easily associate the 'vous' with the 'Épouses d'épouvante' of the following line and visualise these wives lying awake, married now only to terror after the departure of their men to the war. But this impression of direct address is then corrected, with 'elles font leur étude', to a third person view. However, as we shall see, the wives will, in stanza four, be addressed as 'vous', and this time not by the poet-observer alone, but by a collective 'nous'. These changes of perspective are a striking feature of the poem and will be discussed as they occur.

In line 1 the 'soleil de minuit', complemented alliteratively by 'sans sommeil solitude', renders very well the effects on these women of the separation from their conscripted husbands: they know no ease, they cannot escape into the darkness of sleep.

The use by Aragon of the 'midnight sun' (alluding perhaps to the electric light burning into the night) to convey this sense of restlessness may have its source in a memory of Elsa's that she had no doubt recounted to him. She was presently to refer to it in 'L'Air du temps' in the *NRF* of February 1940 (quoted 1964, p. 16):

Il y a en Finlande d'été, des nuits blanches. Une nuit qui est blanche a cette couleur dite 'lumière du jour', que donnent les ampoules bleues, et qui n'a rien à voir avec le jour véritable. Pendant une nuit blanche, il fait clair sans qu'on puisse dire comment ni pourquoi, pas très clair, en vérité, suffisamment pour vous mettre la tête à l'envers, vous y mettre des idées folles [...]. Les doubles rideaux n'y font rien, on la sent derrière.

In January 1940 she evoked this Paris of absences, of emptiness:

Les téléphones sonnaient dans le vide des appartements: il n'y avait personne à l'autre bout du fil;

and the nights of fear:

La sirène de la première alerte m'avait presque soulagée: j'avais l'impression qu'elle hurlait à ma place. Les nuits valaient leur pesant d'horreur (1964, p. 14).

For Sadoul (1967, p. 27), the initial words of 'Le Temps des mots croisés' summed up the whole period of the 'Phoney war':

La signification profonde des vers publiés par Aragon durant la 'drôle de guerre' 1939-1940 se trouva échapper à la censure, mais non à beaucoup de lecteurs, d'autant plus émus

que cette voix poétique fut la seule à pouvoir légalement se faire entendre au temps où tu régnais 'ô soleil de Minuit'.

Stanza 2

The first line of this stanza asks the reader to reflect on who bears the responsibility for the war and expresses the sense of shock people felt at its actual arrival.

Elsa recalls (1964, p. 13):

'La mobilisation n'est pas la guerre...' disait-on en 1938. Comme en 1914. En 1939, c'était la mobilisation et c'était la guerre. On l'attendait depuis longtemps et, pourtant, ce 1er septembre 1939, le ciel nous tomba sur la tête.

The adjective 'panique' in line 2 very cleverly underscores the effect of 'peur' in the first line, and one can imagine the feelings of the Parisians in the blackout. Aragon captures the atmosphere of the period in greater detail in *Les Communistes* (1966b, pp. 106-7):

On aguerrit la population parisienne, on la prépare, on lui fait des réflexes. C'est vrai: on lui fait les muscles de la peur, les nerfs de la fuite, les pieds de la panique.

The third line, with its beautiful balance, characterizes the inner and outer worlds of the time: the sandbags in the attics could not deaden the fears within people's hearts.

Stanza 3

The dread of the future expressed in the last line of the previous stanza (no-one now wants to know of the predictions in the tarot cards) is continued here with what is perhaps a reference to *Macbeth*, the witches having become masculine to

avoid a rhyme between 'sorcières' and 'bruyère' at the end of the line and to avoid possible ambiguity in the identity of 'Elles' in line 2.

In the next lines, Aragon movingly conveys the suffering of the women, bowed with the anguish of separation from their lovers who have been consumed by the vast maw of the Gare de l'Est. In the *NRF* of 1 January 1940, Elsa was to describe how she herself had accompanied Aragon to the train, to see him off to the war:

Il faisait chaud le 2 septembre 1939. Dans une gare
inconnue, car le mystère de Paris est si grand qu'on peut y
cacher même une gare, il y avait un train très long, qui
répondait aux lois de la perspective [...]. Quelques femmes
restées sur le quai pleuraient maintenant que le train était
parti dans le grand soleil [quoted 1964, pp. 13-14].

The 'gare inconnue' was actually that of Vincennes-Fontenay (Aragon, 1989a, vol. 3, p. 1353).

Stanza 4

Here the wives are addressed directly, and Aragon speaks in the name of his fellow soldiers to tell of the intensity of lost happiness, of the broken circle of the lovers' embrace, of the mutual, but unheard, unseen expressions of longing and tenderness. Particularly poignant is the 'baiser troué' of line 4 that conveys the unfulfilled desire for loving contact.

Stanza 5

From a collective viewpoint, Aragon now moves, as in 'Vingt ans après', to the personal situation of Elsa and himself. The bitterness of absence is brought out as it is described as the

'abominable absinthe de la guerre' (there is of course a deliberate ambiguity here since 'abominable' could equally apply to 'absence'). The poet was to re-use this association in *Le Roman inachevé* where he says: 'Parfois j'ai le regret de la guerre avec son parfum d'absinthe' (1980, p. 288). In 'Le Temps des mots croisés', however, his feelings about the war are totally negative: it has caused the unhappiness of separation. The pain of such absence was to be recalled by Aragon some two years later in *Cantique à Elsa*:

Amants écartelés quelle pire aventure
 Craindre que cette mort de l'absence essayée
 Naguère à cette guerre où les baisers se turent
 Mort de ne plus se voir torture

De toutes les chansons trop chèrement payées (1979b, p. 269).

There is indeed a bitter contrast between the present separation and the physical and emotional intimacy that had characterized their life... 'naguère' (line 3). How painful is the echo here in the rhyme with 'guerre' (line 1). The other rhyme of this stanza is an example of the system adopted by Aragon from Apollinaire which gives both 'grisée' and 'faisait' masculine endings. By contrast, 'Bar/barbare' in stanza 9 and 'J'adore/Va dors' in stanza 12 become feminine rhymes.

Stanza 6

This stanza is one of regret for time together, 'ces heures doubles', not fully cherished, a message conveyed in the four-times repeated 'pas assez'. There is an awareness of the feelings

they have in common ('nos coeurs concurrents') but also of their diversity ('nos songes différents'), of each other's mysterious inner world not sufficiently investigated.

In Aragon's love relationship with Elsa, there is deep communication, as when he says in stanza 4:

Nos jambes se mêlaient t'en souviens-tu naguère

Et je savais pour toi ce que ton corps faisait;

but there are also depths that remain unfathomed as in 'Cantique à Elsa':

C'est elle dans mes bras présente et cependant

Plus absente d'y être et moi plus solitaire

D'être plus près de son mystère (1979b, p. 268).

This closeness and yet separateness of lovers had already been expressed in *Cligés* by Chrétien de Troyes to whom Aragon was already turning for inspiration:

Comant dui cuer a un se tiennent

Sanz ce qu'ansamble ne parviennent (1975, lines 2791-92).

Stanza 7

Here Aragon dedicates his poetic vision to Elsa: the whole point of his observing aspects of the external world with his creative sensitivity is to communicate them to her. In line 4 there may again be an allusion to Shakespeare (*Macbeth*), illustrating the poet's ability to transform apparently static reality.

Stanza 8

At the beginning of the poem, Aragon conveyed the fears of the wives in their lonely, sleepless nights; now he expresses the intensity of his own longing for Elsa as he lies in a bed empty

of her bodily presence and of the colour of her hair, of her eyes, of her skin.

There is another change of perspective as he moves from direct address to the third person form, as though he were talking to himself, and no longer to Elsa, when he says:

Faut-il que tout m'échappe et si ce n'est pas elle
Que me fait tout cela.

As at the end of 'Vingt ans après' he said 'je perds [...] le fil [...] / de ma vie', so now he fears that the situation is running away from him, everything is slipping through his fingers, and without her what does anything that is going on matter? In line 4 'tout cela' would seem to refer to the war and its presentation by the authorities.

Stanza 9

Georges Sadoul (1967, p. 26) explains what the poet means here when he says 'Je ne suis pas des leurs':

Les lettres d'Elsa, les conversations de bouche à oreille,
les journaux, la radio lui avaient appris aussi en octobre
que certains, hier nos proches, quelquefois par 'crise de
conscience', mais trop souvent pour d'ignobles motifs,
avaient abandonné la cause qui, dans les pires conditions,
restait la nôtre avec une passion qui passa dans ces vers.

Thus the reference would seem to be to those who had taken the path of the ex-Communist Deputies whose activities are described by Grenier (1969, p. 61) in an entry of his diary dated 6 October 1939:

Cinq députés de notre groupe, Loubradou et Saussot de la Dordogne, Fourrier et Brout de Paris, Declerq du Nord, ont distribué au Parlement un manifeste où ils reprennent tous les 'arguments' de nos adversaires, les aidant ainsi directement dans la répression.

The full bitterness felt by such as Aragon was expressed by *L'Humanité* on 30 October 1939:

Ils ont touché leurs trente deniers [sic]

Les traîtres ont reçu leur denier de Judas. Capron, Fouchard et Jardon, ces trois élus qui, reniant le Parti Communiste, avaient trahi la classe ouvrière, viennent d'être libérés de la prison de la Santé.

Les travailleurs les accueilleront comme ils le méritent. Quant aux autres élus communistes et aux militants syndicaux emprisonnés et qui sont restés fidèles au peuple, le gouvernement Daladier a refusé de les mettre au régime politique.

Ils restent dans d'infectes cellules, soumis au régime des criminels et des voleurs.

The commitment of Aragon to his Party is expressed very vividly in this stanza. The impossibility for him to be on the side of 'them', of those who, in his eyes, had betrayed the PCF, is emphasized in the powerful poetic use he makes of a sculpture by Ligier Richier in the Eglise St-Pierre at Bar-le-Duc, which represents a skeleton offering up its heart in its hand to God.

Stanza 10

Aragon cannot cut through his living flesh and separate himself from what he holds so dear, he needs the fraternal warmth provided by the comradeship of his party. Aragon himself (1953, p. 32) clarifies the contraband sense of an allusion like 'chaleur germaine':

C'est dans le langage familier des communistes l'habitude d'appeler le Parti, la Famille [sic]. Dans les conditions de l'illégalité cette expression remplaçait presque toujours dans les conversations, les lettres, le nom même du Parti. Et toute allusion à un communiste se faisait disant: un cousin, un oncle etc. Il n'est pas interdit de voir là une preuve de plus de ce qu'est profondément la famille pour des communistes: eux qui n'ont rien trouvé de plus tendre à dire de leur parti que de le nommer ainsi.

Another, related sense of 'chaleur germaine' is of the warmth of love that he shares with Elsa: 'Mon amour, tu es ma seule famille avouée' (1979b, p. 195).

As Sadoul (1967, p. 26) comments:

Sans doute le 'Je ne suis pas des leurs' devient après quatre strophes [cf. stanza 12] un 'Je suis à toi' et la chair est d'abord ici celle des amants. Ceux qui entendirent à la Comédie-Française le 1er décembre 1939 'Le Temps des mots croisés', quand Madeleine Renaud eut le courage peut-être inconscient de lire ce poème, le comprirent donc surtout comme un lamento des couples séparés par la guerre.

Pourtant la dernière strophe sonnait comme un appel de clairon.

For Aragon, it is those who are responsible for the war, those who are using it to repress his party, helped by those *L'Humanité* calls 'traitors', who have caused the unhappiness of *les amants séparés*.

Stanza 11

Aragon's commitment to the creation of a new world is linked to his highest value, love, and the lyricism of these lines, in which this value is further linked to the fecundity of nature, contrasts with the darkness of the times.

Stanza 12

Now, having told us four times that 'Je ne suis pas des leurs', the poet tells Elsa 'Je suis à toi Je suis à toi seule', and the intimate, personal details he gives of their life make these words all the more intense.

It is interesting to see that, when Aragon says here 'J'adore/ La trace de tes pas' (lines 1-2), he is restoring a context of positive emotion to words that he had used in 1928 to express, in 'Poème à crier dans les ruines', the death of his love for Nancy Cunard:

Ecoute ces pays immenses où le vent
 Pleure sur ce que nous avons aimé
 L'un d'eux est un cheval qui s'accoude à la terre
 L'autre un mort agitant un linge l'autre
 La trace de tes pas (1974d, p. 297).

Both he and Elsa must have been aware of the link.

Stanza 13

In the final lines of the poem, he tenderly tells his love to sleep, he will watch over her. As he remains awake (the 'vous veillez' of stanza 1 has become 'Je veille'), the night of sleeplessness and fear of the wives left alone, the night of longing and emptiness of the poet without Elsa, becomes 'la nuit du moyen-âge', for him the darkness of reaction that covers this 'shattered universe'. Here we find Aragon using the Middle Ages in a negative sense, as later in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 418) where he describes the destruction of the Reichstag in February 1933:

Les flammes ont passé leur bague
 A cet étrange bâtiment
 Et l'on voit à leur clarté vague
 Les dents des loups l'éclair des dagues
 Tout un moyen âge dément.

But, of course, the poet was to go on to exploit the mediaeval period of French history in an ever more positive way, both in *Le Crève-Coeur* and in the other works completed during the war.

If, on 10 May 1940, in 'Le Poème interrompu' (1979b, p. 134), he talks still of 'la nuit qui ne veut plus finir', in 'Le Temps des mots croisés' he hopes that one day, even if it is not for Elsa and himself, the storm will cease and that the time of the little notes exchanged between lovers, as they had exchanged their notes, will return. This is a hope intimately linked to his political outlook:

La récompense pour le communiste est affaire de l'espèce humaine et non de l'individu. La croyance au progrès, au progrès indéfini, et infini de l'homme, en la montée de l'humanité vers un soleil que, lui, ne verra point mais dont il aura préparé obscurément l'aurore, voilà l'idéal communiste (1953, p. 39).

One could apply to the final stanza of this poem what Lucille Becker (1971, p. 70) says in her analysis of *Les Communistes*:

The Marxist universe is not an existentialist but a manichean universe, in which the forces of light are pitted against the forces of darkness, which they will eventually defeat to ensure a better world.

The interplay in 'Le Temps des mots croisés' between the blackness of the political situation and the fate of lovers, of lovers in general and of Elsa and Aragon in particular, is shown well in the movement between the vastness of 'cet univers brisé' and the intimacy of

La trace de tes pas le creux où tu te mis
Ta pantoufle perdue ou ton mouchoir.

We find in this poem a sentiment similar to the one he was to express in February 1942 at the end of 'Arma virumque cano':

Je veux qu'un jour vienne où, regardant notre nuit, les gens y voient pourtant briller une flamme, et quelle flamme puis-je aviver sinon celle qui est en moi? Mon amour (1979b, p. 195).

Roger Garaudy (1961, p. 361) explains the basis of the title of 'Le Temps des mots croisés', fully exploited in its last line,

when he tells us that it was written 'au moment même [...] où [...] étaient interdits les 'mots croisés' parce qu'ils pouvaient servir de moyen d'expression pour l'espionnage'.

Sadoul concludes his comments on the poem by saying (1967, p. 27):

La 'nuit du Moyen Age', durant ce dernier trimestre 1939, s'épaississait ainsi qu'une prison. Il était évident que le directeur de *Ce Soir* ne pouvait publier alors légalement, sous sa signature, un article au contenu politique évident, où il aurait dit sa fidélité à son parti et à ses idées.

But, as we have seen, Aragon was able to communicate with his friends through his poetic 'crosswords'.

Petite suite sans fil

The circumstances under which this set of poems was written have been illuminated by Michel Apel-Muller in an article on *Les Voyageurs de l'impériale*. He tells of the reconciliatory meeting, at Granville in Normandy in 1939, between Aragon and Gaston Gallimard, quoting the poet's own recollection of the event:

Jean Paulhan s'entremet entre nous, Gaston Gallimard m'écrivit, je demandai une permission à mon colonel et, au début de novembre je crois [...] je me rendis à Granville, non loin d'où s'était 'repliée' la Nouvelle Revue Française, y passai un après-midi avec Gaston: la paix était faite.

Michel Apel-Muller continues:

Début novembre donc, sans aucun doute avant le 15, puisque le 15, Aragon écrit à Germaine et Jean Paulhan au sujet des poèmes dont la publication dans la NRF, en décembre, signalera la réconciliation entre les deux hommes [...]. Dans une seconde lettre, non datée (sauf 'mardi'), Aragon signale à Jean Paulhan qu'il a oublié sa robe de chambre à l'hôtel, non loin de Granville, où celui-ci l'a logé, et il ajoute: 'A propos de chemin de fer, aller et retour de Granville j'ai écrit un nouveau poème. Le meilleur. Les voyages forment la jeunesse' (Archives Jean Paulhan). Le poème en question n'est pas nommé mais il y a lieu de penser qu'il s'agit de 'Petite suite sans fil' [...] quatrième poème du *Crève-cœur*, dont on sait que les textes ont été publiés dans l'ordre chronologique (1988, pp.169-170 and 206).

The poems of 'Petite suite sans fil' were first published in *Mesures VI, 1* on 15 January 1940.

In the first of these three poems, there is a development of the line in *Vingt ans après*:

L'ère des phrases mécaniques recommence.

As in that poem, too, Aragon here evokes the mood of lethargy that afflicts the soldiers, and we see that they are easy prey for the repetitive idiocies of the radio. The title 'Petite suite sans fil' embodies a pun that is particularly applicable to the first two parts of the sequence: 'A little "unconnected" suite for the wireless'. But, despite what Aragon says, there is a thread linking the poems: they all show the soldiers in a state where they have lost control, not knowing what is really happening, separated from their loved ones.

I

There are no variants.

First Quatrain

The poem opens with a list of foreign radio stations, ranging from Holland to Denmark to Czechoslovakia, and this gives credence to the statement that the universe splutters static interference into Mozart. 'Parasites' is another example of Aragon's decision to use modern technological vocabulary in his poetry.

In the same way as the entire universe afflicts Mozart with static, so every day in the week, from Monday to Sunday, the inane announcer dedicates, to silence, the rubbish that he keeps on repeating, the mish-mash that is an insult to the listener's

intelligence. As the pure melody of Mozart is ruined, so is silence destroyed.

Second Quatrain

Here the poet uses an audacious mixture of classical allusion and surrealist word-association to bring out the situation not only of the men but of their wives and loved ones.

These lines contain a reference to the story of Jupiter and the Princess Io. He fell in love with her, but his wife, Juno, was jealous. To disguise Io, Jupiter turned her into a white heifer. In this poem, however, Jupiter is the soldier armed with modern thunderbolts, and the 'vache princesse' of whom he is 'enamoured' is war. He has left 'Io' in the lurch, and all she can do is listen every night to the radio full of the static that is the only news she gets of her husband. The expression 'poux bruyants' in line 8 recalls the earlier 'parasites', but it also reminds us of the gadfly (*taon*) sent by Juno to torment Io, just as the wives left at home are tormented. The complexity of the rhyme (to be discussed later) and the associations in this quatrain justify Aragon's claim that poets can write something new. We see how the internal rhyme of line 8 ('des poux'/'époux') is a development of the rhyme in the following stanza of Apollinaire's 'L'Emigrant de Landor Road' (1965, p. 106):

Mais pour noyer changés en poux
Ces tisseuses têtues qui sans cesse l'interrogent
Il se maria comme un doge
Aux cris d'une sirène moderne sans époux.

It is interesting to compare Elsa's experience of the time with that of the women in this part of 'Petite suite sans fil'. In March 1940 in the *NRF*, she told of how everything closed at eleven o'clock in Paris:

Que se passe-t-il sous le manteau de Paris, après les 11 heures réglementaires?

Pour moi, ce sera la radio [...]. J'appuie mon front à la radio, à une voix, c'est parfois un soulagement qu'une voix humaine:

Y a des cailloux sur toutes les routes,

Sur toutes les routes y a du chagrin...

Des kilomètres de chagrin... (Quoted Triolet 1964, pp. 20-21).

Sestet

From the soldier's wife listening for news of her husband, we move to the husband himself, who is 'hiding' (line 8), but, of course, not of his free will: he has been separated from his loved ones and no information is given as to his whereabouts. He and the other men are listening to the voice on the radio as well. We may compare this situation to the one evoked in *Les Communistes* (1966b, p. 35):

Les soirées n'en finissent plus parce qu'elles commencent de bonne heure [...]. On se résigne parfois à mettre la radio. Quand on ne sait à quel saint se vouer. Oh, pas sur les informations. De la musique. Tout le monde est content quand on ferme le poste. Un boucan. Ça vous casse les oreilles, ça siffle, ça crache, ça craque.

In this poem, however, the men are seemingly paralysed, stupefied by the 'insultant pot-pourri' (line 4) constantly dished up by 'l'idiot speaker' (line 3), and there they remain, 'caressing' not their wives, as they would like to do, but the various radio stations, still hoping for news of a change for the better in their situation.

The cruelty of their plight is brought out in the juxtaposition of this hope 'interrogating the ether', with all the connotations of pure atmosphere that this last word contains, and the utter banality of the message the heavens actually provide: 'Carter's little liver pills are the best'.

The poem gives us an impression of the transformation in the lives of these men and women that has been caused by the war: 'C'est la guerre'. Just as the harmonies of Mozart are bedevilled by static interference, so the tranquillity of the soldiers and their families has been ruined by the conflict.

If Mozart represents all that is worthy of admiration, if his genius may be seen as all that is positive in the human being, then the commercial for liver pills, and the other rubbish spouted by the radio, may be seen as expressions of the soullessness that has taken over the world. The picture of the men hanging on to these broadcasts is a poignant example of what Aragon had stated in 'Vingt ans après': 'L'homme dépose enfin l'orgueil'.

In the context of the times, there can be little doubt that Aragon did not cite the name of Mozart by chance. In an article

entitled 'Reconnaissance à l'Allemagne', published in *Commune* in February 1939, he recalled how, in the First World War,

Des blasphémateurs imbéciles [...] tous les jours dans la presse française écrivaient des choses à défailir de honte, sur les poètes, les penseurs et les musiciens allemands,

and how,

ayant corrigé un vers du poème 'Les Colchiques', publié dans *Alcools* en 1913

Le gardien du troupeau chante tout doucement
pour lui préférer

Le gardien du troupeau chantonne en allemand
Apollinaire, avec la guerre, était revenu, effrayé, à la première version. C'était le temps des poètes épouvantés.
(1979b, pp. 32 and 31)

In the same article, Aragon related how in the trenches in 1918 he had come across the body of a young German soldier who had been sitting reading from a book of poetry when death struck:

Le petit livre rose à croix jaunes avait joué pour moi un grand rôle. Il m'avait appris le mensonge des maîtres, de Barrès à Bergson, qui rejetaient avec l'ennemi, ce qui ne saurait être l'ennemi de la France, la pensée allemande, prisonnière des barbares comme la nôtre, et comme la nôtre chantant dans les chaînes.

In *Pour expliquer ce que j'étais* (1989b, p. 69), written probably in 1943 in the darkest hours of the Occupation, he recalls how 'vers 1916, un agent de police, à la demande des

voisins, était monté me dire de jouer quelque chose de plus patriotique, comme j'écorchais du Wagner sur le piano'.

In 'Reconnaissance à l'Allemagne' in February 1939, foreseeing an imminent war with Nazi Germany, Aragon continued:

Aussi prends-je les devants de l'injustice qui va venir, parce que j'ai connu les outrages d'autrefois. Avant que la colère française n'ait ses égarements, et que la haine juste des hommes d'Hitler ait levé dans tous les coeurs français ce délire qui accompagne les batailles, et entraîne de regrettables méprises qui ne se peuvent éviter, je veux élever la voix et dire ma reconnaissance à la véritable Allemagne.

Je veux dire des mots dont on puisse un jour se souvenir dans l'orage. Je veux pendant qu'on peut encore m'entendre affirmer que cette véritable Allemagne, c'est pour elle que nous nous battons (1979b, pp. 31-34).

With the outbreak of the Second World War, as Aragon had prophesied, the distinction between Nazi and German was not made by the propaganda media. Thus *L'Humanité* wrote on 26 October 1939:

Est-ce mener une guerre démocratique populaire que déchaîner dans notre pays les forces réactionnaires qui déjà ne parlent plus de lutter contre Hitler, mais de lutter contre l'Allemagne, le peuple allemand, dans toutes les conditions.

It was particularly dangerous for Aragon to make his humanist and internationalist point in circumstances where the Communists were widely accused of being the allies of Hitler.

This poem is one of the most audacious in the collection. Audacious in its images and in its contrasts. Audacious, too, in rhymes like 'rade Io/radio' (lines 6-7); in combinations of *rimes complexes* and *rimes enjambées* as in 'lundi au/Dimanche' and 'dédie O/Silence' (lines 2-3); or internal rhymes like 'Pleine des poux bruyants de l'époux' (line 8); or unusual rhymes like 'caressent/Bucarest' (lines 10-11), or 'autrefois/foie' (lines 12 and 14), both of which conform to Apollinaire's system.

The poem is traditional only in that it **does** have rhyme and in the fact that it employs the sonnet form and the alexandrine. But notice how this line is disrupted by frequent enjambement or by interjections like 'O/Silence' spanning lines 3-4, and 'C'est la guerre' (line 9).

And, if we are counting syllables, what about the remarkable three the poet gets from the three consonants 'PTT' in line 11, or two from 'Brno' in line 1?

This first part of 'Petite suite sans fil' shows Aragon as a technical master, able to adapt traditional prosody and to revitalize rhyme.

II

Variants**Stanza 1:**

line 1: MS1 has 'petites ondes' written above an original version 'courtes ou longues' now deleted;

line 5: MS1 has 'Et les mots à venir [two words illegible]'.
Above this version is written (and deleted) 'sont si lents Et les mots sont si';

line 6: MS1 has deleted version 'De ce bled où nous so' [sic] written above 'Ah parlez-moi d'amour'; the line continues with 'les mots sont' (deleted); then 'Les lettres que c'est long'; above 'Les lettres' is written (and deleted) 'à Paris';

line 7: MS1 has 'A venir' added at beginning of line and then deleted; after 'De ce bled', 'à venir' is preferred to 'où je rêve' (deleted).

Stanza 3:

line 1: MS2, TSS have 'Ne parlez plus d'amour';

line 2: MS1 has 'qui l'ont grisé' preferred to deleted version 's'en venaient';

Stanza 4:

line 1: MS1 has 'Mais si parlez d'amour encore et qu'Amour rime';

line 4: MS1 has 'Et folie' deleted at beginning of line;

line 5: MS1 has 'Branchages' preferred to 'Arbres' at beginning of line; above 'noirs et nus' (but deleted) is written 'dépeuillés de l'hiver'.

Stanza 5:

line 5: MS1 has 'Semblable' added at beginning of line and preferred to deleted version 'Pareil'; MS2, TS1 have 'Pareil'; TS2 has 'Pareil' (deleted) and 'Semblable' added in the hand of Jean Paulhan;

line 6: MS1 has 'fûmes' written over 'allions'.

Stanza 6:

line 3: MS1, MS2, TSS, *Mesures VI*, 1 (15 January 1940) all have 'le lit'.

After the final line of this part II of 'Petite suite sans fil', MS2 has , spaced half-way along the page:

'Dimanche 17 Décembre [sic]

Ma chérie [sic], c'est ma lettre du dimanche soir. Avec l'incertitude encore, attendant le retour du médecin-chef pour cette permission peut être [sic] pour mardi. Il sera là dans la matinée. Je donnerai cela à mettre en pneu, j'espère à quelqu'un. Peut être [sic] arriverai-je avant ma lettre. Je t'aime

L.

The second of this suite of poems exploits the song *Parlez-moi d'amour* already evoked in 'Vingt ans après', where Aragon writes of 'une vie où l'on parlait d'amour'. Now, this song in waltz-time by Jean Lenoir stands for a whole genre of melodies provided by the radio. Elsa was to write in March 1940:

Jamais il n'y a eu tant de chansons françaises où la poésie est à son aise, de belles chansons déchirantes, toutes des chansons de guerre, puisque toutes elles parlent d'amour, d'absence, de peine (quoted Triolet 1964, p. 20).

As we shall see, Aragon takes a less positive view of the 'poetry' of these songs.

Stanza 1

We find the poet once again concentrating on his personal relationship with Elsa, whereas, in the first poem of 'Petite suite sans fil', he had painted a broader picture. As in the next three stanzas, there is an address to the radio, here an appeal for it to speak of love, the love that affects his heart with rhapsody and pain, 'chants et [...] cris' (line 2). Again, too, the loneliness is brought out, the doubts and fears caused by the separation of the lovers from one another. In Aragon's case, these fears were also for Elsa's safety, fear that she might be harassed by the police because of his political status, something that did in fact happen in June 1940 (Triolet 1964, p. 26).

The radio should speak of love to console him for the length of time it takes for letters to reach him from Elsa. All the frustration of Aragon, the Parisian, being trapped in boring little Crouy-sur-Ourcq comes out in the words:

'Les lettres que c'est long/De ce bled à venir et retour de Paris'.

In *Les Communistes*, the poet recreates his own situation in the worries of the character Robert Gaillard for his wife:

Qu'est-ce qu'elle fait Yvonne à cette heure-ci? Elle ne dort sûrement pas. Je ne vais pas me mettre à penser qu'il est arrivé quelque chose. La dernière lettre est d'il y a cinq jours [...]. Cinq jours pour venir de Paris, les lettres. Soixante kilomètres en cinq jours! Peut-être qu'on les

retient au Régiment, les bureaux du colonel... Qui est-ce qui met son nez là-dedans? [...]. Tout ce qui a pu se passer en cinq jours (1966b, p. 39).

As noted above, *Parlez-moi d'amour* is a waltz, and its triple time is suggested at several points in the poem: here, by the thrice occurring 'Ah parlez-moi d'amour' (lines 1, 3 and 5) and in the division of the first line: 'Ah parlez-moi d'amour/ ondes/ petites ondes'.

To evoke the banality of the love-songs played by the radio, Aragon subtly provides within line 3 the typical rhyme of such ditties: 'amour/jour'. In the song itself it is exemplified by 'amour/toujours'. In stanza 4, we shall see him giving a dazzling example of how to escape such clichés of rhyme.

In this first stanza, he shows us how *rimes enjambées* can be effectively used in 'ondes/[...] l'on/Doute [...]/long/De' to link the 'love' transmitted by the *petites ondes* to the real pain of doubt and waiting. Similarly, the power of *rime complexe* is shown in the way 's'écrit' (line 4) is coloured by the previous 'ses cris' (line 2).

Stanza 2

The supposed ability of the songs on the radio to beguile the reality of distance and absence is at first extolled and then scornfully dismissed. The triple beat of the waltz is again evoked by the rhythm created by the rhymes in lines 1-2: 'La valse et la romance/Tromperont la distance et l'absence'. The rhymes affect the tone of the words and exemplify what Aragon says in *Arma virumque cano*: 'comme la rime a pour mission de

fixer la prononciation, elle doit servir à fixer les nuances d'expression que j'invente' (1979b, p. 186).

The ball that is about to commence is one at which neither she nor he were present: the music is to suggest a schmaltzy world of 'love' that does not correspond in the least to their reality. In lines 2-3, notice the disjunction in 'où/Ni toi ni moi n'étais' (rather than 'étions') that underlines their present separation.

Aragon is, of course, being very ironic when he says 'Les violons rendraient les poètes jaloux' (line 4) and he is scathing about the bombast of the songs with their 'mots immenses' (line 5).

The bathos of the final line of stanza 2, with the vastness of the night and the sky opening up to these worthless refrains, expresses the poet's real view.

The waltz rhythm is once more indicated (and appropriately so, given the sense of the words) by 'Un bal où/Ni toi ni moi n'étais/va s'ouvrir' (lines 2-3). Notice also the typically clever complex rhyme between 'bal où' and 'jaloux' that contrasts with the repetitive banality of the rhymes of the songs suggested in the recurring sound of 'romance/distance/ absence/ commence/ immense/ chansons'.

Stanza 3

But even the synthetic emotion of the 'chansons de deux sous' has affected him, so great is his susceptibility. He now pleads with the *petites andes* not to speak of love: in this stanza, therefore, the repeated injunction in lines 1, 3 and 5 is: 'Ne parlez pas d'amour/Ne parlez plus d'amour/Ne parlez plus d'amour.

The beat of his own heart drowns out ('couvre') the 'refrains sans fil' (in the double sense of 'sans fil' explained earlier) that have 'intoxicated' it. The effect of the melodies has been to make him think even more intensely of Elsa, to be tortured by the nearness and yet farness of his love. The *rime enjambée* created with 'battre' (line 1) in 'là-bas/Trop proche' (lines 2-3) is cited by Aragon himself in *La Rime en 1940* as an example of

l'enjambement moderne, surenchère à l'enjambement romantique, où ce n'est pas le sens seul qui enjambe, mais le son, la rime, qui se décompose à cheval sur la fin du vers et le début du suivant [...]. Elle précipite le mouvement d'un vers sur l'autre pour des effets qu'utilise la voix, et que le sens supérieur du poème vient dicter (1979b, pp. 164-5).

This is proof once again that Aragon's composition is deliberate, the effects thought out, and here the voice can pause only slightly on 'là-bas' before explaining its poignancy with the words 'trop proche et trop lointaine'.

In lines 5-6 of this stanza the poet employs synaesthesia, evoking, with the help of alliteration, the various impressions communicated by the fire in order to recreate the essence of his love: the light and warmth of the flames, their song, and the perfume of kisses they emit. One can imagine these sense impressions coalescing to let Aragon feel, however tenuously, the presence of Elsa, and one is reminded of Apollinaire (1965, p. 258) attempting to do the same with Madeleine Pagès in 'L'Inscription anglaise' :

un soldat s'efforce

Devant le feu d'un bivouac d'évoquer cette apparition
 A travers la fumée d'écorce de bouleau
 Qui sent l'encens minéen
 Tandis que les volutes bleuâtres qui montent
 D'un cigare écrivent le plus tendre des noms.

Stanza 4

Like the swirl of the waltz, the poet's emotions revolve, and he now countermands his previous order to the radio. He wants to yield entirely to its music of love. Here we find one of the most successful of Aragon's *rimes complexes*, one which ridicules 'le déconcertant *dictionnaire* [des rimes] si comique et qu'on trouve encore dans les boîtes des quais' (1979b, p. 165).

It plays on the most banal of rhymes in love-songs, that between *jour* and *amour* evoked already in line 3 of stanza 1. On this very rhyme, Aragon has the following to say:

Si nous prenons *jour* et *amour* pour type de la rime classique, on apercevra, à cette lumière, que ce genre de rime demande pour moi tout un travail préalable qui explique que j'y fasse appel: par contraste notamment à des rimes plus inattendues, plus laborieuses, qui rendent à la banalité jour-amour un caractère d'extraordinaire fraîcheur. Loin de condamner la rime classique, je m'échine à lui refaire une jeunesse (1979b, p. 187).

And this is what the poet achieves in this stanza when he says 'et qu'*amour* rime/Avec *jour* avec *âme* où rien du tout', which, of course provides the ultimate *rime complexe*.

If Aragon gives the impression of having been carried away by the the love-songs on the wireless, it is in fact to enable him to make a deadly serious point:

Parlez d'amour car tout le reste est crime.

Everything else that is being dinned into the listeners by 'l'idiot speaker' is, in the poet's view, a crime. The pairing of *rime/crime* is quite frequent in Aragon's poetry of the war period. It occurs, for example, in 'Les Amants séparés':

des cris que les vents calmèrent

Du frémissement de leurs rimes

Du frémissement de leurs crimes (1979b, p.117). The

context in that poem is, as we shall see, the arrest of Aragon's Communist comrades. The rhyme occurs again in *Le Musée Grévin* where he is protesting at the prison camps in which the Germans are holding French patriots:

C'est une absurdité que de mettre des rimes

A ce que chacun sait silencieusement

Mais serait-ce donner des ailes à leurs crimes

Que dire en vers français les bagnes allemands (1979c, p. 217).

In this second poem of 'Petite suite sans fil' it is very likely that, when he says 'Parlez d'amour car tout le reste est crime', he is referring to the war propaganda and he is complaining of 'les bagnes français' in which his friends languish.

He turns to surrounding nature to find corroboration of his analysis: amid the leafless branches, the blackness of which is

wiped off like grease-paint by the whiteness of the snow, the birds flee the madness of men, and the abandoned nests are like the vanished joys of 'une vie où l'on parlait d'amour'. This ability of the snow to 'wipe away' the blackness appropriate to Aragon's view of the political situation was commented on also by Elsa in March 1940:

La neige s'étale, elle recouvre de sa blancheur calme et perfide les champs, les arbres, les maisons. La froide arme blanche, tranchante et pointue, blesse et torture sans qu'une goutte de sang tombe sur tant de blancheur. L'homme s'étend sur le duvet de la neige, il est bien sous cette neige qui tombe sans bruit, sans odeur, sans poids, qui se dépêche d'effacer toutes les traces, de recouvrir le cadavre, d'égaliser la blancheur du champ (Triolet 1964, pp. 18-19).

But, in this poem, the cadaver of past happiness is all too visible.

Notice how a clever echo of the omnipresent 'parlez' is given by the complex rhyme of 'par les' in line 4 of this stanza.

Stanza 5

Love for Aragon is synonymous with Elsa. To be with her is to enjoy the delights bestowed on the Chevalier Renaud (in Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata*) in the gardens of the irresistibly seductive sorceress, Armide, who, by her charms, kept him from his duty with the Crusaders beleaguering Jerusalem.

What further links Aragon and his fellow soldiers to Renaud is that they, like him, had failed to express their love (cf. 'Le

Temps des mots croisés', stanza 6) before they set out on their 'crusade' against Hitler, here in the guise of Saladin.

Typically, Aragon does not observe strict historical accuracy.

The Crusade depicted by Tasso was the first one, led by Godefroi de Bouillon; whereas Saladin was the sultan who faced the third Crusade. Here, Aragon's remarks in *De l'exactitude historique en poésie* (to be discussed at greater length in connection with 'Les Croisés') lead us to believe that he preferred to use Saladin rather than Soliman, as chronology would have demanded, because the former's name is much better known and also provides a rhyme with 'paladin' in line 4 here. Another factor is that the attention of those who do know their history will be aroused.

The story of Renaud and Armide is one of which the poet is fond. He re-uses it, for example, in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 335) to evoke the beginning of his love affair with Nancy Cunard:

Tu me parles de ton enfance et ta tête est sur mes genoux
 Dans la chambre au premier qui pour nous sera les jardins
 D'Armide.

In this stanza, too, there is a *rime complexe* that is discussed by Aragon in *La Rime en 1940*:

Parler d'amour c'est parler d'elle et parler d'elle
 C'est toute la musique et ce sont les jardins
 Interdits où Renaud s'est épris d'Armide et l'
 Aime sans en rien dire absurde paladin

où l'écriture nous permet (au choix) d'adjoindre l' au troisième ou quatrième vers (1979b, p. 166).

In 'Renaud [...] absurde paladin', there is perhaps also a contraband sideswipe at the poet's political enemy, Paul Reynaud, who, though extremely small, posed with immense self-importance at the side of his mistress the Comtesse de Portes.

Stanza 6

The radio waves are no longer addressed. Now 'Nous parlerons d'amour'. Elsa and he will speak of love until (the sense of *tant que* when followed by the subjunctive) day breaks, spring returns and the sparrows sing. The conviction of 'Je parlerai' and of 'nous serons' is strong: he will speak of love in a bed full of dreams in which they will both lie as close to one another as the inner and outer circumferences of a single golden ring (they had married on 28 February 1939). The authenticity of the feeling expressed in these last lines contrasts with the 'mots immenses' of the 'chansons de deux sous' broadcast by the radio. The lovers' warmth of intimacy, as opposed to the unreality of the songs, comes out most strongly in the final line, where he is certain that 'tu me rediras Laisse donc les journaux', and one can imagine her adding softly: 'et parle-moi d'amour'.

The different voice at the end of the poem is conveyed also by the change in form (cf. 'Vingt ans après'), the six-line stanzas becoming one of four lines followed, after an effective pause, by a single line that renders beautifully the closeness they want to enjoy again.

The words appended by Aragon to MS 2 of this poem when he sent it in the form of a letter to Elsa confirm the longing and the love it expresses.

III

Chant de la zone des étapes

Like the other parts of 'Petite suite sans fil', this 'song of the supply zone' or 'rear' was written, according to Aragon, in November 1939 (rather puzzlingly, given the initial line of 'Décembre décembre décembre').

Again, like the other sections, it was first published in *Mesures* VI, 1 (15 January 1940).

Variants

Stanza 2, line 4: MS1, MS2, TSS, *Mesures*, VI, 1, (15 January 1940), all have 'Toujours pas à tes galons d'hiver Capitaine'.

Stanza 3, line 4: MS1 has 'Dragons montés', followed by 'Train' written above 'sapeurs' (this last word deleted); MS2 has 'dragons montés sapeurs'; TS1 has 'dragons montés train' (this last word is written above something illegible); *Mesures*, VI, 1 (15 January 1940) has 'Dragons montés Train'.

In MS1 and MS2, the final two stanzas of 'Chant de la zone des étapes' are absent.

At the end of MS1, but deleted, is the following:

Nous dont le coeur bas en [?] chamade

[Space]

Et nous toujours pris [?] de cette

Roulant [?] le fardeau [?] bleu [?] de [?] nos corps tatoués

Nous attendons la mort [?] qui fait [?] joug

Pour mieux abandonner nos carcasses troués [sic]

Mettre [?]

Stanza 1

The negative presentation of the landscape is very striking, with the brown fields, though full of crowing cocks picking at the wisps of straw left after the harvest, described as being like whipped dogs. And the sun, punningly addressed as the 'duty captain' (orderly officer) and the 'captain of daylight' (cf. in 'J'attends sa lettre au crépuscule' the comparison of the 'camion de buées' to the 'Capitaine au long cours') is as sickly white as someone who has been hanging about in his room rather than going out into the fresh air. One thinks again of 'L'Hiver qui vient':

Ce soir un soleil fichu git au haut du coteau
 Git sur le flanc, dans les genêts, sur son manteau,
 Un soleil blanc comme un crachat d'estaminet
 (Laforgue 1975, p. 183).

Stanza 2

Aragon now picks out a soldier (himself?) shaving (and bored?), outside in the wind, one eye on his cheap mirror and whistling the while. A 'mirliton' is a novelty whistle, and the poet has added the suffix *-aine* to make it rhyme with 'fontaine' (line 2), but also to evoke the thinness of the sound and the jingle of the tune. The lack of respect in the soldier's mind for military authority is expressed in line 4 ('Capitaine' here presumably does refer to the officer).

Stanza 3

Jean Ristat tells us (Aragon 1989a, vol. 3, p. 1356) that 'Mareuil-Sur-Ourcq, May-en-Multien, Brémousselle et Gandelu, sont

des villages voisins de Crouy-sur-Ourcq où était cantonné le régiment d'Aragon'.

The soldier's mind seems to be on all those unfortunates who have been torn from their homes and deposited in these hamlets that have station-nameplates like drops of water on the railway embankment along which the train passes.

The various kinds of troops who have been assembled (and Aragon thinks this number is already too many: 'N'en jetez plus') are listed: anti-aircraft gunners (*Défense Contre Avions*), dismounted dragoons transported by lorry; sappers ('sapeur' should be plural); troops moved by horse; combat-gas units ('Groupes Z'). Given the sense of this last expression, the rhyme with 'Dieu les aide' (line 1) is particularly chilling for the prospects of all these soldiers.

Stanza 4

The poet now interprets the thoughts of these soldiers who, like him, are quartered in the grounds of châteaux which have been destroyed in previous wars (cf. 1966b, p. 33, quoted in the discussion on 'Vingt ans après').

Is the fact that the poet says these châteaux repeat a refrain of *la Fronde* merely to suggest the atmosphere of a bygone age that surrounds the men here, or is there, in addition, in the evocation in that struggle between despotic authority and the forces opposed to it, a contraband reference to the present state of France as viewed by Aragon?

Certainly the soldiers are unhappy with the situation as they gaze deeply at the sky.

The 'capitaine de jour' (the sun or the officer?) is addressed once more and is urged not to propagate the false rumour that the Earth is round, i.e. that all is as it is supposed to be. This was only one of the many 'faux bruits' to which Aragon took exception.

Stanza 5

Here the poet combines, ever more typically in this collection, the world of classical allusion and references to the the most modern and most deadly technology (again following Apollinaire's example in *Calligrammes*).

Aragon evokes the age-old fretfulness of the wife whose husband has departed to war (though it should be noted that, like these men, Ulysses went off **most unwillingly**) and seems unlikely to return for **many** a year.

If times, in a sense, have not changed since Homer, the risks faced by the soldiers have. Submarines and not Sirens would lie in wait for those sent to Syria, an unlikely destination, it might be thought, in a war supposedly against Hitler.

Georges Sadoul (1977, p. 65) wrote in his diary on 23 October 1939 an account of how he had narrowly escaped being posted to Syria and, in a note added later, he explained why he was glad to **remain** with his unit in France:

J'aime mieux rester sur la ligne Maginot pour me battre contre Hitler, que d'aller en Moyen-Orient dans un corps destiné à des opérations antisoviétiques. Car, au cours de conversations [...] sur les importantes forces françaises dirigées vers la Syrie, nous avons conclu qu'elles étaient

dirigées, non contre Hitler, mais contre l'URSS. Dédutions que confirmèrent, en 1940, les documents officiels français de La Charité-sur-Loire, saisis et publiés par les Allemands, mais dont l'authenticité ne fut jamais contestée.

We may take it that Aragon had come to the same conclusion, all the more so when he may well have read in *L'Humanité*, in the very month of December of which he speaks at the beginning of the poem, the following comments:

La Guerre Contre L'URSS [sic]

Toute la presse aux ordres accentue sa campagne contre l'URSS. Les plus fidèles serviteurs de la réaction capitaliste [...] commencent à parler ouvertement de la guerre contre les soviets [sic]. Léon Blum dans son *Populaire*, vient à la rescousse, Fabry dans *Le Matin* annonce qu'une armée d'Orient est constituée. Contre qui? et pourquoi?

The sense of 'Ce sont toujours les temps d'Homère' (line 4) is made clear by the first line of the next stanza: 'Ce sont toujours les temps maudits'. In May 1940, in a context of unhappiness, Elsa (1964, p. 26) was to quote this poem: 'Mais les permissions ont une fin. "Ce sont toujours les temps d'Homère"'.
Stanza 6

Stanza 6

Aragon recalls here the bleak realization of 'Vingt ans après': that he and his fellow veterans of the First World War now face another conflict on the same devastated ground that covered the blood of those who had fallen. The bitterness of the poet's

evocation of these battlefields, bare of corn, may be compared to what Prévert (1988, p. 94) wrote in 1937:

il y a eu
 un homme qui a écrit ces mots
 Demain sur nos tombeaux les blés seront plus beaux
 c'est triste
 c'est regrettable
 parce que le blé ne pousse pas
 précisément
 sur les tombeaux des hommes qui sont tombés
 pour que monte ou descende
 le cours du blé.

Aragon dismisses the official glorification of that previous slaughter in his mockery of the 'angel with curlers' that perches atop the war memorials erected to the dead. In the words of 'Vingt ans perdus', there is real pain that contrasts with what he considers to be the *kitsch* of these sculptures.

What this earth meant to him is expressed in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 286):

Voici la région des tirs
 Voici la roue et le martyr
 Le fer y tombe des nuées
 Y vivre a pour règle tuer
 Entends l'approche des marmites
 Sous le crépuscule des mythes
 Dans cette terre déchirée
 Le cri de la chair labourée.

In Aragon's view, the 'ange à bigoudis' was part of the myths that were still being propagated about the 'Voie sacrée'.

Stanza 7

The viewpoint of the poem is now given by 'nous', 'ceux de l'autre guerre', who, if they had not perished, had nevertheless not emerged unscathed from that conflict. They bear the scars of victors (how ironic does this word sound in the context): their lungs, impaired by the gas attacks to which they had been exposed, puff like tugboats. Continuing the nautical imagery, the poet compares the men to old 'tubs' ('rafiots') that sailed once upon a time.

Stanza 8

The sense of age, of weariness, of these conscripts of Aragon's generation is brought out even more strongly here. As in the previous stanza he had said 'Nous sommes ceux de l'autre guerre', he now says 'Nous sommes ceux de l'autre amour', as if their attitude to love had been forged twenty years previously. They feel out of touch with the enthusiasm of the the young generation, uncomprehending of the flowers these young people scatter in an apparent act of defiance towards the reality perceived by the older men. The roses of their own time (cf. 'Les Roses de Picardie') have lost their romantic effect and merely provoke attacks of emphysema, the legacy of the last war.

In *Les Communistes*, where, according to Jean Ristat, 'La vie au sein du 22e Régiment Régional de Travailleurs [in which Aragon was serving at this point] est décrite' (Aragon 1989a, vol. 3., p. 1356), just such men are portrayed (1966b, p. 15):

On voit courir des poussifs, s'arrêter, l'air épuisé [...]
 Tout cela dans les trente-cinq à quarante-neuf ans [...]
 coeurs mal en point, emphysèmes insuffisants pour la
 réforme, asthmes, jambes douloureuses. Des estomacs qui
 demanderaient des précautions.

It is no wonder they feel of the young that 'Aimer mourir c'est
 à leur tour'.

We can only admire Aragon's skill and ingenuity in fulfilling
 the demanding rhyme-scheme of abba by making use of such
 original *rime complexes* as 'fils aiment/ défi sème/ emphysème'.

Stanzas 9 and 10

The poet evokes very simply and poignantly the sufferings of
 his fellow veterans in the words of stanza 9, lines 3-4:

La triste école

De la vie a marqué ces saints sans auréole.

For all the terrible experiences they may have had of
 shrapnel, of the mustard gas used by the Kaiser's army at Ypres
 (thus 'L'Ypérite fameuse', stanza 10, line 2), of the Balkan
 front in Salonica, none of these compared with the wounds
 inflicted on them by love. In 'L'amour noir' (stanza 10, line 3),
 Aragon may be recalling Baudelaire's 'Sonnet d'automne' (1961, p.
 71):

Mon coeur [...]

Ne veut pas te montrer son secret infernal [...],

Ni sa noire légende avec la flamme écrite [...].

L'Amour dans sa guérite,

Ténébreux, embusqué, bande son arc fatal.

When he says (stanza 10, line 4),

Et la guerre pour eux la paix est ironique,

he would appear to be expressing something similar to what we find in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, pp. 291-292):

La guerre mais la vie a-t-elle été rien d'autre que la guerre
[...]

et le pis est que la déchirure passe par ce que j'aime et que
c'est dans ce que j'aime que je gémis dans ce que j'aime que je
saigne.

There is no peace for these men, they have learned that 'seul
souffrir est éternel'.

Les Amants séparés

This poem was written in December 1939 and first appeared in *Poètes Casqués* 40, No. 2 of 20 February 1940.

Variants

Poètes Casqués 40, No. 2 of 20 February 1940 has stanzas 2, 3, 4 and 5 in italic.

Stanza 2, line 5: *Poètes Casqués* 40, No. 2 of 20 February 1940 has 'Mais l'Amour'.

Stanza 6, line 6: TS has 'mai'.

Stanza 1

What seems the major theme of the first part of *Le Crève-Coeur* is expressed in the title of this poem, and in the opening lines we are given a poignant picture of the parted lovers. The heartbreaking attempts of deaf-mutes to communicate amid the unheard din of a station are compared to the distraught gestures of the separated lovers in the silence of the winter and of the weapons. The silence of the snow-covered landscape is used to suggest the stillness enforced on the lovers by the fact that they are apart, but this 'silence blanc' (line 4) contrasts with the 'coeur noir du vacarme' (line 2) to point a difference in the situation of the deaf-mutes and the separated lovers: the former might at least see each other's gestures, the latter are deprived even of this contact, and we recall the lines of 'Le Temps des mots croisés':

Entendez-vous nos voix qui murmurent Je t'aime

Et votre lèvre à l'air donne un baiser troué.

On the first four lines of this stanza, Georges Sadoul (1967, p. 25) makes the following comment:

On découvre d'autres déchirements que celui des amants, dans ces vers et les autres. Ce n'était pas seulement les couples que la drôle de guerre avait alors séparés. Ceux qui avaient assisté à la dernière réunion de *Ce Soir*, dispersés par leur mobilisation, s'étaient trouvés 'quelque part en France' au milieu d'inconnus, 'comme des sourds-muets parlant dans une gare', réduits au silence.

'Dans le silence blanc de l'hiver et des armes' il était interdit aux soldats du Rhin et de la ligne Maginot de tirer une seule balle sur la Wehrmacht nazie, mais une guerre s'intensifiait sur le 'front intérieur' contre les communistes, présentés par la presse et la radio gouvernementale comme 'les complices et les auxiliaires d'Hitler'.

The rest of the stanza expresses its meaning in images that require some agility of mind from the reader if he is to comprehend them.

Baccara (line 5) resembles *chemin-de fer*. And so, when in the card game of the nights (i.e. by chance), the dream of love is recreated, if its fingers of fire (here 'feu' contains the ideas of light and of passion) intersect in the clouds, it is on 'birds of iron'. Thus the fingers, that suggest those of the lovers stretching out to each other across the night separating them, are transformed into searchlights that cross each other, focusing on aeroplanes, not on the lark or the nightingale.

Wolfgang Babilas (1982a, p. 456) has explained the reference to Shakespeare here. With 'Ce n'est pas l'alouette O Roméos sauvages/ Et ni le rossignol' (lines 8-9), Aragon is alluding to Act III, scene 5, of *Romeo and Juliet* where Romeo prepares to leave Juliet's chamber as dawn approaches:

Juliet: Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day; it was the nightingale, and not the lark, / That pierced the fearful hollows of thine ear [...].

Romeo: It was the lark, the herald of the morn, / No nightingale.

Thus the contrast between war and peace is brought out: it is no longer a time when lovers, after a night of passion, can differ over the identity of these birds of the natural world. Now 'birds of iron' rule a sky lit by the fires of hell.

The first stanza, with its nine alexandrines, now yields to four stanzas each of eight lines using an eight-syllable metre, and each having the same rhyming pattern (but different rhymes). These stanzas, which are indented from the stanzas that embrace them, give the impression of forming a unit within the poem (indicated even more clearly at the original publication in *Poètes Casqués 40* where they were printed in italic), as though Aragon were speaking in a slightly more intimate voice.

Stanza 2

Georges Sadoul (1967, p. 25) helps us here, too:

Au début d'octobre, trente-neuf députés communistes avaient été emprisonnés à la Santé. Si dans 'Les Amants séparés' le poète parle de 'lettres tristes à mourir' ce fut entre

autres parce que Elsa lui avait appris à mots couverts l'arrestation d'amis politiques, ou leur internement, depuis que la 'loi des suspects' du 18 novembre permettait sans jugement de les 'assigner à résidence forcée'.

The devastation felt by the poet at this news is translated by the way in which he presents the trees, men, the very walls, being torn from their colourlessness ('Beiges comme l'air beige') and being moved by the arrival of this letter of such sadness, even if it does also contain lighter notes of love amid the threnody of pain.

It is important to note the obvious mistake (one of many not corrected by Aragon in his edition of *L'OEuvre Poétique*) in line 5. The second half of this line should read (as it did when it appeared originally in *Poètes Casqués* 40) 'Mais l'Amour y'. 'Mai' would not make sense, especially in a poem written in December about the winter.

'Les Amants séparés' is notable for bold examples of Aragon's *rime enjambée*. Here 'l'amour y/Retrouve' (lines 5-6) and 'triste à mourir' (lines 7 and 8) underline the mixture of emotions felt at the reception of the letter.

STANZA 3

The slowness of time passing is once more suggested. The emptiness, barrenness of absence, is made vivid in the evocation of winter and the singing crystal of its icicles that chill all meaning from the wine (or perhaps there is a reference to the frozen vines, reminding us of their winter sterility in Apollinaire's 'Les Femmes' (1965, p. 124):

Les vignobles aux ceps tordus

Devenaient dans l'obscurité des ossuaires

En neige et repliés gisaient là comme des suaires).

In this season of separation, the rhythm of the song of love ('la romance') drags, the music that clasps him is the endless chiming of the hours, at every turn of the clock's hand, time grates. The repetition of the last two lines is extremely effective here, as it is in all of the stanzas of this group. Again, too, we have a telling example of *rime enjambée* in 'Et la musique qui m'étreint/Sonne' (lines 5-6), which prepares us in terms of meaning and sound for the recurring of 'grince'.

Stanza 4

The brightness of Elsa's hair may be seen to contrast with the 'air beige' of the second stanza, and any impression of metallic hardness in 'Ma femme d'or' (line 1) is removed when, continuing his evocation of her tresses, he calls her 'mon chrysanthème' (in Greek, 'fleur d'or'), but one wonders whether the choice of this flower, with its funereal associations, is not influenced by the sadness of 'Une lettre triste à mourir'.

Another link between the colour of Elsa's hair and disaster was to be made by Aragon in 'Elsa au miroir' (first published in 1943):

C'était au beau milieu de notre tragédie [...]

Elle peignait ses cheveux d'or et j'aurais dit

Qu'elle martyrisait à plaisir sa mémoire

Pendant tout ce long jour assise à son miroir

A ranimer les fleurs sans fin de l'incendie (1979c, p. 318).

In each of the four indented stanzas the repetition of the final two lines is supported by recurrent phrases elsewhere in them, and so it is here (in lines 2 and 3) with 'Pourquoi ta lettre [...] / Pourquoi ta lettre' which brings out the difficulty for Aragon to accept that a communication from his wife, so longed for, should be associated with such pain.

His sense of individual happiness is marred by his knowledge of the unhappiness of others. In 1931 in 'Lycanthropie contemporaine', expressing this idea, he had said (1975a, p. 234):

J'aime et nous nous aimons mais au milieu d'un naufrage.
 Now, using a similar motif, he asks, if he loves Elsa with all the helplessness of a shipwreck at sea, why should her letter hurt so much? Again the poet deploys *rimes enjambées*, this time to link his suffering with his view that the measures being taken against his friends are criminal: 'cris/M(al)' (lines 5-6) and 'crimes' (line 8).

The winds seemed to drown out the cries of pain with the quivering of their rhymes and of their crimes. This is an enigmatic statement. Is there a reference to the empty repetitions of the official media which, in Aragon's opinion, attempted to cover up with their noise the illegal acts being committed against his comrades? *L'Humanité* of 25 December 1939, on the other hand, accused the Government of using the weapon of silence to conceal the news of such arrests:

[Ils] essaient d'entourer cet attentat d'un silence de
tombe. Les cellules de la Santé ont remplacé les cachots de
la Bastille [...]. Brisez la conspiration du silence.

Stanza 5

Words, which are all that remain for Elsa and himself, are
affected by the cold and depression and monotony of the time:

les mots gelés où s'englue/ Le jour qui sans espoir se lève/
Rêve traîne meurt'.

But these words communicate also the love of Aragon and Elsa
for one another, evoking, in the comparison with lipstick ('les
mots notre rouge-à-lèvres'), the kisses they exchange if only in
the form of messages ('mots') - as in the ending of his letter to
her on 4 September 1939 on his arrival at Coulommiers: 'Je
t'embrasse, je t'embrasse, je t'embrasse'; or of another of the
same period: 'je pense à tout le doux de toi, et j'ai mis mes
lèvres sur mon mouchoir où il y avait de ton rouge. Mon amour,
mon amour' (FTA).

In this stanza as later in the poem, the use of the word *rouge*
has perhaps political overtones as well, for, as we shall see,
all is **not** depression, and this is already hinted at in the word
'renait' (line 5) that is the final verb in the series applied to
'Le jour' (line 4).

Again there is repetition in 'Que les mots [...]/Que les mots'
(lines 2 and 3). The recurring expressions in these stanzas
contribute like refrains to the power of the emotion being
communicated.

Line 6 is elucidated by Jean Ristat (in Aragon 1989a, vol. 3, p. 1357): 'Le château de Gesvres est situé au milieu du Parc de la Grange entre May-en-Multien et Crouy-sur-Ourcq'.

The means by which Elsa was able to meet Aragon there is explained by her in 'Préface à une "Vie de Michel Vigaud"' (Triolet 1966, p. 23):

En 1939, quand tu étais déjà mobilisé et que la police tournait autour de nous comme des corbeaux, quand tant d'amis et connaissances préféraient ne pas me reconnaître dans la rue, Robert Dencœl venait me voir rue de la Sourdière, dans le blackout de la défense passive, et me disait: 'Vous avez vraiment très envie de voir Aragon?' J'en avais très envie, vraiment, et il m'emmenait dans sa voiture sur les routes avec leurs barrages et les gendarmes qui posaient des questions, pour te chercher à Crouy-sur-Ourcq, à Coulommiers.

We can just imagine the bugle sounding to signal the need for them to part, as Aragon had to return to his quarters. The *rime enjambée* that associates 'rouge-à-lèvres [...] se leve/ Rêve [...] Gesvres' perhaps subtly suggests their kisses and their dreams as they contemplated the moats of the Château de Gesvres. Perhaps the bugle heralded something positive as well.

Stanza 6

The final section of the poem, which reverts to the 12-syllable line, has a much more complex rhyme-scheme than the other stanzas and is longer. Its first ten lines are devoted to an elaborate and seemingly traditional dedication of the poet's gift to his

loved one. He will transform these words, which, as he has said, are all that remain to them, into their only treasure, into bouquets of various flowers which he will present to Elsa. He evokes a joyful, and quite different, time of the year from the cold and depressing winter that presently surrounds them, when he talks in line 2 of

Les bouquets joyeux qu'on dépose au pied des saintes.

However, the 'saintes', at whose feet such flowers are placed, would seem to be those of **Aragon's** 'religion', for he soon introduces 'les foires de Mai' (line 6) at which boughs with their velvety catkins can be purchased, as also lilies of the valley.

The reference in 'les cloches blanches/ Du muguet' (lines 6-7) becomes clearer take into account a quotation chosen by *Le petit Robert* to illustrate the use of this flower: 'Un cortège de premier Mai, avec les fleurs de muguet à la boutonnière (Romains)'. .

And so, the season of future happiness that he evokes would appear to be a political one too, as these lilies of the valley will be gathered only when the present bleak period (which makes the flowers shed their flowers in the cold blast of its wind) is over. He hesitates to complete his sentence and makes the reader do it for him.

That this compliment to Elsa contains, as well, a political message, is underlined by the concluding lines of the poem, in which he affirms (lines 11-12) that, despite the negative present:

Pourtant je chanterai pour toi tant que résonne
 Le sang rouge en mon coeur qui sans fin t'aimera.

For the sense of 'sang rouge' one might compare the following
 lines from 'Du Poète à son parti' (1979c, p. 365):

Mon parti m'a rendu mes yeux et ma mémoire
 Je ne savais plus rien de ce qu'un enfant sait
 Que mon sang fût si rouge et mon coeur fût français
 Je savais seulement que la nuit était noire
 Mon parti m'a rendu mes yeux et ma mémoire.

As Lucille Becker (1971, p. 38) says:

After his conversion to Communism, Aragon felt that the
 function of the word was to transcribe reality, not destroy
 it. And the new image was to bring forth a different
 message, fraternity instead of individualism, optimistic
 affirmation of a new world instead of pessimistic despair.
 Henceforth Aragon would put language at the service of his
 party and use words for the creation of a new society.

This is what lies behind the poet's declaration here, a
 declaration he was to repeat in 'La Nuit de Dunkerque' (1979b, p.
 204):

Moi du moins je crierai cet amour que je dis;

and again in 'Une entre toutes les femmes' (1979c, p. 321):

Même si c'est aux jours de la pire misère
 Si les coeurs sont muets si les yeux sont déserts
 J'aurai du moins chanté que ma voix s'en brisât
 Quand d'autres d'Aélis moi j'aurai dit d'Elsa.

For Aragon, the love he has for his wife is associated with the hope of a marvellous new world, and so, even if the refrain he sings here may seem a mere 'tradéridéra' or jingle, perhaps some day these words he murmured will herald 'un monde merveilleux' (line 16) in which love will thrill for humanity in general. Despite his 'coeur usé', his 'coeur banal', and with all his fears and doubts for the future ('sans croire même au printemps dès l'automne'), she will know that he devoted himself like no other to producing poetry in honour of these highest values of love and human happiness, even if his expression seemed trite.

Thus, in the coldness and darkness of the real and political climate of the time, Aragon sounds a positive note, and it was transmitted by Elsa in 'L'air du temps' in the *NRF* in January 1940, where she quoted the last seven lines of this poem and named him as their author.

The rhymes of the last section of the poem show Aragon's skill. He gives us four lines of *rimes embrassées*, followed by six of *rimes croisées*, and then, in the final nine lines, produces five consecutive lines ending in '-ra', before concluding with three lines rhyming with 'résonne' of the first line of this coda (lines 11-19). The *sostenuto* of the four rhymes with 'tradéridéra' are a brilliant example of mimicry, of apparent self-parody, but the sense of the words and their context are all the more moving.

La Valse des vingt ans

This poem (first published in *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941) was written in January 1940 in Paris where Aragon was at the Caserne Mortier awaiting transfer, at his own request, to a *Division Légère Mécanique*. *L'OEuvre Poétique* (1989a, vol. 3, p. 1357)

comments further:

Le 14 janvier Aragon quitte son cantonnement de Crouy-sur-Ourcq et le 220ème R.R.T. pour être dirigé sur le Dépôt de Guerre d'Infirmiers N22, Caserne Mortier à Paris. Il est probable que c'est durant cette période que ce poème a été écrit. Le séjour d'Aragon à Paris sera de courte durée. Affecté à la 3ème DLM (Division Légère Mécanique) [sic] qui vient d'être formée, il est dirigé sur le camp de Sissonne le 24 février.

Variants

Stanza 3, line 5: MS1 has 'seul' added before 'moment'; 'd'ivresse' has been written above 'de bonheur' which has been deleted.

The final three lines of the poem belonged originally to the last long stanza but have later been marked off from it.

The poem reflects on the conscription of twenty-year olds for military service. If accepted, they are termed *bon pour le service (militaire)*, and it is on the irony of the word *bon* in this context that Aragon plays throughout. After being declared fit for duty, the new recruits do the rounds of the *bistros* and dance in the streets. The custom is for them to buy from the street Arabs a brooch, with the word *bon* inscribed on it.

Stanza 1

We learn what these young men, now inducted into military service, are really 'fit' for: for suffering in the form of exposure to the wind and the darkness and the cold, for route-marches, for struggling in the mud of the trenches and battlefields that Aragon had known only too well. The bitterness of the poet comes out in the expression, 'Bon pour la légende' (line 3): not the legends of his country that he was to invoke against the Nazi invader, but the myth of war that belies the reality of the fate that will overtake these 'Enfants-soldats'.

Again, the insistence on the word 'absence' (as in 'Le Temps des mots croisés') gives an indication of Aragon's own thoughts as he contemplates the long nights the soldiers will have to face before battle begins.

The closeness of feeling of the poet for these rookies is brought out in the interplay in the poem of *je* and *tu* as he echoes the 'valse' of the title in the 'drôle de bal' (line 4) at which he had danced and at which they would dance likewise. He conjures up an image, worthy of a Hollywood film, of them executing their 'steps' (the involuntary reactions of fear and death) on an inhuman orchestral score, the 'music' provided by weapons such as the machine-gun mentioned in the second last line of the stanza. The final line plays on two set expressions to let us understand the real sense of 'bon' here: 'Bon comme le bon pain', meaning 'to have a heart of gold'; and 'bon comme la romaine', which is explained thus by *Le petit Robert*: 'loc. pop. : s'est dit d'un homme trop bon; mod., de quelqu'un qui se trouve

dans une situation de victime'. The good-heartedness of the young is being exploited but not for their **own** good. Is there a further sense of these conscripts being treated like such **market commodities** as bread and **cos** lettuces (the literal meaning of 'romaine'), mere 'chair à canon'? As he says of the young soldiers of his first war (1980, p. 259):

Vous êtes de la chair à tout faire Une sorte
 De matériel courant de brique à bon marché
 Avec vous pas besoin d'y aller de main morte
 Vous êtes ce manger que les corbeaux emportent
 Et vos rêves les loups n'en font qu'une bouchée.

The first of the rhyming couplets that separate each of the four stanzas is strongly affected by what has preceded. The irony of the conscripts' 'sun' rising is fully exploited in the rest of the poem. It is a new departure for them, but they do not realize that this dawn will hold nothing bright and beautiful. The contrast between their naïve perceptions and Aragon's jaundiced view is brought out in their waltz that evokes both the music and the **misplaced** gaiety of the scene as the swirling groups move from one bar to another.

Stanza 2

The era that is really dawning for them is now pictured. The ironic repetition of 'bon' continues as Aragon removes the falsely positive sense given to the word by the authorities and the recruits. In another meaning perhaps also attached to it by the poet, these young men have been given a ticket for a tot of hooch ('gnole', line 1) in the cold dawn of the battlefield. They

are 'fit' to experience terror as they risk a glance through the look-out slit ('créneau', line 1), an expression Aragon was to use again in 'Plus belle que les larmes' (1979b, p. 254) in a context that is appropriate to the situation in the present poem:

Créneaux de la mémoire ici nous accoudâmes
 Nos désirs de vingt ans au ciel en porte-à-faux
 Ce n'était pas l'amour mais le Chemin des Dames.

Again the list technique is effective as the poet builds up the agonies that he has known and which will now befall these twenty-year-olds: the eternal waiting, the rainstorms, the danger of being sent out on patrol, the petrifying silence as the flares ('signaux', line 3) go up before the bombardment begins. Their youth will pass prematurely as the freshness of their emotions is transmuted to the rust that will seize up their heart. As he says in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 297):

Tu n'en reviendras pas toi qui courais les filles
 Jeune homme dont j'ai vu battre le coeur à nu
 Quand j'ai déchiré ta chemise.

They are about to be plunged into a world where love and death and oblivion succeed each other with an unnatural speed. Oblivion in the cloak of rain and darkness of the battles, with no other bed than the grave made to measure for them in advance. Again the image is complemented by lines from *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 297):

Comment vous regarder sans voir vos destinées
 Fiancés de la terre et promis des douleurs.

Just how vividly he could envisage these young soldiers in their future graves can be guessed by the experience he recounts of being mistaken in 1918 for one of his comrades round whom he had wrapped his own greatcoat (with his papers in it) and who had died, 'un enfant triste et frêle', freshly placed in the ground:

Qui sont ces défunts que l'on voit
Fosses fraîches et croix nouvelles [...]

Mais l'inscription que dit-elle
Je lis et ne comprends plus
C'est pourtant mon nom que j'épelle
J'ai-t-il mal vu j'ai-t-il mal lu
Si c'est ma demeure mortelle

Qui dort au pied de ce talus (1980, pp. 302-303).

Aragon's vision of what awaited these new recruits turned out to be all too tragically true. Thus he was to write in 'La Nuit de Dunkerque' of what he witnessed at the end of May 1940:

Les soldats ont creusé des trous grandeur nature
Et semblent essayer l'ombre des sépultures (1979b, p. 205).

As the first refrain brought out the irony of the young conscripts' gaiety against the background of the true and horrible meaning of 'Bon pour le service', so in the second refrain, the waltz returns as **incongruous** music, exploding like a burst of laughter from the metro-exits as the young revellers pass from one *bistro* to another. Of course the word 'éclate' suggests for us the detonations of the battlefield, and the laughter seems cruel. In this refrain there is perhaps a

reminiscence of Apollinaire's 'Merveille de la guerre' (1965, p. 271):

Il me semble assister à un grand festin éclairé à giorno
 C'est un banquet que s'offre la terre
 Elle a faim et ouvre de longues bouches pâles.

Stanza 3

Aragon now addresses those of his own generation who had been called up in 1916, 1917 (his own year) and 1918. He remembers their vanished dreams. As he says in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 260):

Où sont les regards purs où sont où sont les neiges
 Où les illusions les coeurs intransigeants
 Cet air qui me revient jadis le fredonnais-je.

Now it is the turn of the young of 1940:

Ils fredonnent
 Comme nous cette rengaine et comme nous y
 Croient.

This is the bitter point that Aragon is making once again: no lesson seems to have been learned:

Ce qu'on peut à vingt ans se raconter d'histoires
 Et l'avenir est tributaire du passé (1980, p. 258).

As in his youth it was

Pile ou face à tout bout de champ qu'il vente ou pleuve
 Pour un oui pour un non toute la destinée (1980, p. 259),

so here, these twenty-year-olds are ready to sacrifice their entire lives for one moment of madness and happiness. They are literally drunk on alcohol, but more so with the thought of their

manhood, of the deeds they think they are going to accomplish.

The poet was later to reflect (1980, p. 258):

On se croit libre alors qu'on imite On fait l'homme

On veut dans cette énorme et plate singerie

Lire on ne sait quelle aventure à la gomme.

With a switch of focus worthy of the Apollinaire of 'Zone', Aragon leaves his address to the young of the **past** and adopts the voice of one of the present 'Enfants-soldats'. We can just imagine the poet saying 'et peut-être vivre est-ce/Tout simplement Maman mourir de très bonne heure' to his own mother who had hoped he would escape military service through his study of medicine. He had refused to be an *embusqué* and had indeed volunteered for the Front in 1918.

In the third refrain, Aragon continues to play on the senses of *bon*. In 'Bon par-ci bon par-là', it refers to the inscription on the rosette or brooch. In 'Bon bon bon', we hear the irony of the poet's tone as he devalues the word in order to show us how misplaced is the enthusiasm of one of these recruits who calls out:

Je pars mes

Chers amis Vingt ans Bon pour le service armé

Stanza 4

The merry waltz begins and the dancers sing this time 'la fille à Madelon' (a bitter comment on the memory of those who had sung 'La Madelon' in World War I). Again, little seems to have changed since Aragon's youth, and he can say (line 4):

J'ai quarante ans passés Leurs vingt ans me sont proches.

As the dancers move down the Boulevard Saint-Germain and the rue Saint-Honoré, their lapels are bedecked with the word 'Bon' written in gilded, cursive letters ('anglaise dorée'). The word 'dorée' does not conjure up for Aragon the idea of *jeunesse dorée*; he knows what awaits these young people: a name written in gold on a war memorial as for the dead of the previous war (1980, p. 298):

Déjà la pierre pense où votre nom s'inscrit

Déjà vous n'êtes plus qu'un mot d'or sur nos places.

When he says, 'Je veux croire avec eux que la vie est marrante', it is with supreme irony. He understands their gaiety but understands also that it is all too mistaken.

In the final refrain he repeats, as though trying to convince himself, that he too is carried away by the waltz of the twenty-year-olds and he will forget in this year of 1940 all that his own forty years have taught him. This is, of course, impossible as the other sense of 'en l'an quarante' indicates - i.e. *never*. As *Le petit Robert* tells us:

'*S'en moquer comme de l'an quarante*, expression employée à l'origine par les royalistes pour signifier qu'ils ne s'inquiétaient pas plus (d'une chose) que de l'an quarante de la République, qu'on ne verrait jamais'. Aragon uses the expression literally in *Le Roman inachevé* when speaking of the two World Wars: 'la guerre d'il y a quarante ans et cette autre qui vint en l'an quarante' (1980, p. 290).

In 'quarantaine' in the final line there is perhaps also a reference to the political quarantine in which the poet found himself as a Communist.

We can see in the poem a musical construction that underlines the sense of the words. The 3/4 rhythm of the waltz is evoked for example in stanza 1:

Bon pour le vent/ bon pour la nuit/ bon pour le froid
 Bon pour la marche/ et pour la boue/ et pour les balles

[...]

Bon pour l'absence/ et les longs soirs/ drôle de bal [...]
 Bon pour la peur/ pour la mitraille/ et pour les rats [...].

And again in stanza 2:

Bon pour l'attente/ et la tempête/ et les patrouilles [...]
 Bon pour l'amour/ et pour la mort/ bon pour l'oubli.

This brings out the dancing movement that he is trying to convey, but with a meaning that is the contrary of the merriment of these conscripts. The circular patterns of the waltz are chosen to portray the message of history repeating itself: as in 1914, so in 1940, the young go willingly into the slaughter, intoxicated by the deadly alcohol of legend and myth, of untried manhood.

As already indicated, the refrains that occur after each stanza are like the musical background, the revellers' songs suddenly swelling up. And in these refrains we find the bitterest irony, and nowhere more so than in the final one with its two twelve-syllable lines followed by one of eight syllables. The effect visually is very clever: it is as though the music, this waltz, is carrying him away, and his voice seems to trail off.

These three final lines get particular attention because the other refrains are rhyming couplets. As a variation of the waltz time, the first line of this final refrain has four groups of three syllables, thus:

J'oublierai/ j'oublierai/ j'oublierai/ j'oublierai

1 2 3/ 1 2 3/ 1 2 3/ 1 2 3

The rhymes in the poem once again show Aragon to be inventive and audacious, e.g. in stanza 3, 'évanouis/Quinze' (lines 1-2) and 'nous y/Croient' (lines 3-4); or 'ivresse/vivre est-ce' (lines 5 and 7); or 'bonheur/bonne heure' (lines 6 and 8). A very telling link is made in the first stanza between 'balles' and 'bal': the second word conveys what the young men **think** they are waltzing into, the first word is what Aragon **knows** awaits them.

Deux poèmes d'outre-tombe

This overall title does not figure in the manuscript versions of the two poems and appeared only (as did the section markings 'I' and 'II') with the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941 (one hundred years after the completion of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*).

It is a title that contains hope as well as sorrow. By the time he published *Le Crève-Coeur*, Aragon knew that the disaster prophesied in 'Pergame en France' (written at the end of February 1940) had come to pass, but 'Santa Espina' (written in March 1940) carries the message that humanity will triumph over the forces of oppression. There is life beyond the dark sepulchre in which France now finds herself in April 1941.

1

Pergame en France

This poem was written, as indicated above, at the end of February 1940 at the *Groupe Sanitaire Divisionnaire* (GSD) 39, 3e DLM, and was first published in *Fontaine* (Alger) in December 1940.

Variants

Stanza 5:

line 8: *Fontaine* (Alger) of December 1940 has 'framée';

line 9: *Fontaine* (Alger) of December 1940 has 'bien-aimées'

The poet captures the mood in Paris at the time of the poem's composition. In the atmosphere of the *drôle de guerre*, the city seemed to him like Troy (for which 'Pergame' is often used in French), unaware of its imminent destruction. The comparison must have urged itself all the more on him as he knew only too well of

the allies and agents of Hitler within the gates of the French capital.

Stanza 1

The first line is explained by the final one of the stanza. There is such an air of unreality that he does not know whether he is on the banks of the Scamander (which has its source on Mount Ida and passed near to Troy) or of the Seine. He compares the bridges, as they lie one next to the other over the water, to dominoes and this is part of a wider impression of frivolous activity (cf. line 7, 'et Notre-Dame a l'air d'un casino') in a situation that requires a quite different attitude.

It is with irony that (lines 3-4) he quotes the newspapers as advising people not to wait till winter to have their stove ('Salamandre') repaired. It is now too late: this winter of 1939-40 was exceptionally bitter. The facetious rhyme 'Scamandre-Salamandre' gives an inkling of the irresponsibility of the tone of the press of the time, in part a product of the unwarranted self-assurance of the Maginot-line mentality, according to which France was as impregnable as Troy thought itself behind its walls.

It is appropriate that (lines 5-7) the poet should hear a sailor murmur tenderly a refrain from *No No Nanette*, for the atmosphere is like that of an operetta (note the clever echo of 'opérette-No No Nanette'). The rhymes of lines 6 and 7, which hark back to 'dominos' (line 2), and the alliterative link in line 7 undermine any surprise that 'Notre-Dame a l'air d'un casino'. And the majesty of the Panthéon (ironic in this context

because of its name and its mock Greek features) is destroyed as Aragon compares its shape to the dome of a diving-suit emerging from the water. This ridicule suggests that faith in the heroes of the past is not going to be much good in the present circumstances. But it was on the totally outmoded military concepts of the likes of Pétain that the official confidence was built.

Stanza 2

Aragon continues his analogy between the two cities as he addresses Helen of Troy. Her 'berger' was the Trojan hero, Paris, whom shepherds had rescued from exposure on Mount Ida and had brought up as one of their own. They did not know that his mother, Queen Hecube, had wanted him to die because she had dreamt shortly before his birth that her child was to be a torch that would set fire to Troy. He did carry off Helen, the wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta, and thus caused the Greeks to devastate Troy. There may be a covert allusion here to another Helen - to Héléne, Comtesse de Portes, whose 'berger' was Paul Reynaud, soon to become Prime Minister, and an ardent supporter of the war.

When he speaks of 'the infantry of decimated dreams', Aragon evokes also the mass of soldiers and the destruction that awaits them. He expresses the reality that faced many a 'Marthe Elise et Marie' whose husbands, 'Pierre ou Roger', had been taken away before they had had time to bring in the harvest. There is obviously a much wider scope of reference here than just to the fate of these peasants, but it was a particularly topical source

of unhappiness as *L'Humanité* testified in an edition of December 1939:

Le gouvernement Daladier traite les paysans en parias. La femme d'un paysan mobilisé ne touche que 4 fr. 50 d'allocation. Les indemnités de réquisitions sont insuffisantes et ne sont pas toujours payées. Les permissions agricoles sont parcimonieusement accordées, alors que la main-d'oeuvre manque à la campagne.

Appealing now to Helen of Troy to think of the beauty of the flowers, the grass of the meadows to be laid waste by the war, the poet invites her to walk with him this evening in the gardens of the Tuilleries where he hopes that his great love (for Elsa) will be untroubled enough for him to forget Mount Hymettus (south-east of Athens) and Helen's 'shepherd'. The analogy is between Athens and Berlin, the Greeks representing the Germans in the equivalence Troy-Paris. The ease of movement between Paris and the ancient world of Greece and Troy is reminiscent of Aragon's surrealist period and adds to the impression of unreality that he is trying to give, but also shows the special ability and insight that he possesses.

Stanza 3

The poet develops the associations between Helen, love and beauty when he speaks to her of his 'grande amour' for Elsa. It is, of course, noteworthy that the words 'Elle est si belle' complete the first and last lines of the stanza, and appropriate that Aragon should so emphasize to Helen, of all people, the beauty of his own wife.

In a typical example of his ability to renew what has become trite, the poet now rhymes 'amour' and 'jour' (lines 2-3), but attenuates the effect by making the reader pause between the lines in which they appear as sense-units and by giving 'jour' stress as part of a balance with 'nuit' (line 4). Again using a technique favoured by the Surrealists, he then revitalizes a proverbial expression: he sees the wings of a swallow that **does** make a summer (in French, a spring) as the pouting lips of Elsa that form the 'M' of the reborn month of May. One can only **marvel** at the seemingly effortless skill of Aragon as he provides the *rimes enjambées* of lines 6-8: 'sa lèvre est l'**M** où/Renaît le mois de Mai dès la première **moue/Ravissante**'. Thus he only permits himself the rhyme 'amour-jour' (lines 2-3) because he is going to breathe new life into it with this **amazing** reprise.

With such compliments paid to Elsa, the poet convinces us of his delight in her: 'O monde merveilleux' [...] Elle est si belle'. But the words 'Je tremble' have a double sense as the danger of destruction approaches this modern Troy.

Stanza 4

As in the previous stanza, Aragon uses balanced statements to bring out Elsa's power of attraction:

Elle est la paix profonde et le profond délire

Tout ce qu'enfant naguère et qu'homme je voulais.

And again there is an association between his love and that of Helen for Paris, as the poet intercalates her words of desire for her hero whose star she seeks in the heavens. As though the French capital really were Troy before the attack of the Greeks,

Aragon says that there are too many stars in the night sky for him to read its alphabet and know whether the price of Helen's love will be death.

When he tells her, 'Il faut attendre l'heure où le ciel va pâlir', he could not have known that it was to be the dawn of 10 May 1940 that would initiate the attack that would bring about the fall of Paris. It is nevertheless significant that the coming pallor of the sky is associated with death by means of the rhyme with 'mourir' in the middle of the following line (6).

It is ironic that one of the most beautiful images of the poem - 'Trop d'astres font à l'ombre une robe de lait' - should find itself in the context of a looming disaster. In the aftermath of the defeat of France, Aragon was to reflect in 'La nuit d'exil' (1979b, p.207) on the stars that had shone down on their love in the nights of Paris:

Ces nuits t'en souvient-il [...]
 Avaient autant d'éclairs que l'oeil noir des colombes
 Rien ne nous reste plus de ces bijoux de l'ombre
 Nous savons maintenant ce que c'est que la nuit [...]
 Quand j'y songe aujourd'hui les étoiles trichèrent
 Le vent charriait trop de rêves dérivés.

The final line of the stanza makes powerful use of the word 'délire'. Where, in the first line, it referred to the transports of passion that Elsa inspires in the poet, it is now used in the sense of the frenzy of war, the cost in blood that the conflict may exact.

Stanza 5

In the first stanza Aragon wondered: 'Est-ce Troie ou Paris la Seine ou le Scamandre' ? He now declares: 'C'était un soir de Troie en proie aux bien-aimées', as though he is now convinced of the analogy between the situation of Paris and the ancient city that fell victim to the love inspired by Helen. The plural 'bien-aimées' suggests perhaps the obsession of Aragon and others for their beloved.

It seems that, just as Priam was unaware of the perils (the sense of 'hasards' in line 2 of this stanza) that threatened his palace, so the rulers of Paris are not taking seriously the dangers facing France. Thus the dismissive, 'Et le Louvre après tout n'est qu'un nom de bazar' that recalls the earlier 'et Notre-Dame a l'air d'un casino'.

Later, when such monuments of France were under Nazi control, how he longed to see them again (1979b, p.208):

Reverrons-nous jamais le paradis lointain
Les Halles l'Opéra la Concorde et le Louvre.

In the final section Aragon claims for himself the powers of Cassandra, the daughter of Priam and Hecube, who was endowed with the gift of prophecy but condemned not to be believed. And so he alone could see the approaching conflagration and the suffering of Hecube (symbol of the suffering of mothers) amid the armies.

In this deadly serious situation of which Aragon is all too aware, the operatic flippancy of the first stanza is reinforced as he sees taxis going to the 'bal des Quat'z Arts' with people made up to look like Egyptians, Gauls, Romans, Franks not

carrying javelins (i.e. at peace, unlike their modern descendants, or is there a covert warning of the unpreparedness of French arms?) and mock Greeks who, unlike the Germans with their terrifying weapons, were not making the beloved of such as Aragon weep. The incongruity of the unserious mood of Paris in face of the terrible danger is emphasized by the rhymes with 'hasards': 'bazar' (line 2), 'bizarres' (line 6) and 'Quat'z Arts' (line 7).

In 'Pergame en France' Aragon again shows that all the resources of traditional poetry can be combined with modern techniques and inventiveness to produce a powerful message relevant to the present world.

Santa Espina

This poem was written in March 1940, at one of the darkest moments of the anti-Communist repression in France. It was first published in *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941. There are no variants.

Of this poem, Sadoul (1967, pp. 28-29) has the following to say:

Cette 'Santa Espina' était une 'contrebande' très typique. Son message, incompréhensible pour beaucoup, était fort direct pour ceux qui, en 1937-1938, avaient entendu, dans les meetings pour la République espagnole, la cobla *La Bisbal* jouer un air de sardane qui porte ce titre, et qui avait été assez largement diffusé par les disques.

This information is complemented by Aragon himself in *L'Oeuvre poétique* (1977, pp. 333-334). He tells how in 1937-38: *La Cobla de Barcelone*, soutenue par nos Maisons de la Culture, est accueillie à Paris et dans les villes du Nord comme dans celles du Midi, où chaque fois qu'éclate la *Santa Espina*, c'est comme le coeur de la France qui répond à ce chant catalan, que je devais reprendre pour thème deux ans plus tard, aux jours de la 'Drôle de guerre', dans un poème qu'on retrouvera en 1941 dans *Le Crève-Coeur*, paru à Paris aux jours hitlériens...ainsi mêlant nos tragédies et nos périls.

Stanza 1

The first three stanzas of this poem all begin with the words 'Je me souviens d'un air', as Aragon evokes the unforgettable impressions that this music made on those who heard it at the

anti-Fascist rallies in support of Republican Spain. It was the melody of a revolutionary *sardana* to which the Catalans marched, and the passion it inspired is brought out in the first stanza by the interplay of 'coeur' and 'feu' particularly in the phrase 'comme un coeur sous la cendre' (line 3), where one would normally have expected 'comme un feu sous la cendre'. It is as though 'coeur' and 'feu' were interchangeable when speaking of this music: the fire it lit in the blood of the listeners, just as it seemed to have burnt itself out, was rekindled like the glowing embers of a heart beneath the ashes. The insistent power of the melody is emphasized in the repetitions and internal rhyme of 'Sans que le coeur battit [...] Sans que le feu reprit', and by the abundant alliteration of lines 2 and 3. The images of blood and fire are not destructive in this context as is shown by the final line with its associations of happiness and freedom.

Stanza 2

The pattern of repetition and alliteration continues here with the word 'air' dominant. The idea of space and freedom suggested in the last line of the previous stanza is developed in 'un air pareil à l'air du large' (where, in its second use, 'air' is deliberately ambiguous, connoting both the atmosphere and the music of the wide open sea) and further developed in 'un air pareil au cri des oiseaux migrateurs'. The next two lines show the ability of *Santa Espina* to express sorrow for pain suffered and, with that, the expectation of inevitable liberation, in the image of the salt water of the sea taking its revenge on its

conquerors. We find a similar idea directed later against the victorious Nazis:

mais des vainqueurs la mer lave l'écume

Un jour on saura que nous fûmes

Nous deux ô mon amour et que saura-t-on d'eux (1979b, p. 269)).

There is a clever link made between the suggestion of tears in 'sanglot' (line 3) and the 'revanche de sel des mers' (line 4). The idea is further developed in stanza 4 (line 2) in the expression 'larmes de couleur'.

Stanza 3

The revolutionary message of the music is made clear. It was whistled in the darkness of tyranny (and, as Aragon points out, the tyranny of the Nazis had befallen the people of France when this poem was first published in *Le Crève-cœur* in 1941), in a time of bleakness when no knight errant came to the rescue. This last element is illuminated by the recall of a visit made by Aragon to Spain in 1925, during the period of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship:

Dans les premiers froids de Madrid

J'habitais la Puerta del Sol

Cette place comme un grand vide

Attendait quelque nouveau Cid

Dont le manteau jonchât le sol

Et recouvrit ces gueux sordides

Qu'on jette aux mendiants l'obole

Montrez-moi le peuple espagnol (1980, p.358).

It was indeed a time when 'l'enfance pleurait' (line 3), as Aragon further recounts in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 359):

Un jeune aveugle a chanté
 D'où se peut-il qu'un enfant tire
 Ce terrible et long crescendo
 C'est la plainte qu'on ne peut dire
 Qui des entrailles doit sortir
 La nuit arrachant son bandeau
 C'est le cri du peuple martyr
 Qui vous enfonce dans le dos
 Le poignard du *cante jondo*.

But the melody of *Santa Espina* expressed the clandestine dream of the **death** of oppression. The only example in the poem of *rime enjambée* occurs in this stanza - between **ombres** (line 1) and 'cata**ombes**/Rêvait' (lines 3-4) - and it has the effect of giving extra stress to the first consonant of 'Rêvait', to emphasize the swell of the music carrying the passion and defiance of the people's desire for deliverance.

Stanza 4

Aragon associates the sufferings of Christ with those of 'un peuple pur', evoking the intensity of feeling of those whom *L'Humanité* of 18 January 1940 called 'le noble peuple d'Espagne', whose history had taught them to identify themselves with the humiliation and pain of one whom the poet here describes as 'un dieu' with a small 'd' and, in the final stanza, as '[le] Fils de l'Homme'. This politicisation and humanisation of Christ makes one think of Baudelaire's similar approach (1961, p. 143) in 'Le

Renielement de saint Pierre', when he asks Jesus to recall the time when 'tu sentis s'enfoncer les épines / Dans ton crâne où vivait l'immense Humanité'. The difference is that Baudelaire attacks Christ for failing to fulfil the hopes placed in him by suffering humanity.

In the last two lines of the stanza, the technique of alliteration is once again used to underline the inescapable power of this melody:

Et le chant dans la chair ~~comme~~ une barque ancrée
Ravivait sa blessure et rouvrait sa douleur.

Stanza 5

Aragon says here:

Personne n'eût osé lui donner des paroles
A cet air fredonnant tous les mots interdits.

In fact, the Catalanian scholar Pere Solà i Solé has testified (at a colloquium in Glasgow in 1992) that *Santa Espina* does have a text.

However, the music alone was sufficient to communicate all the forbidden hopes of the oppressed for a new world (even if, like 'la semaine des quatre jeudis', it might never come), free of the ravages of the past. Of these 'anciennes véroles' (line 3) that, with Franco's victory, continued to afflict Spain, Aragon was later to say:

On ne croit jamais dans l'abord que ce soit la peste
qui gagne

Cependant rien ne se conquiert sans que se déchire
une Espagne (1980, p. 422)

Stanza 6

The contrast between the heart-rending phrases of *Santa Espina*, the purity of its ever-growing call to the emotions ('L'appel de source en source', line 4), and the synthetic sobs, the 'pleurs d'opéra' of the official propaganda of Phoney-war France, is brought out in the description of this period as the 'soir des ténoras'. *Le grand Larousse de la langue française* defines this last word as follows:

ténora: Sorte de clarinette en usage en Catalogne: 'la sèche ténora, trompette nasillarde / Ne bruit que rarement pour de courtes sardanes' (Max Jacob).

The thinness of sound, the nasality of the *ténora* and its rhyme with 'opéra' render Aragon's contempt for the vacuities of the time. Additional and similarly pejorative associations of *ténora* may be suggested by its link to cognate expressions such as:

ténor: Par ext. Personnage qui joue un rôle de premier plan surtout en politique: [...] 'Les ténors de la IIIe République, les Poincaré, les Clemenceau' (Mauriac);
ténoriser: v. intrans. (dér. savante de *ténor*; 1769, Ch. Bonnet, au sens de 'proclamer avec éclat' (ibid.)).

Stanza 7

Using the melody of *Sainte Epine* as a rallying call, Aragon now appeals for a renewal of the massive anti-Fascist forces which had supported the fight against Hitler, Mussolini and Franco in Spain, but which had fallen silent under the present, repressive Government in France. Note how there is an echo here of the 'Je me souviens d'un air' of the first three stanzas in:

O Sainte épine ô Sainte Epine recommence

On t'écoutait debout jadis t'en souviens-tu

Stanza 8

Aragon has not lost his faith, however, that the heart of his country conceals within itself further revolutionary anthems that will emerge triumphant. Here Aragon may be echoing a sentence in *L'Humanité* (undated) of December 1939:

Le peuple de France, qui a lutté avec courage durant des années contre le fascisme, se dressera contre la dictature militaire imposée par les oligarchies financières et les éléments fascistes.

With 'Les muets' and 'les paralytiques', Aragon is not only using the imagery of Christ's miracles to evoke those who, by word and deed, had opposed Fascism but were now inactive and silent. For, when we know that the newspapers and the organization of the PCF had been banned, we can uncover an additional reference.

Even more specifically, this very month of March 1940 was seeing the trial of the Communist Deputies, arrested in October 1939 and since, for 'activité ayant pour but de propager les mots d'ordre de la Troisième Internationale' (the Comintern).

The court sessions were held *in camera* although, as the Communists' advocate pointed out, this was the first political trial in France to be conducted thus since that of Dreyfus. 'Les muets' and 'les paralytiques' mean even more when we learn that, among the forty-four Deputies being judged, three were 'des grands blessés de guerre 1914-1918: Pierre Dadot, amputé d'une

jambe, Félix Brun, amputé des deux, Jean Duclos [...] gueule cassée. Tous trois arborent la croix de guerre, la médaille militaire et la Légion d'Honneur (Crémieux and Estager, 1983, p. 182).

It is interesting to note that Aragon was to show how a war cripple could serve in the vanguard with his political comrades in the story of Joseph Gigoix, blinded and with his arms amputated, in *Les Communistes*).

Stanza 9

The noble and moving music that tells of the suffering of Christ in the crown of thorns placed upon his head, but also of the hope that this symbol of pain will fall from the brow of the Son of Man, now inspires Aragon to prophesy that this release will come to pass and that a new world free of tyrants, a world of happiness for humanity will be brought about.

A more negative use of this imagery on the very subject of the Spanish civil war is to be found in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 424):

La pourpre le roseau l'épine il faut aux crucifixions
 Tout l'ancien cérémonial quand c'est l'Homme qu'on exécute.

In 'Santa Espina' we have seen the clearest example so far in *Le Crève-cœur* of Aragon's use of religious motifs. This marks an important political and artistic development that had taken place over the previous ten years or so and shows the difference from his attitude during his Surrealist period. Thus, in his conversations with Dominique Arban (1968, p. 86), he recalls the dissensions that had been growing among the Surrealists and the

attempt in the period 1930-1932 to find a compromise which would enable them to continue to exist on a collective basis:

[...] décision fut alors prise entre nous de faire taire toutes les divergences pour nous consacrer à l'action antireligieuse. Mieux valait cela que rien à mes yeux, mais en même temps, j'étais tout de même frappé par l'extraordinaire réduction du domaine qui pouvait nous être commun.

At this very time, Aragon was under attack within his party and took very seriously the struggle against religion, being a contributor with Sadoul to *La Lutte antireligieuse et prolétarienne*, the journal of *L'Union Fédérale des libres-penseurs révolutionnaires de France*.

A good example of the form taken by this anti-clerical activity can be found in some lines of *Front Rouge*, a poem he brought back to Paris at the end of 1930 after his journey to the USSR:

Le plus beau monument qu'on puisse élever sur une place
la plus surprenante de toutes les statues
la colonne la plus audacieuse et la plus fine
l'arche qui se compare au prisme même de la pluie
ne valent pas l'amas splendide et chaotique
qu'on produit aisément avec une église et de la dynamite
Essayez pour voir (1975a, p.165)

In a real-life version of this, he tells how, in 1931 with the other Surrealists,

nous avons aussi salué les mouvements de masse qui s'étaient produits dans un grand nombre de villes d'Espagne, au cours desquels cent édifices religieux avaient été incendiés (1975a, p. 180).

As we have seen, it was above all the influence of Maurice Thorez that caused the change in Aragon's outlook and practice.

Georges Sadoul (1967, p. 29) gives the following commentary:

Dans 'Santa Espina' apparaît un élément nouveau, qui put alors paraître insolite sous la plume d'un 'sans-dieu', le 'Merveilleux chrétien'. La circonstance l'appelait, puisque cet air de danse catalan a pour thème la couronne d'épines du Christ. Il rappelait aussi plus largement, que peu de mois auparavant de nombreux catholiques, des prêtres même, s'étaient trouvés jusqu'au bout de la guerre civile dans les rangs du Frente Popular, se battant contre Franco et ses alliés hitlériens ou mussoliniens. Pour demain 'rénover la romance / Rendre la voix aux bois chanteurs qui se sont tus', fallait-t-il repousser par des blasphèmes les mains qui pouvaient un jour se tendre? A côté des mythes païens et médiévaux, les mythes chrétiens se trouvèrent donc prendre dans les poèmes d'Aragon, en 1939-1940, une place qui s'élargit naturellement dans les années suivantes où l'on vit s'unir dans la Résistance 'Celui qui croyait au ciel / celui qui n'y croyait pas'.

Pere Solà i Solé maintains that the Spanish civil war was a confrontation between two tendencies, the one republican, revolutionary and atheist, the other monarchist, reactionary and

Catholic. There were Catholics on the Republican side, but the only priests were Basques. Thus we see just how great the influence of Thorez was: how would Aragon, the Surrealist, have handled this material?

On the question of using language associated with religion, Aragon (1968, pp. 82-83), talking to Dominique Arban, says:

Je me suis exprimé à ce sujet, d'une façon que j'espère au moins claire, dans un livre qu'on a très peu lu, qui s'appelle: *Les Yeux et la Mémoire*.

Les Yeux et la Mémoire expriment en particulier une revendication globale du langage de la divinité et de la religion, mais c'est pour en faire cadeau à d'autres. Pour exprimer une réalité, où le nom de Dieu pour moi est toujours un blasphème. Un blasphème de l'homme, entendez bien. Et non de Dieu [...]. La réalité, c'est que l'on prend très souvent pour une adhésion à un certain mysticisme quelque chose qui se passe au niveau du vocabulaire [...]. Le vocabulaire existe en dehors de la croyance de Dieu, même si le vocabulaire comporte, emploie ce mot.

To make his meaning clear to Dominique Arban and to illustrate how and why he uses religious vocabulary, Aragon then quotes (1968, pp. 83-84) from *Les Yeux et la Mémoire*:

Pourquoi doux Lucifer en ce siècle où nous sommes
 Où la Vierge et les Saints ont des habits dorés
 Le chant nouveau déjà qui s'élève des hommes
 N'aurait-il pas l'accent sacré

J'ai souvent envié le vers de Paul Claudel
Quand sur nos fusillés se levait le destin
Pourquoi n'auraient-ils pas à leur épaule d'ailes
Les Martyres couleur du matin [...]

Le travail et l'amour changent le chant mystique
Et tout dépend vers qui s'élève l'hosanna
Je ne crains pas les mots dont on fit des cantiques
On boit dans le verre qu'on a.

We shall see the adaptation of religious expression being
developed in further poems of *Le Crève-cœur*.

Le Printemps

In the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941, Aragon says of this poem in the *Bibliographie*: 'Paru dans le numéro 1 de *Poésie 40*, revue faisant suite après la guerre à *Poètes Casqués 40*'. This first number of *Poésie 40*, 'ancienne revue des Poètes-casqués [sic]', is dated October-November 1940. The second number, dated December 1940-January 1941, is entitled: *Poésie 41* 'qui fait suite à la revue "Poètes Casqués" "P.C. 40"'.

Variants

Stanza 3, line 4: TS has 'Et les premiers beaux jours ont des ombres légères', deleted and changed to the version of 1979b, p. 126.

Stanza 4, line 3: TS has 'Où c'est en vain qui vit dans nos veines vannées'.

Stanza 4, line 4: TS has 'Et le ciel a des fleurs de pommiers pour voilettes'.

The circumstances of the poem are evoked in *Les Communistes* (1966c, pp. 66 ff.). On Monday, 8th April 1940, British forces began mining Norwegian waters to close down the route of Swedish iron ore to Germany. During the night of 8-9 April, the German army occupied Denmark. At the same time, their naval forces entered the fjords of Oslo, from which capital the Norwegian Government fled. Massive use of land and air attacks enabled the Nazis to occupy all the ports of the West coast of Norway.

In an atmosphere of stupefaction and catastrophe, the French High Command decided to reply to the German success by preparing to send troops into Belgium. The first stage in this plan was to

despatch forces to line the frontier along the River Scheldt (l'Escaut). Aragon's unit was sent to Condé-sur-Escaut.

Daix reports (1975, p. 308) on the movements of Aragon since his departure (at his own request) from the *Régiment Régional de Travailleurs* at Crouy-sur-Ourcq:

En janvier 1940, il est à la caserne Mortier à Paris, puis on l'a affecté à la 3e DLM (division légère motorisée) en instruction dans la plaine de Laon. Au groupe sanitaire divisionnaire, il commande à des étudiants en médecine, ce qui le ramène à sa première guerre. Il trouve le temps d'inventer une clé pour permettre de dégager les blessés des chars, invention qui lui vaudra une lettre de félicitations du ministère. Le 5 avril, la DLM se rend à Condé-sur-Escaut. L'armée française doit entrer en Belgique, renforcer les défenses belges.'

Daix's dating of the movement of Aragon's DLM to Condé-sur-Escaut would seem to be a few days premature. Firstly, according to the *Journal de guerre* of Georges Sadoul (1977, p.174), Aragon was still on leave in Paris on 6 April, and, secondly, the Allied advance towards Belgium was in response to the German attacks on Denmark and Norway of 8-9 April.

This is important because it affects the date of the composition of 'Le Printemps'. Aragon tells us in his *Bibliographie* (1979b, p. 399): 'Ce poème a été écrit à Condé-sur-l'Escaut [*sic*], en détachement au 1er Cuirassiers, pendant l'alerte d'avril 1940 à la frontière belge.'

As we are told in *Les Communistes* (1966c, p. 81), the plans for entry into Belgium were soon aborted:

Le Roi a refusé d'appeler les Alliés. Le dispositif mis en place à la frontière, au bout de cinq ou six jours, a dû être disloqué [...]. Les troupes désalertées ont regagné leurs positions initiales.

The time and length of the sojourn at Condé-sur-Escaut are given by Aragon in *L'Enseigne de Gersaint*: 'un mois avant les combats de mai 1940, j'étais resté, par ordre, huit jours à Condé-sur-Escaut à considérer cette frontière précaire, avec mes hommes ...' (1979c, 'Ecrit en avril 1945', emphasis added). The actual date of the movement towards Belgium is recorded in *Les Communistes*, when Aragon speaks of it in connection with the renewed advance of the Allies on 10 May, the morning on which the Germans invaded the Low Countries: 'la manoeuvre du dix avril recommence, avec cette simple différence que, cette fois, nous arrivons après l'ennemi' (1966c, p.108, emphasis added.)

And so the period of the composition of the poem would seem to be 10-17 April 1940. Jean Ristat (Aragon 1989^o p. 1357) gives the wrong dates for the German attack on Denmark:

Le 11 avril, les troupes allemandes avaient pénétré au Danemark et en Norvège. C'est pour prévenir une pénétration de l'ennemi en Belgique que le corps auquel appartenait Aragon fit mouvement le 14 avril et pris position à Condé-sur-l'Escaut [sic].

'Le Printemps' follows the familiar pattern of comment on the political and military situation along with the expression of the

poet's desire to be reunited with Elsa, a desire that is becoming ever more compelling now that spring seems to be arriving at last.

Stanza 1

The poem opens with what resembles the evocative sound-track of a film: we hear the long-drawn-out calls from the barges that the Scheldt is carrying away to Belgium and Holland, to the distances of the North Sea at Antwerp, while, on the radio, play the insidious strains of another of those 'chansons de deux sous'.

The comparison in line 2 is reminiscent of Aragon's erotic poetry of the 1920s and conveys the thoughts triggered off in the writer's mind by the seductively awakening warmth of the spring night. As in 'Petite suite sans fil II', the banality of the love song on the wireless does not stop it piercing the hearts of those who hear it. An almost animal sensuality is communicated by the link between 'une fille chaude' (line 2) and 'l'amour rôde' (line 4), and one can understand the pain of separation, the urgency of longing.

Aragon shows how the seemingly difficult problem of finding a rhyme for 'l'Escaut' (line 1) can be solved with the *rime complexe* of '(b)lesse qu'au' (line 3). The *rejet* of line 4 gives particular emphasis to 'Coeur' and removes any danger of a humorous effect being created by the polyphonic rhyme.

Stanza 2

The evocation of 'une fille chaude' in the previous stanza seems to have become reality, as the poet sees a girl dreaming next to a man lying stretched out on the deck of a boat, but wonders if

he himself is dreaming, whether his own preoccupations have made him imagine the scene. At the relevant point in the narrative of *Les Communistes* (1966c, pp. 76-7), a similar picture is described, as two officers walk along the bank of the Scheldt:

Ils flânent le long de la voie d'eau, plate, unie. De l'autre côté, les arbres commencent à verdir. L'air est léger, le ciel presque vert. Une barge, près du quai, où vague un gaillard brun, en gilet de peau. Et, à l'avant, regardant la Belgique, une femme dans sa robe noire et large, toute agitée par le vent, chante d'une voix rauque. Belle à sa manière.'

The theme of parting, and desire for reunion, that characterizes so many of these poems is suggested once again as a voice calls out: 'A bientôt'. A tone of apprehension is immediately added as another voice murmurs (line 4) 'qu'on mourait en Norvège'.

Again, rhyme provides a comment as the daydreaming of the poet is confronted with menacing reality in the contrast between 'révais-je (l.2) and 'Norvège' (l.4).

Stanza 3

Aragon and his fellow soldiers were very much aware of the different perceptions of the inhabitants across the Belgian border, and he uses the flow of the waters towards foreign territory to signal the direction of sympathies there, with a very effective use of *rime enjambée* stressing the tendency of Belgian affinities:

O frontaliers ô frontaliers vos nostalgies

Comme les canaux vont vers la terre étrangère

La France ici finit ici naît la Belgique

The officers mentioned above in connection with stanza 1, likewise question the attitudes of the Belgians:

Mais quel rapport y a-t-il entre ces gens et nous? une autre race, de format supérieur, toute sculptée par l'air des rivières [...]. 'Ça pourrait aussi bien être des Espagnols que des Français..' dit Parturier, et Noirmoutiers se met au pas, et dit: 'Ces gens-là...ils sont ce que les fait la force...aussi bien Allemands demain...' (1966c, p.77).

This was very much the official view. Illuminating here are the instructions (quoted in *Les Communistes*) given to the French troops, who, in May, did enter Belgium, on the attitude they were to adopt towards the population:

Nous sommes entrés en Belgique appelés par le gouvernement, et le peuple belge nous accueille avec de grandes démonstrations d'amitié [...]. Mais nous aurions tort de croire que tout le monde nous aime. La Belgique a été longuement travaillée par la Cinquième Colonne. Sous l'aspect de la neutralité, certains éléments ont fait le jeu de l'Allemagne jusqu'à la dernière minute. Il y a dans le pays, surtout parmi les flamingants, des admirateurs fanatisés de tout ce qui est germain (1966c, p.119).

The frontier is marked in the poem by the oppositions of the two *hémistiches* of line 3:

La France ici finit ici naît la Belgique

Nature, however, does not reflect the political distinctions:

Un ciel ne change pas où les drapeaux changèrent

In *Les Communistes* at this juncture, the same point is made: 'Un bateau doucement passe la frontière...L'eau est la même des deux côtés' (1966c, p. 77).

Stanza 4

The longing for spring and, with it, the embrace of the loved one, dominates the poem from now on, and the intensity of this desire is conveyed by the use of repetition. The initial line of this stanza, 'Nous l'avons attendu bien longtemps cette année', is twice echoed in the next stanza. Aragon's presentation of **what** the men had so long been waiting for is a delightful celebration of the renewal of nature and passion: he speaks of the lovely month in which eyes are violets, evoking a traditional link between flowers and female beauty; the wine that quickens the tired veins of these soldiers corresponds to the sap that flows from the earth; the apple blossom that provides a hat-veil for the day(light) (another version has 'ciel' here) is again suggestive of the softness, scent and coyness of feminine charms. Alliteration highlights the sense of the the third line, and there is a felicitous transposition in the rhyme 'violette-voilette'.

Stanza 5

The sense of interminable waiting for the return of the season of warmth and light in the darkness and coldness of the real and the political winter of 1939-40 is brought home to us with the insistent repetition of 'Nous l'avons attendu'. The hope of a promise being fulfilled is conveyed powerfully by the use of

religious vocabulary as re-awakening nature is described as 'ce renaissant Messie'. But the Biblical reference is then muted as the 'Messiah' is transformed into a pagan god - 'Ce Dieu qui meurt d'amour avant la fenaison' - and here the sensual pleasures of love prevail.

The wait for another kind of release from seemingly endless winter is now alluded to when Aragon reminds his politically attuned readers:

Nous l'avons attendu longtemps cette fois-ci

Si longtemps qu'on n'y croyait plus dans les prisons

His incarcerated comrades were to wait much longer, however, before they would be liberated, and they would be joined in their captivity by many more prisoners. In 1943 he would be writing:

Au quatrième été de notre apocalypse

Une étrange pâleur paraît sur l'horizon

Est-ce qu'on toucherait à la fin de l'éclipse

L'espoir palpite dans la paille des prisons (1979c, p.

191).

That Aragon was willing to use religious reference outwith the judeo-christian domain to voice his hopes in this kind of political context is shown in the 'Cantique à Elsa' (written between December 1940 and February 1942) where he visualizes the constellation of her hair as representing

Le nouvel an de notre Hégire

Dans les mèches de feu que tu fais aux prisons' (1979b, p.

274).

Stanza 6

The brightness of colour and the warmth of feeling associated with the coming spring and summer are contrasted vividly with the earthen tones of the camouflage uniforms of the soldiers and with their apparent deafness to the world and to emotion as, insulated by their helmets, their masks and the leather straps across their chests, they had stood to attention all winter, bent double by the weight of their packs, on the look-out for the modern 'dragons'.

The expression 'l'arme au pied' conveys once again the inertia of the French army's strategy. The use of 'tarasques', to evoke perhaps the fire-spitting tanks of the enemy, may also underline the lack of seriousness of the threat in the minds of these bored and frozen French troops, given that the word is defined thus in *Le petit Robert*:

1 Animal fabuleux, sorte de dragon des légendes provençales; mannequin le représentant que l'on promène en procession dans certaines villes méridionales. 2 *Fig. et littér.* Danger fabuleux. 'On a pris l'habitude de considérer la grève générale un peu comme la tarasque (Aragon)'.

Stanzas 7-8

These two stanzas must be treated together as they form the axes of contrasts used to illuminate the situation of the soldiers.

When these men laugh at the thought of people sleeping naked or of children playing in the streets with their scooters, their laughter is not indulgent, it is sardonic. The soldiers are deprived of the simple luxuries of civilian life: the comfort and

intimacies of marriage (thus the force of the words in stanza 8: 'Mais nous [...] sans amour'), the pleasure of seeing children enjoying themselves in a carefree way.

Another element of contrast is provided with the allusion to Leonhard Euler (1707-83), a Swiss mathematician and astronomer who became totally blind in 1766 but who continued his brilliant work of research nevertheless. The full opposition of this to the situation of the soldiers is brought out in stanza 8:

Mais nous sans yeux [....] nous sans cerveau [...]

Nous n'avons inventé que d'anciens blasphèmes.

The similarity of construction and vocabulary reminds us of 'Vingt ans après': 'Nous [...] / Sans chaînes sans draps blancs sans plaintes sans idées' (1979b, p. 103). There is a similar motif in both poems:

Fantômes d'une vie où l'on parlait d'amour ('Vingt ans après');

Fantômes qui vivons séparés de nous-mêmes ('Le Printemps').

The sense of this latter line is perhaps elucidated in the 'Ouverture' (written in December 1940) of 'Cantique à Elsa' (1979b, p. 267), where the poet addresses his wife saying:

Ce ne sont plus les jours du vivre séparés.

Aragon comments on this latter line in *Arma virumque cano* (1979b, pp. 186-187): 'le pluriel de séparés [sic], impliquant deux personnes'. Thus, in 'Le Printemps' Aragon perhaps means that the soldiers feel mere ghosts of themselves because they are separated from the ones they love.

In the vain wait for the renewal of spring and of a return to their former lives, they have been cruelly aware that all they have succeeded in 'inventing' are the blasphemies of the past. The use of 'blasphèmes' here is perhaps influenced and explained by a cognate expression in a quotation by *L'Humanité* (in the undated number 13 of December 1939) from the anti-war appeal made by the German socialist Karl Liebknecht on 1 May 1916: 'Finissons-en avec le **crime impie**, avec l'assassinat des peuples!' (emphasis added).

Stanza 9

The 'Fantômes' of the previous stanza now become 'faux défunts' who wonder whether, in the season of rebirth, they are going to return to life. The yearning keened by previous disappointment comes out in the repeated 'enfin', especially in line 3. The contrast between the death-like existence of the soldiers and the vitality associated with spring is pointed by the power of the season's perfume '[qui] Bouleverse le vent ainsi qu'une caresse', by the combined effects of scent and touch. The question the men ask about what they desire is suggested by the *rime complexe* of *car est-ce/caresse* (lines 2 and 4).

Stanza 10

Again the poet moves from a discussion of the situation of all of these men to his own particular love. The complex rhythms of repeated expression ('Et le plus beau printemps / mais le plus bel avril / le plus doux mai'), and the reiteration of 'sans toi' in stressed positions, serve to emphasise his emotion, his

devotion to Elsa, and to convey the message that the beauty of spring brings only pain without her.

Stanza 11

The tone of the final stanza is such that it seems the poet has suffered a sudden collapse of all reserve and restraint. He can bear the suffering of separation no longer, and the concentration on his own universe takes over completely:

Rendez-moi rendez-moi mon ciel et ma musique

Ma femme [...]

Sans qui Mai n'est pour moi que le désert physique

Le soleil qu'une insulte et l'ombre une douleur.

We see how the sense of 'enfer' of the previous stanza is made clear by this 'désert physique'. The dichotomy between the mood of nature and that of the poet deprived of his love recalls lines of Baudelaire's 'A celle qui est trop gaie':

J'ai senti, comme une ironie,

Le soleil déchirer mon sein,

Et le printemps et la verdure

Ont tant humilié mon coeur [...].

How tragic the spring of 1940 was to turn out on the beaches of Dunkirk:

Les parfums du printemps le sable les ignore

Voici mourir le Mai dans les dunes du Nord (1979b,

p.205).

Romance du temps qu'il fait

This poem, composed, according to Aragon's *Bibliographie*, at Audencourt in April 1940, was first published in *Poésie 41* ('Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, 3, fév-mars 1941') and then in the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* of April 1941.

Variants

Stanza 3, line 5: *Poésie 41* has 'La Reine'.

Stanza 5, line 3: TS. has 'Rosenkranz Guldestram'; *Poésie 41* has 'Rosenkranz Gulderstram'.

Stanza 13, line 5: MS1 has 'demeure'.

The date of the poem's appearance caused such a well-informed reader as Georges Sadoul (1967, p. 30) to misinterpret its content. He tells how, in 1963, he had quoted it to the Soviet Gregori Kozintzev in connection with the latter's film *Hamlet*:

Je lui récitais quelques vers de la 'Romance du temps qu'il fait', ajoutant qu'écrits pendant l'occupation, ils dénonçaient encore plus Vichy qu'Hitler. Je commettais la même erreur que certains (moi déjà peut-être) qui, le découvrant au début de 1941 dans *Le Crève-Coeur*, purent penser que ce poème visait Pétain ('Le Roi n'a pas voulu la guerre / Il préfère les tragédies'), stigmatisait les 'collabos' ('Rosenkrantz, Guildenstern, Fantoche[sic] Vous qui tuez pour de l'argent / Celui qui vous fut indulgent'), exprimait le lointain espoir de la Libération ('Et lui reste

sourd aux fanfares / Dont la nuit pourtant se timbra / O
trompettes de Fortinbras').

'Le temps qu'il fait' était pourtant celui de mars [sic] 1940, et non pas 1941 comme en témoignent la bibliographie du *Crève-Coeur* et les allusions de ses vers à l'attaque d'Hitler contre la Norvège.

Even when it is placed in its correct time, the poem poses a number of difficulties of interpretation. This is principally because the *contrebande* is sometimes too secretive, a fact acknowledged by the poet himself in stanza 6:

Je tiens la clef de ces parades [...]
Je garde le secret du jeu.

The reason for this more arcane expression may have been the issuing of the *Décret-loi Sérol*, named after the Minister of Justice of the time. Sadoul, who was spending a few days' leave in Paris where he had been reunited with Aragon and Elsa, recorded the event and the mood of the poet:

Samedi 6 avril.

Décret-loi Sérol. Peine de mort contre tous ceux qui imprimeraient, stockeraient ou distribueraient des tracts communistes. Aragon [...] est très pessimiste. Sa permission s'achève. La séparation avec Elsa s'annonce. Quelle sécurité derrière lui? (1977, p. 174).

The title of the poem seems to want to deflect the interest of the censor: 'Love-song about the weather we're having'. But, as the poet was to explain in *Le Musée Grévin* in 1943:

Les mots français gardent l'espoir d'un double sens
 Comme un pré qui ne peut oublier qu'il a plu
 Les plus simples d'entre eux ont plus de puissance
 Ils vibrent longuement d'un accord résolu (1979c,
 p.217).

Although it was summer when he was writing those words,
 Les champs sont défleuris quand mon peuple est aux fers [...]
 Tout prend au temps qu'il fait le parfum de l'enfer (ibid.,
 emphasis added).

And so, we shall see that 'Romance du temps qu'il fait' is a poem about love in the political climate of April 1940.

Stanza 1

Just as in 'Pergame en France', Aragon had used the parallel of ancient Troy in order to comment on the situation of Paris at the end of February, so he turns now to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in order to give an interpretation of events in the context of the German invasion of Denmark and Norway of 9 April 1940.

Wolfgang Babilas (1982a, p. 456) convincingly suggests that Aragon is doing the same as Hamlet with his play (within the play) where, in the words of Act III, scene 2, '[the] end is, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show [...] the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'.

We might translate the first two lines of this stanza thus: 'Fresh / recent reasons for old madnasses into which the ghosts of monarchs and the modern Ophelias march'. The ancient madness, it would seem, of war, embarked on anew by the modern successors

of the monarchs of the past, was about to cause unbearable suffering to innocent women. Aragon may be adapting *Hamlet*, Act I, scene 1, where Horatio addresses the ghost thus:

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,
 Together with that fair and warlike form
 In which the majesty of buried Denmark
 Did sometimes march? (emphasis added).

The final two lines of this first stanza of 'Romance du temps qu'il fait' exploit *Hamlet* (Act I, sc. 5) to make an analogy between the present world and the kingdom of Denmark. That country (which had clung desperately but vainly to its neutrality) has fallen victim to war like the world where, as in the 'state of Denmark', something is rotten.

Stanza 2

Aragon universalizes the rottenness, as does Hamlet himself in Act II, scene 2: 'this brave o'erhanging firmament [...] - why it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours'.

The poet now adapts Hamlet's discourse on the fate of Yorick to talk, it seems, of the destiny that has overtaken the French soldier ('Pauvre Pierre') and his German counterpart ('pauvre Guillaume') who have died (in the Scandinavian battle) from their fanciful dreams, unlike Columbus who fulfilled his 'rêve chimérique' by his discovery of America.

In *Les Communistes*, Aragon (1966c, p. 107) puts this another way when he talks of 'hommes-enfants rêvant à la beauté des batailles, et au doux retour dans le pays'.

The pity shown here by the poet for the German as well as for the French conscript reflects Aragon's experience of World War I and his conviction that this is an imperialist conflict.

L'Humanité of 10 April 1940 carried a similar message:

Aujourd'hui, les impérialistes se sont engagés dans une lutte où ils sont prêts à sacrifier autant qu'il faut la jeunesse de leurs pays. En France comme en Allemagne, les peuples sentent que ce ne sont pas leurs intérêts mais ceux de leurs maîtres qui sont en jeu. En France comme en Allemagne, les communistes proclament cette vérité et appellent les masses ouvrières à se dresser contre leur propre impérialisme.

Aragon was not convinced that such political awareness was widespread. He told Georges Sadoul (1977, p. 171) on 2 April: 'Le mécontentement des soldats contre leurs officiers, très vague, est encore loin d'avoir un sens de classe.'

If 'Pauvre Pierre' does refer to the French soldier now engaged in the Norwegian conflict, this could give us an indication of the date of composition of the poem because Sadoul (1977, p. 154), like Horne (1969, p. 146), records the arrival in Narvik of the French forces as on 19 April.

Stanza 3

The *contrebande* now seems to refer to the political events that have prepared this 'state of Denmark' in France.

The first two lines perhaps allude to Daladier's signing of the Munich agreement with Hitler at the end of September 1938. The French Prime Minister had presented it as a means of saving the

peace, but it had been denounced by the PCF as a betrayal of Czechoslovakia and as making war inevitable but on much worse terms for France, since it deprived her of a well armed ally on Hitler's eastern flank.

The final three lines of the stanza would then recall the visit of the Nazi Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, to Paris to sign the Franco-German Accord of 6 December 1938. This was supposed to consolidate the Munich Agreement but was seen by the PCF as an invitation to the Nazis to satisfy their territorial ambitions at the expense of the Soviet Union. It effectively left France with no allies in Eastern Europe.

Inaudi (line 4) was an amazingly fast mental arithmetician of the 19th century, but it is another kind of calculating that would seem to be attributed to Ribbentrop here.

'La reine ['La Reine' in the first published version] n'a pas applaudi', besides referring to the displeasure of Queen Gertrude after the play staged by Hamlet (cf. Act III, scene 3, 'The Queen [...] in most great affliction of spirit') could be an allusion to the attitude of Paris whose population reacted negatively to the visit of Ribbentrop. William L. Shirer (1970 p. 396) describes the mood of the day:

I happened to be in Paris on December 6, 1938, and noted the frosty atmosphere in the streets and in the corridors of the Chamber and Senate. The Presidents of the two Chambers, Herriot and Jeanneney, several cabinet members and many leading figures in political, literary and social circles declined to attend the public functions accorded to the nazi

Foreign Minister. One got the impression that the French, after their defeatist panic of the Munich days, were beginning to recover their senses and regain their distrust of Berlin.

Wolfgang Babilas (1982a, pp. 457-458) suggests that the first two lines of this stanza refer initially to Hamlet's uncle, King Claudius, who wished to hinder the war-plans of the young Fortinbras. Secondly they would allude to King Christian X of Denmark under whose rule the Danish Government had signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in May 1939 in the hope of staving off a Nazi attack (the tragedy which had ensued). This interpretation does not explain 'Inaudi' or 'La reine'.

Stanza 4

These lines probably allude to Daladier. The sense of 'Excellence' is explained by 'ministre' in line 2 (*Le petit Robert* gives as one of the meanings of 'excellence': 'Fam. Ministre'), and Daladier's career as Premier was now certainly in the graveyard. He had been forced to resign on 20 March 1940 in the aftermath of the disappointment caused by the Finnish War ending too soon for the French Government to send troops to engage the Soviets. Hamlet's words in Act V, scene 2, as he considers Yorick's skull, could well have been applied by Aragon (not without bitter satisfaction) to the persecutor of the PCF: 'Where be your gibes now? [...] Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen?'

The ex-Prime Minister's fate is then associated with that of Polonius when the poet adapts Hamlet's cry as he passes his sword through the arras (Act III, sc. 4):

How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead.

Again, Aragon's tone betrays no kindness:

Hamlet par Dieu c'est bien joué.

Stanza 5

Here the poet would seem to be referring to the corruption, the meretriciousness characteristic of French politics of the period. Fernand Grenier (1969, pp. 169-170) commented in his diary on 23-24 March 1940 on the scenes in the Chamber of Deputies when, immediately after the fall of Daladier, Paul Reynaud presented his new cabinet:

La lecture du compte rendu des débats donne une pénible impression de mesquineries, de haines, de jalousies. C'est ça un cabinet de guerre?

There Grenier also reported the reaction of Henri De Kérillis in *L'Epoque*:

Parlant du vote des députés de droite contre le nouveau cabinet, il flétrit 'la bassesse des appétits, des intrigues et des calculs qui se sont déchainés'.

Georges Sadoul may well have been right to see in this stanza an attack on 'les collabos', but on those who were preparing Hitler's takeover. It is interesting to know that an important part in Daladier's downfall was played by Pierre Laval (a role described by Pertinax in *Les Fossoyeurs* [1943, pp. 192-51] and that there were Nazi sympathisers active even in the ex-Premier's

own circle. This latter point was made by *L'Humanité* on 31 December 1939:

Les complices d'Abetz [an agent of Hitler's] étaient des protégés de Daladier. Le principal agent de propagande hitlérienne, de Brinon était l'ami de Daladier et le confident de l'équivoque marquise de Crissol [sic], égérie du président du conseil.

Fernand de Brinon, founder of the notorious *Comité France-Allemagne*, was executed after the war for collaboration as was Laval (in whose Government of 1942 de Brinon was a Secretary of state).

Stanzas 6-7

The puzzling nature of some of these allusions for the reader is acknowledged by Aragon when he tells of the reaction of the sergeant to whom he shows these 'analogies'. The rhyme of lines 4 and 5, 'qui c'est / Qui sait', underlines the poet's unwillingness to elucidate.

Adapting Rimbaud's *Parade* ('J'ai seul la clef de cette parade sauvage', 1966, p. 224), Aragon insists on his exclusive knowledge of the identity of the figures in this parade of celebrities. The word 'parades' may contain a further sense of 'showing off'. The lines,

Tant pis s'il vous est outrageux

Je garde le secret du jeu,

remind one of the attitudes of Aragon's Surrealist days and the influence of Rimbaud that was particularly strong then.

Specifically, there may be an echo here of 'Je tiens le système' in *Une Saison en enfer* (1966, p. 200).

Wolfgang Babilas (1982a) sees 'jeu' (line 6) as being used in its mediaeval sense of 'play' (the 'secret' being the hidden meaning of the *Hamlet*-references) and 'parades' as alluding to the clowning of mediaeval tumblers.

This interpretation could well be supported by the fact that in Rimbaud's 'Parade' we find 'Maîtres jongleurs [qui] transforment le lieu et les personnes et usent de la comédie magnétique' and 'Dans des costumes improvisés avec le goût du mauvais rêve, ils jouent des complaintes, des tragédies de malandrins' (1966, p. 224).

Stanza 8

The perplexity surrounding Aragon's allusions seems to extend now to his own identity (cf. Rimbaud (1966, p. 180): 'me connais-je?') and to that of his fellow soldiers. In these strange times and circumstances, he is not sure any more who he is or who they are. Cavalrymen they may be called, but their horses have been replaced by armoured cars and tanks (cf. *Les Communistes* (1966c, p. 71): 'Des cavaliers, et des cuirassiers encore. Cuirassiers sans cuirasses ni chevaux, devenus chevaucheurs de chars.').

Soldiers they may be, but when they look in their haversacks for their mess tins and their beaker (quarter-litre capacity), their minds wander on to pleasures far removed from their military role.

Firstly to the 'bal' where they would enjoy the 'java', a popular waltz played to the sound of the accordeon (music and

dancing evoked also by another sense of 'musette' as in 'bal musette'); and then to the brothel ('bocard'). In *Les Communistes* (1966a, p. 214), we find the same word: 'Et bien sûr les bocards, derrière le quartier Lapérine. Pour ceux qui aiment ça'. *Faire la java* ('faire la foire') is just what these soldiers long to do.

Stanza 9

Like Hamlet (in Act III, sc, 1), these men reflect on life and death and think that they also can allow themselves a little madness (cf. *le petit Robert* - 'avoir un petit grain: être un peu fou') before it is too late. There is irony in the vision of the soldiers scouring the countryside for a bit in their all-roads vehicles ('battre la campagne' also means, according to *le petit Robert*, 'déraisonner, divaguer', reinforcing the the sense of 'grain'). What they would be looking for in this incongruous style is no doubt explained by the following lines from *le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 429) where Aragon recalls the memory of his young comrades-in-arms who had indeed fallen in the battles of May and June 1940:

Toujours à battre les buissons
 A dégoiser des gaudrioles [i.e 'débiter des gauloiseries']
 Ils avaient de belles façons
 Avec les filles mais passons.

Stanza 10

Reciprocally, they arouse the interest of women who seek to read the emblems on their uniforms. These emblems would seem to be in the form of 'Les sphinx' (line 3), perhaps in the second meaning

of this word given in *Le petit Robert*: 'chenille d'un papillon dont la tête est dressée; ce grand papillon crépusculaire au vol puissant, dont le thorax porte une tache rappelant une tête de mort, *Sphinx tête-de-mort*'. In a punning sense, Sphinxes are acquainted with 'dragons' (in the sense of 'dragoons', now motorized). In the minds of the women, the idealized DLM combat their problems (i.e. defend them against the enemy).

In *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 430), Aragon was to remember the military emblems of those who were soon to lie dead in the fields:

Asseyez-vous dans le cresson [...]

Il vous reste votre écusson.

Stanza 11

Again the desires of the soldiers are listed and, with the approach of May, the heart sighs for love. But the 'vieilles folies' of the first line of the poem are pessimistically recalled when we are told:

Le coeur humain n'a pas changé

Il est aussi fou sinon pire

Qu'il était au temps de Shakespeare

These lines seem to contradict Aragon's Marxist philosophy of progress.

Aragon was later to make an interesting comment on the use of the name of Shakespeare in French verse: 'La prononciation française classique de ce nom (*Chèkspire*) exige qu'il compte pour deux syllabes, et ne soit pas scandé à l'oeil' (1980, p. 226).

Stanza 12

Taking us to the chilling images of war in the true state of Denmark, the poet reminds us that death is now passing with its lovers on the waters of the Little and the Great Belt (straits linking the Kattegat with the Baltic). *L'Humanité* (No. 38) reported on 10 April: 'A l'heure présente, des milliers d'hommes se font tuer sur les forteresses flottantes le long des rives de Scandinavie.'

The word 'amant' (line 2) seems to call forth a cry from a young 'scatterbrain' that 'Celle que j'aime est la plus belle'. Aragon tells him to keep quiet or tell a lie, this is no longer the time for protracted pledges of love: will he live to fulfil his vows?

Wolfgang Babilas (1982a, p. 459) sees in 'Tais-toi jeune étourdi ou mens / L'heure n'est plus aux longs serments' an allusion to Hamlet's fervent love letter to Ophelia (Act II, sc. 2).

Stanza 13

Liberty shares the fate of the queen at the end of *Hamlet* ('I am poisoned'). It is dying in the real Denmark of 1940 with the invasion of Hitler ('Dans Elsenaur elle se meurt'). Aragon fears that the loss of freedom is not confined to Denmark alone, thus:

La liberté nous abandonne.

Wolfgang Babilas (1982a, p. 459) suggests that there is a reference here to the political situation within France, where the trial of the Communist Deputies had just ended with fines and prison sentences.

In the final line of this stanza, the voice of Elsa intervenes to command the poet to be silent and to stay with her, as she said in 'J'attends sa lettre au crépuscule':

Reste ici comme avant

Les batailles de l'est.

Stanza 14

Here it is as if the poet is recalling his last leave in Paris at the end of March and beginning of April 1940. Elsa remembers in *Préface à la contrebande* (1964, p. 24): 'Tu étais venu en permission une dernière fois, en mars, je crois, avec au bout, des signes...[of the deteriorating situation]'. In this final stanza of 'Romance du temps qu'il fait', they do not want to part: 'Elle dit N'ouvre plus tes bras'.

In the darkness of the blackout (recalling 'La nuit du moyen-âge'), he tries to shut out the the trumpets of Fortinbras. Here 'le secret du jeu' is easily penetrable. Hitler, after his conquest of Poland, had now invaded Scandinavia in response to Britain's mining of its coastal waters. A reading of *Hamlet*, Act V, scene 2, allows us to identify him behind the Fortinbras of Aragon's poem:

Hamlet: [*March afar off, and shot within*]

What warlike noise is this?

Osric: Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,

To the ambassadors of England gives

This warlike volley.

Very ominously, and perhaps expressing Aragon's own fears for the outcome of the battle with Hitler that lay ahead, Hamlet continues:

I cannot live to hear the news from England
But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras.

Le Poème interrompu

Aragon's *Bibliographie* tells us:

Ce poème écrit à Audencourt, comme le précédent, a été interrompu et mis à la poste à la première heure le 10 mai 1940, l'auteur partant en détachement en avant du régiment de découverte de la 3e D.L.M. qui franchit la frontière dans la matinée.

In the interview conducted by Fernand Seguin (1968, p. 70), Aragon, talking of *Le Crève-Coeur*, says:

Il y a un poème qui marque [là-dedans] la date du 10 mai puisque c'est un poème-lettre que j'ai envoyé à Elsa, quand j'ai appris que les Allemands étaient entrés en Belgique. J'ai mis le poème à la poste et Elsa a compris que j'étais envoyé là où on se battait.

The date of the arrival of this 'lettre-poème' may be gleaned from the following entry by Sadoul in his *Journal de guerre*:

Mardi 4 juin [1940]: la radio annonce dans la soirée l'abandon de Dunkerque. Trois cent trente-cinq mille hommes ont été embarqués, ce qui est très beau. J'espère qu'Aragon est parmi ceux-ci, car d'après Yvonne qui m'écrivait hier, il a été encerclé dans l'armée Blanchard. Elsa, sans lettre depuis le 14 [mail, est folle d'inquiétude] [1977, p. 267, emphasis added].

At its first publication in *Fontaine* (Alger), II, 13 (*fév-mai*) 1941 (and afterwards in all the editions of *Le Crève-Coeur*) the poem had appended the words: '10 Mai 1940, au petit matin'.

In the manuscript (MS1) and the extant *tapuscrits*, there is no mention of this date, but the following remark is added at the end in brackets:

Les Allemands ont ce matin attaqué la Belgique et la radio de Bruxelles annonce que le Roi des Belges a demandé la protection des armées alliées.

Variants

Stanza 1, line 4: in MS1, 'O mon amour' has been amended to 'Ma belle amour'.

Stanza 2, line 7: *Fontaine* has 'Nos coeurs disjoints vont toujours l'amble'.

On 9 May 1940, Aragon was in the thoughts of Georges Sadoul as the latter discussed the outlook with a re-enlisted soldier:

Le rengagé [...] croit à une attaque immédiate sur la Hollande.
 Dans ce cas, la Belgique à nos côtés, et nos troupes courant vers la Hollande. Parmi eux, Aragon et Pierre Unik (1977, p. 190).

Stanza 1

The poem opens with what seems a reference to battle, but, as no fighting was taking place on the Franco-German front, the first four lines probably contain contraband allusions to another struggle.

The beginning of May 1940 was a period when the French Government, seeking no doubt to divert public opinion away from the recent failures in Norway, launched a major offensive against the Communists. Thus on the third of the month Fernand Grenier recorded:

Pour la première fois, l'article 76 du Code pénal prévoyant la peine de mort est retenu contre les six jeunes communistes arrêtés il y a quelques jours (1969, p. 204).

On 9 May he noted:

Au Conseil général de la Seine, Langeron, préfet de Police, a dressé 'le bilan de la répression des activités communistes: 2 241 arrestations, 67 journaux interdits, 321 syndicats dissous, 200 permanences fermées, 666 élus déchus, 116 agents des services publics arrêtés, 1 337 militants signalés à l'autorité militaire, 673 affectés spéciaux radiés et renvoyés aux armées' (1969, p. 207).

Is this perhaps the 'massacre' to which Aragon is really referring in line 2?

And if, in the thick of it, 'Nous aurons chanté combattu', to what song and to what fight is the poet alluding?

Perhaps Grenier can help us again:

1er mai. En me levant, j'ai chanté 'l'Internationale' dans le magasin. En sourdine, comme ça, pour moi tout seul, histoire de commémorer la Journée internationale des Travailleurs.

A plusieurs sympathisants rencontrés dans la journée, j'ai serré la main en disant: 'Vive le 1er mai quand même!' Dans leurs yeux brillait la même espérance (1969, p. 202).

It is probable that Aragon, too, would have sung the words:

C'est la lutte finale

Groupons-nous et demain

L'Internationale sera le genre humain.

He may even have heard by letter or word of mouth what *L'Humanité* was to report on 15 May:

MANIFESTATION A LA SANTE

Le 1er Mai, pendant tout le cours de la journée, les prisonniers ont manifesté en chantant l'Internationale, et en criant 'Vive l'Union Soviétique' et 'Thorez au pouvoir'.

Soutenons nos courageux camarades que la répression n'abat pas, aidons leurs familles: exigeons leur libération.

When, in the final stanza of 'Le Poème interrompu', the poet speaks of his own song, which he says is pure enough to pass over the walls, does he perhaps have prison walls also in mind? And are 'les gens que nous connaissons' (stanza 4, line 9) in fact 'les gens que tu sais'?

The first two lines of the poem may exemplify the traditional use of birds to symbolize dissenting voices in an atmosphere of repression. We may compare them with stanza five of 'Richard II quarante', where the censorship attacked is that of the Germans and of Vichy:

Fuyez les bois et les fontaines
 Taisez-vous oiseaux querelleurs
 Vos chants sont mis en quarantaine
 C'est le règne de l'oiseleur.

In the second half of the first stanza of 'Le Poème interrompu' the fields of May are 'Porteurs d'animaux et d'amphores'(line 5), like the statues of saints in the the frieze of the entablature of a church (cf. *Le petit Robert* - 'Zoophore: Frise de l'entablement, qui portait à l'origine une décoration zoomorphe; **Zoomorphe**: qui figure un animal, des animaux'). The comparison is illuminated by the text at the appropriate point of *Les Communistes*, where a soldier is writing to his fiancée:

Il lui parle d'autrefois, des printemps de leur jeunesse, où ils marchaient dans les champs ensemble, à regarder les premières pousses, et dans les villages près de la Loire, où ils entraient dans les églises semblables et différentes, avec leurs statues de saint Roch qui montre sa cuisse, son chien près de lui
 (1966c, pp. 106-7).

Stanza 2

This may be the season of colour and brightness, but the future is too vague to make out as yet, it is a dream-like form striding across the sky in the seemingly endless night.

As in days gone past, the poet's lover trembles again (is this a reference to the insecurity Elsa felt at the beginning of their relationship?).

Whereas in 'Le temps des mots croisés' he recalled that when they were together,

Nos jambes se mêlaient t'en souviens-tu naguère

Et je savais pour toi ce que ton corps faisait, -

now, their unyoked hearts do not go at the same pace.

There is no intrinsic joy in spring, it depends on their being with one another, and we recall the end of 'Le Printemps': 'Rendez-moi [...]/ Ma femme sans qui rien n'a chanson ni couleur'.

Stanza 3

The sun in this misty Flanders landscape translates the helpless bewilderment, the sadness, the frustration of the poet without his love. Again *Les Communistes* has a similar passage, where the soldier continues his letter to his fiancée:

Il lui parle de ce faux printemps des Flandres, où il est seul,
ses brumes jamais tout à fait dissipées par le soleil, du
paysage noir des mines (1966c, p. 107).

There is a special pain for Aragon in finding himself once more in the scenery of the First World War: 'Revoici la brume des Flandres'.

It may be spring according to the calendar, but this is not reflected in the weather, and how could the sky respond otherwise while the lovers are separated? This is what Aragon means when he says, 'Le ciel est facile à comprendre'. Here we have the pathetic fallacy, but it is the emotions of the poet which determine the presentation of Nature. Thus, in 'Le Printemps', we recall him telling

Elsa: 'mais le plus bel avril le plus doux mai/ Sans toi ne sont que deuil ne sont sans toi qu'enfer'.

Stanza 4

The poet now reflects on happiness and how short-lived was that of Romeo and Juliet. The only thrill they shared was in the dark draught of Veronal. Again *Le petit Robert* explains: 'Véronal (1903, marque déposée; de la ville de *Vérone*). Méd. Barbiturique employé comme somnifère'. Strictly speaking, it was, of course, only Juliet who took the sleeping potion; Romeo took poison. Perhaps, in the word 'frisson', there is a recollection of Juliet's words (Act IV, scene 3) as she prepares to take the drug: 'I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins'.

In contrast to the 'noir véronal' that symbolizes the tragic passion of Shakespeare's lovers, Aragon offers to Elsa a 'glass of azure', with its connotations of happiness, of the blue sky they do not have at the moment, and he immediately exploits the associations in French literature of 'azur' with pure poetry in order to transform it into 'ce trille étrange ma chanson'. The expression recalls the 'tradéridéra' of 'Les Amants séparés' in its modesty, but this is offset by the literary conceit of the song amid the tanks and the armour plating (line 6). The message of the final lines seems to be one of hope (tempered by the pain of present separation), that love will triumph over all the obstacles and dangers created by the war. In the final line ('O mon amour ô ma blessure') we have another expression of the duality already encountered in 'Vingt ans après'

('Elle seule l'angoisse et l'espoir mon amour'). We find it later ('Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux' (1979c, p. 317):

Mon bel amour mon cher amour ma déchirure.

In this final stanza of 'Le Poème interrompu', Wolfgang Babilas (1982a, p. 461) discovers more Shakespeare references. Thus, 'Mais à toi ce verre d'azur' (line 4) would evoke Romeo's words before drinking the poison: 'Here's to my love!' (Act V, scene 3). The ability of Aragon's song to pass over walls would be an allusion to Romeo's capacity to do the same in order to be with Juliet (Act II, scene 2):
Juliet: How cam'st thou hither, tell me and wherefore?

The orchard walls are high and hard to climb [...]

Romeo: With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls

For stony limits cannot hold love out.

There is a deliberate contrast between the form and the circumstances of the poem. The bleak plain of Flanders, the uncertainty of its skies and of the future, the starkness of the military hardware are countered by the song of the poet that echoes that of the bird which 'au fort / Du massacre ne s'est pas tu'. It is a song whose message is supported by the beauty and complexity of the structure. The five stanzas of ten octosyllables all have the same dazzlingly accomplished rhyme-scheme (a b b b a b b b a b) and the rhymes themselves show how Aragon can sustain a series of them by using Apollinaire's system. Thus, in the first stanza, the *rime complexe* of *es-tu* is followed by *tétus/ laitues/statues* and *vertus*. In the second stanza, a similar technique is embellished by *rime Aragon*

as in lines 2-3 and 4-5: *naissant*→*Blême*/ *enjambe*→*La* (veritably, *rime enjambée*). Such sustained rhymes enable the poet to develop an idea, an emotion, as for example in stanza three:

Triste comme un hôtel à vendre
 Comme un feu qui ne peut reprendre
 Comme un baiser qu'on ne peut rendre.

These formal aspects are backed up by the stylized register of the language, the intricate syntax, the alliteration, as in stanza 2:

Saison des couleurs avenir
 Sans force encore au jour naissant
 Blême blessé que l'aube assemble
 Quel songe dans le ciel enjambe
 La nuit qui ne veut plus finir.

They reflect Aragon's belief in the traditional (and renewed) elements of French poetry as tenors of vital cultural values in the grim circumstances of 1940. They are an integral part of the system of values centring on the love of which he sings to Elsa, surrounded though he may be by the weapons of destruction:

Mais à toi ce verre d'azur
 Ce trille étrange ma chanson
 D'entre les chars et les armures
 Elle monte Elle est assez pure
 Pour passer par-dessus les murs.

Les Lilas et les roses

Aragon told Fernand Seguin (1968, p. 71) that ' "Les Lilas et les roses" évoquent à la fois la campagne, les Flandres et la traversée de l'Anjou'. The poem was written in July 1940 at Javerlhac (Dordogne), 'where Aragon's division had withdrawn with the first ratification of the demarcation line' (Josephson 1946, p. 90).

At the end of August, Aragon and his wife went to see Gaston Gallimard in Carcassonne. There, Elsa recalls in *Préface à la contrebande* (1964, p. 28), she and Aragon rented rooms from

une vieille demoiselle qui s'était prise d'affection pour nous [...]. C'est dans la cuisine de cette Mlle Agnès que Louis a lu à Jean et Germaine Paulhan 'Les Lilas et les roses' qu'il venait d'écrire... 'On nous a dit ce soir que Paris s'est rendu'..et la blessure, fraîche, saignait..

The poem first appeared on the front page of *Le Figaro* (which was published in Lyon after the armistice) on Saturday, 21 September 1940, and signed *Aragon*. In the same newspaper's edition of 28 September, on page 3, an admission was made that the poem had not been sent by Aragon personally but came 'sur l'aile de la renommée'. The paper apologized for nine errors and continued:

M. Aragon, qui vient de déposer la vareuse de médecin auxiliaire après avoir fait une très courageuse campagne dans l'une de nos divisions légères mécaniques [sic] nous a adressé de Carcassonne le texte exact de son poème - que voici.

In the corrected version in *Le Figaro* of 28 September, lines 5-8 of stanza three (obviously cut out by the censor although present the previous week) have been replaced by a blank space.

The statement in the newspaper that the poet had sent this corrected version from Carcassonne contradicts Daix (1975, p. 314) who tells us:

Aragon et Elsa suivent Seghers aux Angles, village tout proche de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon. C'est là qu'ils prennent connaissance de la publication des 'Lilas et les roses' dans *le Figaro*, dont Aragon corrige les erreurs de mémoire. Ce texte corrigé sera republié le 28 septembre.

Much more reliably, Sadoul (1967, pp. 31-2) recounts how he was reunited with the poet and what followed:

Nous nous sommes pourtant retrouvés après la grande dispersion de la débâcle le 21 septembre 1940 à Carcassonne, dans le petit meublé qu'il habitait avec Elsa. Elle m'installa pour dormir pendant quelques nuits un matelas sur le plancher.

Dans un petit restaurant nous eûmes pour convive un jour un jeune inconnu (de moi). Il arrivait d'Avignon où il vendait du matériel pour cafés-restaurants. Il s'appelait Pierre Seghers [...]. Je fus bien surpris quand Aragon me tendit le numéro du *Figaro* publié le jour de notre nouvelle rencontre, le 21 septembre 1940, et me montra, signé de son nom, un court poème, 'Les Lilas et les roses' dont il corrigea les altérations. Elles étaient beaucoup dues à la 'tradition orale'. Aragon avait lu ce poème à Jean Paulhan

qui l'avait ensuite transcrit de mémoire, et fait publier par *Le Figaro*.

Sadoul's account confirms that Aragon was at Carcassonne when the poem appeared and it was there that Seghers came to see him in the following few days.

Variants

Stanza 5, line 4: *Le Figaro* of 21 and 28 September 1940 have 'Refllet d'un incendie au loin roses d'Anjou'.

Stanza 1

In the poems written immediately preceding Hitler's attack on the Low Countries, Aragon had associated the arrival of spring with the hope of the reflowering of love, for example in 'Le Printemps' ('Le joli mois où les yeux sont des violettes') or in 'Romance du temps qu'il fait' ('Et quand Mai vient le coeur soupire'). He plays on such expectations in the first line of 'Les Lilas et les roses' only to destroy them. The positive aspects given to 'mois des métamorphoses' by the proximity to 'mois des floraisons' (line 1) are extinguished by the second line. There we learn that we are not being taken forward to a blossoming future, but, by means of the past tense, that we are being shown the corpse of promised summer.

When Aragon talks of 'Mai qui fut sans nuage' (line 2), he means this literally, as the weather was particularly beautiful, but also in another sense. Max Adereth (1985, p. 49), discussing the interplay between the poem and the relevant part of the text of *Les Communistes*, says the novel

gives many instances of the illusion then entertained that there was nothing to worry about (the figurative meaning of 'sans nuage') since victory was round the corner.

Crémieux and Estager (1983, pp. 191-192) go even further in their assessment:

Dans les premiers jours de mai 1940 tout se conjugue pour laisser croire aux Français que finalement la guerre n'aura pas lieu: un printemps magnifique dont 'les lilas et les roses' seront gravés dans le poème d'Aragon, une rassurante autant que totale inactivité militaire, des communiqués du haut état-major qui répètent jour après jour 'rien à signaler sur l'ensemble du front', une presse qui exalte les joies saines que connaissent des millions de jeunes hommes qui bivouaquent à nos frontières dans le cadre de ce que le *Petit Parisien* appelle 'Les vacances Gamelin'. Et d'ailleurs, pourquoi la guerre aurait-elle lieu? Le président du Conseil Paul Reynaud répète dans chaque discours que 'nous sommes les plus forts', et le haut commandement confirme que 'la France n'est pas la Pologne'. La propagande gouvernementale affirme jour après jour que le blocus a déjà atteint son but: l'effondrement de l'économie allemande [...]. Le 10 mai au matin, la radio annonce l'invasion de la Hollande, de la Belgique et du Luxembourg par les armées allemandes. Ce même jour, les Français peuvent lire dans le *Petit Parisien*: 'Il n'y a rien de nouveau en Europe occidentale de même qu'en Europe orientale. Tous les bruits mis en circulation au sujet de la

Hollande ou des Balkans qui sont partis, on en a acquis la certitude, de Berlin, ne reposent sur aucune base sérieuse'.

But if 'Mai [...] fut sans nuage' in this sense, it was only at the commencement of the battle. In fact, it was not long before disaster struck. Four days after the initial attack on 10 May, the Germans crossed the Meuse at Sedan and the way lay open for Hitler's tanks to rush towards the Channel coast, cutting off the French and British armies which had been lured into Belgium. This crossing of the Meuse was known to the public by the 15 May. On that day, Sadoul recorded in his *Journal de guerre* the contrast between the radiance of nature and the black news of the war:

Il fait une superbe journée de printemps [...]. Hier, deux mille chars se battaient, près de Tirlemont [where Aragon was engaged], pour Bruxelles. Sur la Meuse, un effort est fait [by the Germans] pour franchir la ligne d'eau à Mézières-Sedan. S'ils réussissent, la route de Paris leur est ouverte. Les mauvaises nouvelles sont accueillies un peu partout avec accablement.

- Hitler disait qu'il serait à Paris le 15 juin. Il y sera peut-être avant. Il va falloir qu'il se retienne [...].

Belle soirée de mai sur les champs verts où roussissent les fleurs des oseille sauvages. Les cerises sont déjà rondes et bien formées [...].

La mauvaise nouvelle de Sedan est confirmée. J'entends répéter:

- Hitler va être obligé de se retenir, s'il ne veut être à Paris que le 15 juin' (1977, pp. 198-9).

In the second line of the poem, the brutality of the defeat that was to become devastatingly clear in June (and which the cloudless sky of May did **not** seem to portend) is expressed in the conjunction of the words 'Juin poignardé'.

Aragon now introduces the central motif of the lilacs and the roses that he is going to use to convey the pitiless irony of the backdrop provided by nature for the catastrophe that overtook France. The complexity of the meaning of the flowers and of 'Je n'oublierai jamais' (line 3) will only be fully understood by the close of the poem.

The final line of the stanza is as poignant in its euphemism as that of 'Le Dormeur du val' (Rimbaud 1966, p. 56) which perhaps inspired it:

Un soldat jeune [...]

Dort; il est étendu dans l'herbe, sous la nue,

Pâle dans son lit vert où la lumière pleut.

Later, in 'La Nuit de mai' (1979 b, p. 205), when he would recall the bombardment of the allied troops that took place at Dunkirk at the end of that month of 1940, Aragon was to use cognate impressions:

Les parfums du printemps le sable les ignore

Voici mourir le Mai dans les dunes du Nord.

Later still, in *Le Roman inachevé*, he would echo the first stanza of 'Les Lilas et les roses' to make a link for us between

his experience as he set off for the First World War and that of May 1940:

Le temps vient des métamorphoses

J'ai quitté la beauté des choses (1980, p. 286).

In the same collection, we see the persistence of the imagery of his most famous poem when, as an old man, he tells us that for him:

Le printemps qui revient est sans métamorphoses

Il ne m'apporte plus la lourdeur des lilas

J Je crois me souvenir lorsque je sens les roses (1980, p. 393).

Stanza 2

The repetitions of 'Je n'oublierai jamais' recall those of 'Je pense à' in Baudelaire's 'Le Cygne' (1961, pp. 95-96) in the emphatic structure they create within the poem. On these words depends the list of inescapable memories that follow.

In 'Les Lilas et les roses', 'l'illusion tragique' (line 1) makes clear with hindsight the bitter irony of the figurative sense of 'Mai qui fut sans nuage' discussed above.

Aragon brings out the various stages of the progress of the French army into Belgium on the first day of the German attack. *Les Communistes* (1966c, pp. 113-114) describes them in a form that is not as compressed as in the poem:

A Quiévrain [just across the Belgian frontier], toute la population est là, du délire. D'où a-t-on sorti ces drapeaux français mariés aux couleurs belges. Les chars, devant les ambulances, défilent, l'officier dans la tourelle, et le

tonnerre que ça fait est couvert par les acclamations. Des filles folles se jettent contre ces énormes bêtes d'acier, des présents pleins les bras [...]. On arrive en plein Borinage [...]. Ici, un brusque déferlement de fleurs...des fleurs...des fleurs...mais où ont-ils été prendre tout ça? S'ils en jettent depuis le matin, des rouges et jaunes, des énormes fleurs violettes...Mais les cigarettes, les bouteilles de bière ou de vin, les fruits, les filles qui s'accrochent aux voitures pour embrasser les soldats, tout cela continue sous les *Vive la France!* on n'y prête presque plus guère attention, à cause de ce qui vient de se produire: les lilas ont fait leur apparition, tous les gens arrivent avec des brassées de lilas, la route en est jonchée, les chars passent sur des litières de lilas, les hommes dans les tourelles d'un instant à l'autre fleuris comme des dieux païens...'Écoute...écoute' [...]. La *Marseillaise* grandissante au cœur des lilas...une *Marseillaise* qui ne ressemble à rien... folle..

The comparison with the novel lets us see how well Aragon uses the resources of poetry in the verse rendering. We register immediately the way in which he conveys so much in few words: 'Le cortège les cris la foule et le soleil' (line 2). We are struck by his skilful use of alliteration in 'Les chars chargés d'amour' (line 3) to transform these terrible weapons of war into the bearers of the love of a people. The trembling of the air (line 4) evokes a radiant heat, and the droning of the engines of the tanks is associated with the humming of bees. This serves to turn

the hardware of destruction into something innocuous and to make it seem that nature somehow connives at this delusion.

'Le cortège' of line 2 of this stanza now becomes 'Le triomphe' (line 5) in the Roman sense, and we appreciate the weight of 'imprudent' when we learn that this triumphal procession 'took precedence over' the actual clash of arms (cf. *Collins-Robert*: 'chez elle, l'intelligence prime la sagesse'; or *Les Poissons noirs*: '[Les cartes de Russiel faisaient prime sur les cartes d'Italie' [1979c, p. 178]).

A negative reinterpretation of the meaning of 'Le cortège' in view of the subsequent happenings is highlighted by the use of the syntax to place 'Le sang' and 'le baiser' at opposite ends of line 7. This makes more powerful the revelation of the fact that the redness of the lips that pressed kisses on the soldiers was a crimson signal of the blood to be spilt. Again the order of events is reversed, as first we are told of the imminent death of the soldiers and then we are shown them standing upright in the turrets of their tanks to take the salute of the delirious crowds that surrounded them with lilacs. This makes the pain of their fate all the more deeply felt, as it was in such contrast to their expectations.

Very effective in this stanza of the poem is the use of the present tense to recreate what had happened in May. Aragon makes illuminating comments on this technique in *La Fin du 'Monde réel'* *Postface* (1967, p. 307):

Ce présent accentué que je dis, s'il reflète pour moi dans ce monde où nous sommes, les moyens de la cinématographie,

je ne l'ai bien sûr pas inventé, il s'est trouvé avant moi chez bien des écrivains [...]. Mais il faut aussi y reconnaître une très vieille tradition de notre langue: c'est le présent des chansons de geste. *La Chanson de Roland*, le poème épique français, les premiers romans au sens initial de ce mot sont écrits entièrement au présent.

The tradition of the *chanson de geste* is alive in 'Les Lilas et les roses'. In the second last line of stanza 2, the present tense makes the immediacy of the memories particularly vivid. We are given the sense of witnessing for ourselves the gestures of glory **knowing** that they will very soon be the gestures of death. This impression is encouraged by the deliberate ambiguity of the absence of punctuation, so that 'debout dans les tourelles' (line 7) could equally refer to the soldiers as they were dying or as they stood to acknowledge the adulation of the Belgians. Underpinning this, too, is the subtle linking by sound pattern of 'mourir', 'tourelles' and 'Entourés'.

In the final line of the stanza, the word 'grisé' translates well the fervour and the delusions in which nature also seems involved through the association of the lilacs with the intoxication of the people. The sobering reality of what was to ensue was recalled by Aragon in 1948:

Les compagnons d'alors dans le printemps des Flandres
 Vous souvient-il comment notre amour fut joué
 Vous pleuriez dans vos chars de ne savoir défendre
 La frontière trouée (1980, p. 59).

Stanza 3

With the comparison in the first two lines between the colourful beauty of the gardens of France and the illustrated mediaeval prayer books such as the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, we have the first explicit evocation by Aragon in *Le Crève-cœur* of the glorious, centuries-old, cultural tradition of his country. These gardens, these symbols of the fruitfulness of the French ground and the order of the French mind, were the ironic background of chaos and destruction.

An idea of what Aragon means by 'Le trouble des soirs' (line 3) can be gained from the following extract from *Les Communistes*:

Rien de déroutant comme ces contrées inconnues qu'on traverse. On a beau, les officiers, posséder les plans directeurs, sillonnés de grandes flèches, des itinéraires fixés. La nuit venue, la chevauchée des armées a le caractère des insomnies, la mi-conscience du premier sommeil, des doutes absurdes, l'idée à la fois qu'à tout moment on va tomber sur l'ennemi, puis la sécurité sans raison, l'impression qu'on s'enfonce dans un domaine illimité comme l'ombre. Sur des routes où, à des carrefours, des éclaireurs s'interrogent, avec le jeu des lampes de poche aux poteaux indicateurs, brusquement se déchaîne la direction des combats' (1966c, p 157).

The periods of mysterious silence ('l'énigme du silence') which must have been particularly unnerving are commented on in *Aurélien* (1944, p. 482) where Aragon evokes the state of the

battle in Anjou, to which his own unit had been forced to retreat in June :

Maintenant l'ennemi n'insistait plus... Quand ses motos ou ses chars arrivaient à l'entrée d'un bourg où on était, dès les premiers coups de feu, ils tournaient bride. On pouvait les attendre jusqu'au soir: ils ne reviendraient pas. Ils essayaient les routes, évitaient les centres de résistance, nous débordaient.'

The all-important motif of the flowers reappears as we are told of the roses that lined the path they followed in retreat (cf. *Les Communistes* (1967, p. 282): 'ce pays couvert de roses, il y en a dans tous les jardins, le long des maisons..'). Just as the phrase 'Je n'oublierai jamais' governs all the elements of the stanza, so now Aragon achieves a further cumulative effect as he underlines by means of the construction 'Le démenti des fleurs à..' (line 5) the contrast between the roses and all the terrible events they seemed by their beauty to deny. These events, which the poet communicates so powerfully by means of images such as '[le] vent de la panique', '[les] soldats qui passaient sur l'aile de la peur' or '[les] vélos délirants' were engraved in the minds of all who had experienced them. Sadoul recorded the testimony of troops who had been routed by the German forces:

Dès la nouvelle de l'invasion de la Belgique, les divisions de l'Armée Corap montèrent prendre position aux environs de Namur. Elles arrivent dans cette région le jour ou le lundi de la Pentecôte. Une section de sapeurs fils qui déroule sa

ligne téléphonique trouve les Allemands installés dans le village où ils devaient terminer leur travail. Ils refluent. Les *Panzerdivisionen* commencent une attaque foudroyante. Les fantassins et les artilleurs sont anéantis, 90% de pertes, morts ou prisonniers. [...]

Les divisions marocaines réussissent à arrêter les chars avec des fusils mitrailleurs. Mais les avions foncent, mitraillent en rase-mottes les *krouyas* qui se font tuer sur place. Les chars passent.

C'est alors une déroute, une retraite catastrophique. Les hommes sans cesse talonnés, fuyant en camions, à pied, en bicyclette, poursuivis par les chars et les avions [...]. On voyait les pauvres fantassins courir dans la campagne en se dispersant comme des moineaux. Mais les avions les poussaient, les arrosaient à coups de mitrailleuse, les tuaient comme du gibier (1977, pp. 217-8).

The sense of 'canons ironiques' (line 7) is illuminated by what Sadoul observed personally: 'Le long de ces chemins de la débâcle des canons versés dans les fossés' (1977, p. 377).

The flight of the soldiers was accompanied by that of masses of civilians. These refugees were the 'faux campeurs' of the final line of the stanza. Aragon describes those he saw at Ribérac (Dordogne), where he found himself on 25 June, the day of the armistice:

Il y régnait un grand désarroi d'hommes de toute sorte: des familles débarquées dans des voitures antiques, on ne sait où racolées, avec leurs matelas sur la tête, et qui y

compaient, quand ce n'étaient pas dans les granges avec les bêtes, les vestiges de notre division qui n'étaient que vingt pour cent des hommes entrés en Belgique' (1979b, p. 291.).

He evokes similar 'campers' in *Les Communistes*:

Les villages sont encombrés d'hommes, de femmes, d'enfants, pour lesquels on a répandu de la paille sur les places. Des fuyards belges, groupes de cyclistes, fantassins, jettent la panique parmi les populations (1966c, p. 210).

Stanza 4

The sense of irresistible movement which characterized the events that the poet has recalled in the previous stanza is expressed in 'ce tourbillon d'images' (line 1). Very cleverly, Aragon now slows the reader down. The lack of punctuation forces us to pause even longer over the short phrases, thus heightening the effect of the build-up to the scene to which the whirlwind of images always returns the poet. The technique is cinematic with the individual shots: '[the village of] Sainte-Marthe [in the Forêt de Conches in Normandy] / Un général / De noirs rames / Une villa normande au bord de la forêt'.

After the total silence, the seeming calm as we learn that 'L'ennemi dans l'ombre se repose' (line 5), the heartbreaking simplicity of 'On nous a dit ce soir que Paris s'est rendu' (line 6) is as powerful as the final line of 'Le Dormeur du val', and similarly makes us reassess the meaning of the preceding lines of the poem..

The heartbreak lies not merely in the loss but in the **surrender** of Paris. Georges Sadoul, who was in the capital on 13 June, recorded being told:

On vient de mettre une affiche blanche sur les murs pour déclarer *Paris ville ouverte* [...]. C'est à ce moment que je me rends compte que, depuis l'aube, le canon s'est tu. Je crois comprendre que le gouvernement a décidé de rendre la capitale sans coup férir [...]. La Tour Eiffel nous passe peu à peu derrière l'épaule gauche. Sur les ailes sont assis des camarades qui guettent les avions; leurs bouches se gonflent et se tordent de chagrin, leurs yeux se remplissent de larmes. J'ai moi-même les joues toutes mouillées.

Abandonner Paris, la Tour Eiffel, où demain flottera la croix gammée... (1977, pp. 315, 317).

Aragon was later to express in 'Absent de Paris' how he felt when the news struck:

Quand la nouvelle vint frapper au coeur de la France
 Vous ne pouvez savoir quelle fut ma souffrance
 Dans l'école déserte au soir d'un bourg normand

O douleur qu'une larme à la fin ne délivre
 Je criai tous les mots que le délire crée
 Comme Jésus pleura j'aurais voulu pleurer

Paris humilié j'enviais ne plus vivre (1979c, pp. 98-9).

The repetition now of 'Je n'oublierai jamais les lilas ni les roses' gives this line a poignancy that is derived from our new understanding of its meaning. Just as these flowers have taken on

a significance quite different from their traditional associations with 'la force profonde de la saison' (1967, p. 287), so have the words of the song recorded by Josephine Baker in 1930: *J'ai deux amours*: 'mon pays et Paris'. These were the two loves Aragon and his fellow Frenchmen lost with this surrender (I am grateful to Professor F.W. Leakey for this elucidation).

As he left the capital on that 13 June, Sadoul thought:

Cette nouvelle, quand elle sera connue de tous, va achever de briser la force de résistance de nos troupes (1977, p. 324).

The final line of the stanza is able to transform the **lightness** of the tone of the words of the popular song into a noble sadness and this is aided by the literary register of the construction, 'Et ni', and by the striking home of the rhyming link between 'rendu' (line 6) and 'perdus'.

Stanza 5

In these final four lines the poet can now fully explain the sense of 'mois des floraisons mois des métamorphoses' of stanza 1.

The metamorphosis was in the meaning of the flowers. The 'bouquets du premier jour', the lilacs showered on the French troops as they passed through Flanders on their way to expected victory, symbolized the pallor of coming death in the softness of the shade of spring ; and the tender roses on the path of retreat through Anjou signified in their redness not passion but the distant glow of fire.

In a later poem, written in exile in Nice, Aragon uses a similar motif:

Nulle part comme ici [...]
 La rose ne paraît masquer des sépultures
 Les lilas y sont lourds comme au campo-santo
 (1979cc, p. 103)

'Les Lilas et les roses' is not merely a requiem for the soldiers who died in the disastrous campaign of May-June 1940. The constant repetition of 'Je n'oublierai jamais' contains a determination to act. In *La Leçon de Ribérac* Aragon recalls his feelings and those of his comrades:

A peine sortis des flammes de Flandres, à peine échappés à Dunkerque, de la Basse-Seine à la Dronne [...], moins épuisés d'avoir retardé presque seuls la puissante poussée d'un ennemi démesuré que du formidable débat en chacun de nous suscité par des événements extraordinaires, **du drame de la Patrie percée et de tant de témoins de la grandeur française abandonnés derrière nous** (1979b, p. 286, emphasis added).

The key is the grandeur of French culture as in 'les jardins de la France / Semblables aux missels des siècles disparus'. This is what Aragon refuses to forget. He wants to defend the achievements of his country against what Sadoul described as 'l'armée d'Attila, devant laquelle les pays se vident, s'éparpillent, s'effondrent, flambent' (1977, p. 377). There is a provocation to action as well as a lament in the words:

Je n'oublierai jamais les lilas ni les roses

Et ni les deux amours que nous avons perdus.

His message is that it is impossible for Frenchmen to accept such a loss. We can see the direction of the poet's thought in the way he deliberately re-uses words and images from this poem in the political context of 'La Plainte pour le grand descort de France', written in 1941. There, in the final stanza, he associates the dead of May 1940 with the Communards of May 1871, slain at the *Mur des Fédérés*:

Les mois passent L'émoi passe et le coeur déraille

Mais le printemps pour moi murmurerà toujours

Les mots d'un autre Mai parmi les mots d'amour

Je n'oublierai jamais pour ses fleurs la muraille

Je n'oublierai jamais

Les morts du mois de Mai (1979b, p. 235).

In 1871 and 1941 France was occupied by the Prussians. Then it was the *Versaillais* who collaborated, now it is Vichy. Aragon wants resistance. He blamed those who were to be revealed as Pétain's men for the **surrender** of Paris without a fight and for the fall of France, a France betrayed, he was convinced, from within. This was a widespread reaction at the time. Sadoul recorded on 16 June 1940: 'Avant-hier, à Leuville, l'adjudant Kiki, la tête basse, répétait à la nouvelle de la prise de Paris: - Nous sommes trahis' (1977, p. 358).

At the very time when he heard of the surrender of Paris in the Forêt de Conches, Aragon was decorated for his bravery in May. He continued the fight until the armistice and was awarded a

second *Croix de guerre* and the *Médaille militaire*. 'Les Lilas et les roses' inspired many Frenchmen to resist like him.

Elsa (1964, p. 37) recalled to Aragon the use made of one of its lines by the Allies in their radio communications with the French Underground:

Te rappelles-tu l'impression bizarre que cela nous faisait d'entendre parmi les 'messages personnels' ce vers de toi

... 'une villa normande au bord de la forêt'...

et puis:

'deux villas normandes au bord de la forêt'...

et puis: 'trois villas'... etc. Signifiant peut-être le nombre d'avions pour un parachutage ou n'importe quoi d'autre..

The publication in *Le Figaro* of 'Les Lilas et les roses' was a turning-point in the poet's career. As he told Dominique Arban:

C'est à partir de là que l'attention a été attirée sur ces poèmes [du futur *Crève-coeur*] et que j'ai pu commencer à parler aux Français, sans être gêné par le gouvernement de Vichy, me servant de moyens qui, considérés comme traditionnels, semblaient pour cette raison ne pas tomber sous le coup des lois (1968, p. 138).

He informed Fernand Seguin (1968, p. 74) of another consequence of the appearance of 'Les Lilas et les roses':

C'est ainsi, qu'on a commencé à me demander des textes, à les publier, et que j'ai cessé d'être un poète maudit.

Enfer-les-mines

On 'Enfer-les-mines', 'Tapisserie de la grande peur' and 'Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie', we find the following note in *L'OEuvre Poétique* (1989a, vol.3, p. 1358):

Ont été écrits en août 1940 à Varetz (Corrèze). Après sa démobilisation, Aragon séjourne durant plusieurs semaines chez son ami Renaud de Jouvenel dans le château de Castelnovel à Varetz. Ces trois poèmes trouvent une même inspiration dans le souvenir de la campagne des Flandres au mois de mai 1940

'Enfer-les mines' was first published in *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941.

Variants

Stanza 2, line 4: in MS1, 'Qui semblent [hérissées (sic) (?)] de veuves sur leurs dos' has been amended to 'Qui portent ça et là des veuves sur leurs dos'.

Stanza 5, line 2: MS1 has 'Ni le lit de l'amour dans le logis mesquin'.

The circumstances are those of the end of May 1940. The French and British troops who had been forced out of Belgium now found themselves trapped between the line of Panzer divisions sweeping westwards through Arras towards the coast and the other German forces pressing on the Allies from the direction of Lille. On 26 May, Generals Blanchard and Gort decided to withdraw towards the sea. At this point Aragon's unit was in the region of Lens, in

the mining area of the Pas-de-Calais, near Noyelles-Godault, the birthplace of Maurice Thorez.

In *L'Homme Communiste II* (1953, pp. 268 ff.), Aragon recalled the moment:

J'ai traversé cette contrée de canaux et de corons avec notre malheureuse armée de quarante. Je me souviendrai toujours de ce coin de route, près d'une église moderne, avec la flèche indicatrice: *Noyelles-Godault*...je me souviendrai toujours de cette nuit folle où Arras flambait, et où sur un mur de briques je lus le nom écrit fraîchement à la craie par une main qui, à cette heure-là, n'avait d'autre espoir, *Maurice Thorez*...Et d'où nous étions soignant des Marocains sanglants, pansant ces jeunes gens de France qui me demandaient à mi-voix: 'Tout n'est pas perdu, docteur, tout n'est pas perdu?', nous voyions s'élever l'échafaudage de la fosse no. 4 des Mines de Dourges, où l'enfant Thorez à douze ans se faisait de 25 à 30 sous par jour comme trieur de pierres [...]. Noyelles-Godault, pays qui est comme le pain noir... En 1941, au lendemain de la défaite, dans un des poèmes du *Crève-Coeur*, Pétain, Schumann et Pinay tout-puissants, j'avais glissé ce nom de village dans une strophe:

Est-ce Hénin-Liétard ou Noyelles-Godault
 Courrières-les-Morts Montigny-en-Gohelle
 Noms de grisou Puits de fureur Terres cruelles
 Qui portent ça et là des veuves sur leurs dos.

J'avais glissé ce nom comme une carte parmi les autres, sachant que le lecteur serait peut-être quelqu'un pour qui on ne pouvait nommer Noyelles-Godault sans Maurice, et à cette minute nous étions des centaines de milliers, des millions, comme l'inconnu dans la nuit où flambait Arras et qui écrivit son nom sur les briques... nous étions légion qui avions lu l'appel du 10 juillet 1940, signé Thorez et Duclos, qui dissipait les équivoques, appelait à la résistance, nous disait: Ton coeur, camarade, a raison de battre, c'est cela, la France, et nous, les Français... non pas Pétain, Schumann, Pinay...

Thus, the poem had a political import for Aragon, both at the time it was composed and when it was published in 1941: in this evocation of suffering, there is the contraband of hope in the allusion to Thorez.

Stanza 1

To those about to die (and we remember, in 'Les Lilas et les roses', 'ceux qui vont mourir' and the circumstances of the Moroccan and French troops being tended by Aragon and his men as described above in *L'Homme Communiste II*), the 'charade' or riddle being posed is 'Où sommes-nous'? (line 3). Time and again in *Les Communistes* Aragon bemoans the soldiers' lack of maps. So, too, at this point in the novel:

On est tombé sur des Anglais. Ils nous ont remis dans le chemin. Parce que les Anglais, c'est pas comme nous, ils ont des cartes. Et ils savent où on peut aller, et où on ne peut pas (1967, p. 94).

Thus he wonders in the next stanza:

Est-ce Hénin-Liétard ou Moyelles-Godault
 Courrières-les-Morts Montigny-en-Gohelle.

In lines 2-3 there is an image that recalls the technique used by Apollinaire at the beginning of 'La Chanson du mal-aimé' (1965, p, 46) as in:

Nous semblions entre les maisons
 Onde ouverte de la mer Rouge
 Lui les Hébreux moi Pharaon.

Aragon compares the coal bings to the pyramids of Egypt. But this is a black Egypt with no god-king to implore for help and these are recent constructions, 'pyramides sans mémoire' (line 4), not the wonders of the ancient world, and they are part of the terrible landscape of this modern war. Particularly striking here is the echo (in lines 3 and 4) of 'Profil terrible' and 'Terrils terrils'.

Using a similar comparison to the one found in the poem, Aragon evokes at greater length in *Les Communistes* the effect of this landscape on the young ambulanceman Jean de Moncey;

On tourne dans cette plaine, à l'horizon de laquelle
 s'aperçoivent les pyramides noires. Jean de Moncey n'a
 jamais vu de près des terrils. Ces collines artificielles
 dont la pente se prolonge au sommet d'une flèche, comme un
 index pointé, continuant une échine de fer [...]. Ici, quand
 il approche de Drocourt, d'Hénin-Liétard, est-ce à cause du
 caractère tragique qu'à ses yeux a maintenant revêtu la
 guerre? [...].

Cette entrée solennelle dans le pays minier, l'austérité du paysage plat, avec ses bandes vertes, et ses monts de charbon, bientôt les localités monotones et interminables, leurs corons de briques foncées, l'accumulation de ces maisons pareilles, égales, leurs tristes enclos, les rues sans fin, le morcellement de la nature et de la vie humaine... tout cela parle un langage d'angoisses au jeune homme passant dans sa sanitaire (1967, pp. 69-70).

Stanza 2

The reason for the hyphenated place-names of the region is explained in the following comment in *Les Communistes*: 'Les agglomérations s'interrompent à peine pour reprendre, et à d'autres horizons surgissent d'autres terrils' (1967, p. 70).

Hénin-Liétard is described thus (ibid):

Au coeur d'Hénin-Liétard, cette affreuse cathédrale moderne en ciment armé qui écrase les demeures alentour de sa stature disproportionnée ajoute beaucoup au sentiment d'horreur que ce pays surprenant donne.

In the political context of the name of Noyelles-Godault deliberately inserted by Aragon to evoke Thorez, Hénin-Liétard has also a part to play: in the aftermath of the attempted Fascist coup of February 1934, it was the scene of a confrontation organized by the Communists against the *Ligues factieuses* (Crémieux et Estager 1983, p. 27).

Courrières-les-Morts, so called because of the explosion there of firedamp ('grisou', line 3) in 1906 that killed 1200 miners, was remaining true to its name.

If Aragon speaks in stanza 1 of 'ceux qui vont mourir', he gives more information of situation in *les Communistes*:

Voilà deux nuits qu'on se bat dans Courrières. Deux nuits et un jour. Les Allemands ont d'abord cru avoir affaire à des troupes importantes. Il y avait peut-être cent, cent vingt hommes, qui avaient essayé de rejoindre Carvin et s'étaient rabattus sur Courrières devant l'impossibilité de passer [...]. La nuit du 27 au 28, ayant perdu encore du monde, après s'être concertés, ils décident de disperser leurs troupes, parce que les seules possibilités de salut sont pour des isolés, les Allemands cernent le quartier où ils sont et commencent à le détruire avec des grenades incendiaires [...]. Dans le matin, Courrières s'est réveillé presque entièrement en feu. De grandes parties de la ville détruites systématiquement à la grenade, par représaille contre la résistance prolongée des Marocains, dont les corps sont exposés sur les places, jetés comme des charognes, avec des sentinelles les gardant. Les soldats, allant de maison en maison, en tirent les hommes à coup de crosse. On entend des coups de feu. C'est, pour des raisons de hasard, un homme qu'on tue sur place (1967, pp. 166-170).

The tragic history of the mines of the region, these 'Puits de fureur Terres cruelles' (line 3), was continuing in the slaughter of this war. There were more widows on the backs of these black heaps. Now this was 'Enfer-les-mines'.

Stanza 3

In *L'Homme Communiste I* of 1946, Aragon quotes this poem at length. His comments serve to clarify some of the context of the life of the miners evoked in 'Enfer-les-mines':

Il faut se représenter ce monde où dès l'enfance ils sont jetés, ce monde de charbon et de douleurs, ce monde implacable, ce monde où la nature même bouleversée, éventrée, succombe sous la noirceur. Nulle part comme dans ces régions où l'homme prend à la terre sa chaleur et sa force, il n'est aussi visible que l'homme même est devenu, et sa force et son courage, une marchandise dont il est froidement, cruellement disposé par ses marchands. Nulle part comme ici la lutte des classes n'est visible, transformant sous le poussier des mines le paysage, et les collines mêmes sont écrasées du poids des terrils noirs [...]. J'étais allé dans ce pays dont je parle en mai 1940, au milieu du charroi des armées, quelque chose en était passé dans certains de mes vers [here Aragon quotes the first two stanzas of 'Enfer-les mines']. [...] Lorsqu'en 1940, nous eûmes abandonné...notre armée surprise, percée, contournée, traquée, abandonnée...mais c'est cela aussi que je disais alors en vers [now he cites stanzas 3-5]. [...] Et quand nous fûmes partis, vint s'installer une tyrannie nouvelle, une tyrannie étrangère (1953, pp. 42-49).

These comments help us to understand the need for the accordion, the need for 'l'alcool de l'oubli' in the normal lives of the miners. But now they are deprived of these consolations.

Now their anger has the unmitigated taste of the coal. Against that anger, Aragon poses the fear in the eyes of the little girls ('Te souviens-tu des yeux immenses des gamines').

Stanza 4

Here again, *Les Communistes* provides us with expression that is less taut than in the poem:

D'ici cela flambe aux deux bouts dans la nuit noire. Lens au nord, où de grands incendies agitent leurs mouchoirs rouges, et vers Arras les éclairs de l'artillerie. Par la route, on voit se hâter des silhouettes noires. Des hommes à grandes enjambées, dans les ruines qui ont coupé ici la route. Les voix de par ici, rauques, soufflantes de ch'timi... C'est un mineur et son fils [...]. Ils sont fous de rage. On les a chassés. La mine a fermé ses portes. Cent cinquante francs on leur a donné. Un ingénieur leur a dit une adresse à Paris. Le siège de la Société! Ils s'en vont. Avec un baluchon sur l'épaule. Et cent cinquante francs. Vers Lens. On ne passe plus vers Paris. Lens brûle, vous ne voyez pas que Lens brûle! [...] Toute la vie travaillé là-bas, et puis allez! (1967, pp. 93-94).

Thus were the miners dispossessed (line 1), and this was the source of their anger ('la colère' of stanza 3). The sheet of fire in Lens in the distance seemed like a handkerchief waving them farewell. The *Stukas* knock over buildings like dice with their their bombs. In 'Les Amants séparés', the aeroplanes were called 'oiseaux de fer'. Now the effect of the image of the 'joueurs de fer' (line 4) is to show the command of the skies

enjoyed by the German planes, the way they seem to toy with their victims, the implacability of their force and the randomness of the destruction. A cognate image is used in *Les Communistes* at this juncture where Aragon talks of 'la partie d'échecs, sur l'immense damier bombardé, battu par la mort et le feu' (1967, p. 97).

Stanza 5

Where the miners lived is now a desert, seemingly emptied of its population. The word 'désert' (line 1) is made even more powerful by the series of negatives that follows. From those who had so little, even that which they had has been taken away: the bed of love in the mean dwelling, the darkness of the environment alleviated by the melody of *Le Petit Quinquin* (a popular folk-song of Artois), not even their harsh toil and their poverty belong to them anymore.

The terrible conditions of the miners' normal existence, 'ce monde de charbon et de douleurs' quoted above, were an aspect of life in France that Aragon wished to change, but now the very ground had been removed from French control. And when the poem was being written in August 1940, this region had been effectively annexed by the Germans, being attached to the authority of the military Command in Brussels.

Stanza 6

If the miners had said 'Adieu' in stanza 4, it was because, as we are now told, they were being hunted from their homes. Aragon manages to represent what they had had as somehow positive and desirable by means of the romantic picture of children being

washed at the fountain (the reality was much starker) and the use of the verb 'chanter' (line 3) to render the sound of the radios playing as the men did odd jobs (this was a form of relaxation from their labour underground) in the mining villages beneath a sky thick with aerials.

Stanza 7

The poet skilfully varies the important verb of the previous stanza ('Ils s'en iront', line 1) by telling us now, 'Ils n'iront plus..'. Because they are being driven away, they will no longer dance in the evening at the gala (again the rare positive feature of these lives is highlighted). The anthracite will be extinguished in the pores of their skin (will disappear from it), no longer will they light the lamps in their helmets. That which gave the miners their identity (even if it was also the source of their suffering) is being taken from them, and the message is repeated (line 4):

Ils s'en iront ils s'en iront puisqu'on les chasse.

Stanza 8

An element of finality is given to the destruction of what was a vibrant community in the way the roofs seem to have sat down on the ground without further ado. We are asked, then told in the following line, who is walking amid the broken stars. A. M. Boase (1952, p. 242) suggests 'broken glass' for 'étoiles brisées', but 'étoile' has the sense of 'destin' as well, which may be more appropriate to the mood of the poem expressed also in the description of the night of 29-30 May 1940 in *Les Communistes*: 'C'est un cauchemar traversé [...], comment appeler cette

nécropole d'espoirs, d'idées, de richesses, d'avenirs?' (1967, p. 222).

It is deserters who are making their way from the scene ('Qui marche au milieu des étoiles brisées'), cursing beneath their breath as they go. They provide a contrast to the miners who are bitter at having to leave the area. That he does not omit this inglorious aspect of the *débauche* shows that Aragon was not blind to its realities.

The final image recalls the Apollinaire of 'Chevaux de frise' (1965, p. 303):

La fusée s'épanouit fleur nocturne
Quand il fait noir.

Where the rocket (or flare) of the older poet blooms like a flower, that of Aragon

Promène dans la nuit sa muette chanson.

It may be argued that, like Apollinaire, Aragon is embellishing the instrument of war, but there is an eery threat in the silent song of this rocket. A similar motif, but more sardonically presented, occurs in 'La Nuit de mai' (1979b, p. 201), which deals with exactly the same period:

Un aéro dit son rosaire et te balance
Une fusée au-dessus d'Ablain Saint-Nazaire.

'Enfer-les-mines' may be said to have the most unpromising of raw material and yet is full of telling images, the language is often rhetorical and, above all, the *rimes embrassées* of the alexandrines add a musicality to the starkness of the content.

How much more successful is the treatment here than that found in
Hourra l'Oural.

Tapisserie de la grande peur

This poem was also written in August 1940 at the château de Castelnovel in Varetz. It was first published in *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941.

Variants

Line 30: MS1 has 'Va-t'en' amended to 'va-t'en'.

Line 31: MS1 has 'Et la beauté des soirs tombe et son aile marie'.

The first half of the poem, which provides a chilling update of the tradition of Flemish tapestry, seems to be characterized by the techniques of Surrealism, with a whole series of images built on the association of ideas, sudden, unexpected transformations and a syntax which is sometimes difficult to follow. The aim is to give the reader the impression of a supremely destructive power that deploys a multiplicity of guises in its all-pervading attack.

In *La Rime en 1940*, Aragon appeals for the use in poetry of the technology of the modern age. Here, this technology seems to have turned on humanity and created a landscape born of the new weapons of terror.

Whereas in 'Zone', Apollinaire (1965, pp. 39-44) celebrates the modern age in the symbol of the aeroplane, for Aragon here the *Stuka* is the emblem of 'la terreur moderne' (line 1) and he goes on to present this fiendish machine in a breathtaking diversity of forms.

First these planes are 'flying fish' (line 2), which immediately stresses their strangeness in this 'landscape'. Then they become 'sirens', and here, to justify the association with 'poissons volants', Aragon seems to be exploiting the various definitions of these demons. In *le petit Robert 1* we find: 'Sirène - Animal fabuleux, à tête et torse de femme et à queue de poisson, qui passait pour attirer, par la douceur de son chant, les navigateurs sur les écueils'; and in *le petit Robert 2* - 'Sirènes: Démons marins de la légende grecque, représentés comme des femmes ailées ou comme des oiseaux à tête de femmes...elles passaient pour attirer par leurs mélodies les navigateurs sur les récifs et dévorer les naufragés'.

If 'poissons volants' did not seem baleful enough in the circumstances, the impression is corrected in their transformation into 'saw-fish' (line 2), which evokes their voraciousness and perhaps the shark-like teeth often painted on the snouts of the planes.

The bizarre nature of the vision is emphasised as one of these 'saw-fish' is able to write with its white trail on the blue of the sky (line 3), and then (line 4) it turns into a hydra-headed bird reminiscent of the Hydra of Lerna, which, however, took the form of a serpent. Here the sinuous movements of the flying monster are cleverly portrayed as is the endless multiplicity of its attack.

Just as the 'flying fish' are transported to this terrifying landscape, so, too, the usual expression 'écumeur de mer' or

'pirate' becomes (in line 5) 'Ecumeur de la terre' (the verb 'écumer' means 'to pillage' in this sense).

The next transmutation is into a 'stone-bird' that 'sows air into the houses' (i.e. blows holes in them). The strangeness of this image is perhaps best shown by the comparison with a cognate one drawn from a wholly positive evocation of Amsterdam in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 339):

Les martins-pêcheurs au ciel jaune et rose
Cousent le printemps au-dessus des toits
Où leur vol léger en passant se pose
aux créneaux neigés que les vents nettoient.

Again, if the earlier association with 'sirènes' might be thought to contain something positive, the effect is now negated by the designation 'oiseau strident' (line 6) which brings out the true voice of this 'bird'.

Similarly, it is surely the maleficent connotations of imminent catastrophe and the fiery head of the speeding plane that are conveyed by 'oiseau-comète' (line 6).

Now the syntax becomes extremely complex as the images imitate the dizzy convolutions of the *Stuka's* flight path. Thus we have to read: 'Et la géante guêpe [...] Sur un manche à balai de Messerschmidt s'abat' (lines 7-11), leaping over the intervening images. The transmogrifications of the plane become ever more disparate: from a giant wasp to an acrobat, to a match that, by a multiple play on words, places bunches of cowslips ('coucous', line 8), or else crowning pieces of a fireworks display ('bouquets', line 8) delivered from 'old crates' ('coucou' in the

sense of 'avion d'un modèle ancien'), on to flaming walls. Or these are flights of flamingoes which, with their scarlet plumage, turn the sky red ('rougissent' [le ciel]).

The word 'flamants' (line 9) suggests 'flamands' to the poet (line 10) and his imagination now takes him to a comparison with a mediaeval coven of screaming witches ('sabbat') parading in circles (cf. also *Collins-Robert*: 'un carrousel d'avions dans le ciel - planes weaving patterns in the sky') in the Flemish countryside.

This image of the 'carrousel flamand de l'antique sabbat' gives a clue to an inspiration for the form of these visions other than in Surrealism. At the close of the poem, Aragon evokes Pieter Brueghel the Younger and his brother Jan, but it is an earlier Flemish influence that predominates in these weird and frightening transformations, that of Hieronymus Bosch. *Le petit Robert 2* speaks of 'ses visions fantastiques, grouillantes d'êtres hybrides, où faune, flore, formes humaines et objets se mêlent et se juxtaposent avec une imagination délirante et un sens narratif inépuisable (scènes infernales et démoniaques)'.

The completion of the image 'Et la géante guêpe [...] Sur un manche à balai de Messerschmidt s'abat' seems like the work of Dali.

The final element of this image is intercalated into the syntax of 'O carrousel de l'antique sabbat [...] C'est la nuit en plein jour du nouveau Walpurgis' (lines 10-12). Thus from the representation of mediaeval witchery in Flanders, the poet moves us to the Brocken, the highest mountain in the Harzgebirge, where

in the night of 30th April-1 May, witches were supposed to gather. But this is no longer the *Walpurgisnacht* of old, this is the darkness at noon of the *new Walpurgis*, where evil spirits have taken over. In the context, this would seem to be a reference to the dark forces set loose by German Fascism.

The type of scene depicted here can be found in more accessible form in *Les Communistes*, e.g. :

On s'échappe de là quand des avions rapploient, piquant dans les rues, nous pourchassant le long des darses, on court, on tourne, on se cache dans un immense hangar [...] et brusquement au-dessus du toit transparent, on voit le Stuka descendre, raser, remonter, repiquer et les balles de mitrailleuses claquent les vitres, droit sur les hommes accroupis, avec leurs courbes de feu en tous sens, tant qu'on est instantanément couvert d'une poussière de verre... (1967, p. 251).

In 'Tapisserie de la grande peur', the evocation of the *Stuka* and what it stands for now come to an end. This seems to be marked by the insertion here (at lines 13-16) of the only *rimes croisées* in this poem of *rimes embrassées*.

What could be called the second section of the poem begins (line 13) with the striking combination of two nouns - 'Apocalypse époque' - but even this is not enough to sum up definitively what has gone before. Aragon preserves the tension of the line by the surprising juxtaposition of space ('Espace') and time ('époque') and by using the emphatic technique of repeated sounds (Apoc-époque and Espace-passe).

From the recognition of this period ('époque') as seemingly heralding the end of the world, Aragon moves to consider the actual area ('Espace') before his eyes and his expression is made memorable by alliteration ('Espace où la peur passe/ Avec son grand transport de pleurs et de pâleurs'). He evokes the panic of the masses of soldiers and civilians fleeing the devastating attacks from the skies.

The tone is one of immense sadness as the poet contemplates the destruction wreaked on the landscape, the town and the people. His reference to 'les rapaces' (line 15) points a vivid contrast between the natural birds of prey that hovered over this region and the terrifying technology of the Messerschmidts which the French troops called 'Méchants Schmidt' (Sadoul 1977, page 192).

Aragon picks out other details in this list of losses: the church tower that in this 'Apocalypse époque' will never again strike the hour; the carts with the motley bedding the refugees had taken with them. This kind of picture was described also by a correspondent of *Le Temps* who observed:

[Des] gros tracteurs qui sur leur large plate-forme portent cinq ou six familles entassées sur des ballots de linge. Mêmes matelas sur les toits de voiture, mais grossièrement arrimés avec un camouflage de branches d'arbres qui doivent dissimuler le véhicule aux aviateurs allemands dont ils ont plus d'une fois subi la mitraille, comme l'attestent, ça et là des trous très visibles sur les côtés. Les notes comiques ne manquent pas. Il y a un corbillard dans le

convoi. Sur un lit de matelas, des enfants dorment (Sadoul 1977, pp. 230-1).

The poignancy of Aragon's picture is deepened by the juxtaposition (lines 18-20) of seemingly minor elements, like the abandoned teddy-bear and the shawl, the clock (note the *rime enjambée* of 'perdu-Les' and 'pendule'), and the chilling images of the corpse and the rotting carcasses of dead animals. On closer inspection, we see that the abandoned objects all tell a sad story, and the dead body is likened to one of these same objects: 'Un mort comme un soulier perdu' (line 18).

The technique is pursued till the end of the poem, with powerful interjections of direct speech that make the scene of suffering all too vivid.

The burden of 'la grande peur' was not evenly distributed, however. The reporter of *Le Temps* described the flight of refugees from north of Dieppe towards Rouen at this very period:

La première journée, mercredi, a été celle des voitures de grand luxe, à marque américaine presque toutes et qui filent avec une rapidité prodigieuse [...]. Il y a entre elles des matches de vitesse. C'est à qui arrivera le premier (Sadoul 1977, p. 230).

On the following days the mass of the population followed on bicycle or on foot. It is the fate of such as these that Aragon is evoking in his poem.

In the final two lines of 'Tapisserie de la gr^ande peur', with an irony similar to that found in 'Les Lilas et les roses', Aragon brings out the beauty of nature as evening falls over the

landscape of terror. It is a beauty that contrasts also in the language of its expression with the heartbreaking realism that immediately precedes. The marriage of dissonances is that of the visions of 'Hell Brueghel' and 'Velvet Brueghel'. Of the former, *le petit Robert 2* says: 'aurait dirigé un atelier spécialisé [...] dans les scènes d'incendies ou d'«enfers» (d'ou son surnom)'; and of his brother: 'Ses oeuvres [...] révèlent une vision miniaturiste et raffinée de l'univers, de caractère idyllique [...] et surtout une délicatesse de coloris, et la matière brillante et fine qui lui valut son surnom'. Thus Aragon draws on Flemish artists of a previous age to convey his impressions of the Flanders of May 1940. The last two lines of the poem may also have been influenced by a memory of another visitor to this region - Verlaine. Consider the end of 'Chevaux de bois' in *Romances sans paroles* (1948, p. 131):

le ciel en velours
D'astres en or se vêt lentement.

The photocopy (pp.333-336) of the manuscript of 'Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie' is the property of Le Fonds d'Archives Elsa Triolet-Aragon du CNRS and may be reproduced only with the express permission of the Director of the Fonds......

Complément
pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie

Ceux qui arrêtaient les barrages
Sont revenus en plein midi
Morts de fatigue et fous de rage

Sont revenus en plein midi

~~Les enfants pleuraient des yeux larges~~ Les femmes ~~pleuraient~~
Les ~~enfants~~ ~~semblaient~~ des maris ~~sous leur charge~~

Les enfants pleuraient des yeux larges
Et pleuraient des jouets perdus

Les femmes pleuraient sous charge
Et pleuraient les jouets perdus
Leurs enfants ouvraient des yeux larges

Et pleuraient les jouets perdus
Les enfants voyaient sans comprendre
Leur horizon mal défendu

Les enfants voyaient sans comprendre

La mitrailleuse au carrefour
La grande épicerie au centre

La mitrailleuse au carrefour
Les soldats parlant à voix basse
Un colonel dans une cour

Les soldats parlant à voix basse
Comptaient leurs blessés et leurs morts
A l'école dans une classe

Comptaient les blessés et leurs morts
Leurs promesses que diront elles
O ma amie à mon retour

Leurs promesses que diront elles
Ils dorment avec leurs photos
Le ciel survit aux hirondelles

Ils dorment avec leurs photos
Sur les bancs de table basse
On les enterrera toutôt

Semblables à des ombres peintes
Un passant qui ~~avait~~ soudain ~~est~~ vit
Sauf ~~à~~ mentir de leurs plaintes

Un passant qui ~~avait~~ soudain ~~est~~ vit
Il était noir comme ~~les~~ mines
Il était noir comme la vie

Il était noir comme ~~les~~ mines
Ce ~~jeune~~ qui ~~venait~~ chez lui
De ~~l'~~ ~~Amérique~~ on ~~saluait~~

Ce ~~jeune~~ qui ~~venait~~ chez lui
Lent ~~et~~ Nous tant pis on rentre
Si c'est les obs on la plume

Leur ~~dit~~ Nous tant pis on rentre
D'une ~~ou~~ deux ~~fois~~ dans la ~~vente~~

CNRS
Paris

~~On~~ ~~trouve~~ ~~des~~ ~~balles~~ ~~dans~~ ~~la~~ ~~vente~~
D'une ~~ou~~ deux ~~fois~~ dans la ~~vente~~

~~On~~ ~~trouve~~ ~~des~~ ~~balles~~ ~~dans~~ ~~la~~ ~~vente~~
A la ~~vente~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~vente~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~vente~~
A la ~~vente~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~vente~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~vente~~

Mieux vaut cent fois ~~chez~~ ~~vo~~ ~~créer~~
Que d'aller en ~~terre~~ ~~étrangère~~
Mieux vaut cent fois ~~chez~~ ~~vo~~ ~~créer~~

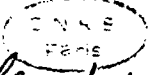
Que d'aller en ~~terre~~ ~~étrangère~~
Nous ~~revenons~~ nous ~~revenons~~
Le ~~yeu~~ ~~lourd~~ la ~~paule~~ ~~lé~~ ~~gère~~

Nous ~~revenons~~ nous ~~revenons~~
Sans ~~espoir~~ ~~sans~~ ~~armes~~ ~~sans~~ ~~armes~~
Nous ~~voulons~~ ~~partir~~ ~~ma~~ ~~is~~ ~~non~~

Sans ~~armes~~ ~~sans~~ ~~espoir~~ ~~sans~~ ~~armes~~
Ceux qui ~~vivent~~ ~~en~~ ~~paix~~ ~~li~~ ~~bas~~
Nous ~~est~~ ~~de~~ ~~leur~~ ~~gendarmes~~
Ceux qui ~~vivent~~ ~~en~~ ~~paix~~ ~~li~~ ~~bas~~
Ceux qui ~~vivent~~ ~~en~~ ~~paix~~ ~~li~~ ~~bas~~

3
Nous ont renvoyé sous les bombes
Et fini ~~notre~~ nous revenons ici
Pas de creuser nos tombes
Ph bien nous revenons
Avec nos enfants et nos familles
Pas besoin de dire merci

Dans les enfants et les femmes
Les géants ~~parce~~ Saints Christophes de grand chemin
Sont partis du côté des flammes


Saint Christophes de grand chemin
Les géants qui se profilèrent
~~Il y avait~~
Sans même un baton dans la main

Les géants qui se profilèrent
Sur le ciel blanc de la colère

Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie

Written at Varetz in August 1940, this poem was first published in *Le Crève-Coeur* in April 1941.

Variants

For the many variants, see the photocopy of MS1 on pages 333-336 above.

As an epigraph to this poem, we might well take the following lines from *Plus belle que les larmes*, which appeared in January 1942 as Aragon's reply (1979b, p.249) to an attack on him by Drieu La Rochelle:

Ah si l'écho des chars dans mes vers vous dérange
S'il grince dans mes cieux d'étranges cris d'essieu
C'est qu'à l'orgue l'orage a détruit la voix d'ange.

The organ preferred here is thus the barrel organ, and the *orgue de Barbarie* provides the poet with the opportunity for a pun that, however, is in no way meant to be amusing. This is a lament for the suffering imposed, above all on civilians, by the new barbarity of the *Blitzkrieg*. Another element to the pun may be provided by an older use of the word 'orgue' as defined by *Le petit Robert*: '(1485). Ancienne pièce d'artillerie composée de plusieurs canons de mousquets montés sur un affût'.

The effect of the barrel-organ is imitated by the device of using *terza rima* with its rhyme scheme of aba bcb cdc etc. In the manuscript version, the indentation on the page of alternate tercets is not present, but each three-line sequence is separate. As in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 265), Aragon could say of this poem:

Je tresserai l'enfer avec le vers du Dante
 Je tresserai la soie ancienne des tercets
 Et reprenant son pas et sa marche ascendante [...]

Je tresserai le ciel avec le vers français.

'Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie' carries on Aragon's presentation of events at the end of May 1940 in Flanders. Those who had been driven from their homes in 'Enfer-les-mines' ('Ils s'en iront puisqu'on les chasse ils s'en iront') have been stopped by the road-blocks erected by the French police and they have determined to return to where they belong (tercets 26 and 27):

Ceux qui vivent en paix là-bas
 Nous ont dépêché leurs gendarmes
 Ceux qui vivent en paix là-bas
 Nous ont renvoyés sous les bombes
 Nous ont dit On ne passe pas.

The scene is described in *Les Communistes*:

C'est le matin des retours. De tous les côtés, dans l'immense creuset du pays des mines, des familles, des isolés reviennent vers leur village, leur coron, leur travail ou leur malheur [...]. Par les routes on voit revenir les mineurs, des ménages, des groupes [...]. Sur les vélos chargés que les hommes poussent, il y a des lainages de couleur, les souliers, la layette du gosse, le réveil, deux coussins (1967, pp. 226-7.)

What is peculiar to the poem, however, is the filmic presentation, the depth of emotion, the poignancy underlined by the rhythm of the eight-syllable lines and the constant *repetends*. Thus the feelings of these victims of 'la nouvelle Barbarie' are brought out, as in tercet 1: 'Morts de fatigue et fous de rage'. We will see this emotional analysis being developed in a dramatic way when, later in the poem, Aragon focuses on an individual miner.

Very effectively, the poet lets us see the devastation of the previous normality through the wondering eyes of the children (tercets 4-5):

Et pleurant leurs jouets perdus
 Les enfants voyaient sans comprendre
 Leur horizon mal défendu

Les enfants voyaient sans comprendre
 La mitrailleuse au carrefour
 La grande épicerie en cendres.

It was, of course, not only the children who were unable to understand how their horizon was so ill defended. Everywhere to be seen was the irony of the kind encountered by Georges Sadoul on 26 May in the town of Poix, south of Abbeville (1977, pp. 232-233):

- Pourquoi diable les habitants sont-ils partis? me dit un caporal-chef, avec son accent de Roanne. Il n'a pas fini sa phrase que nous entrons dans une zone de ruines et de dévastation. Le bombardement a écrasé le centre du pays [...].

Sur les murs encore intacts, les grandes affiches de l'emprunt: 'Souscrivez, il Veille' et la carte du monde avec la devise 'Nous Vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts'.

When Aragon was writing this poem in August, the question of why the débâcle had taken place was central to the propaganda campaign being conducted by Vichy (cf. later the discussion on 'Ombres'). It is not insignificant that Aragon should evoke this question in the context of the 'pays des mines' where so many shared his political viewpoint.

The pitiful state of the French soldiers is now brought out (tercet 7):

Les soldats parlant à voix basse
Comptaient leurs blessés et leurs morts
A l'école dans une classe.

Aragon blends into the modern, realistic picture of the war-torn *coron*, with the machine-gun at the crossroads, a recall of laments of the past in the motif of the sorrow of the betrothed women when they learn of the deaths of their young men (tercet 8):

Leurs promises que diront-elles
O mon amie ô mon remords

The poignancy of the scene is increased (in tercet 9) as we visualize the fatally wounded lying on stretchers, sleeping not with their lovers of flesh and blood, but with their photographic images. The evanescence of all that is young and graceful is expressed in what seems an almost proverbial form. The beautiful

vulnerable swallows (like young love) disappear, the terrible sky remains:

Le ciel survit aux hirondelles.

The message is then put more plainly (tercet 10):

Ils dorment avec leurs photos
 Sur les brancards de toile bise
 On les enterrera bientôt.

The grisly reality (tercet 11) now contrasts with the euphemistic 'Ils dorment':

Sur les brancards de toile bise
 On emporte des jeunes gens
 Le ventre rouge et la peau grise.

A link exists between the situation in the poem and in *Les Communistes* (1967, p. 99):

Pour les évacuations, cela commence à devenir très inquietant. Le [Groupe] S[anitaire] D[ivisionnaire] [...] dans un des faubourgs de l'agglomération de Lens, voit revenir ses sanitaires jusque-là dirigées sur Béthune. Là-bas, l'hôpital vient de fermer après le départ du Groupe d'Armées. On ne débouche plus à l'ouest. Il faut expédier les blessés sur Saint-Omer.

In the poem, however, the outlook is bleaker still (tercets 13 and 14):

Mais qui sait si c'est bien utile
 S'ils arrivent à Saint-Omer
 Entre nous qu'y trouveront-ils

S'ils arrivent à Saint-Omer

Ils y trouveront l'ennemi

Ses chars nous coupent de la mer.

The prosaic register of these lines and the weakness of the rhyme 'Saint-Omer / mer' could perhaps charitably be said to be a deliberate impression of the barrel-organ.

Aragon now (tercet 18) introduces what he clearly views as a heroic figure: the miner returning to his home in the region of Lens.

There is a contrast in his demeanour and that of the artillerymen who are (tercet 17)

Semblables à des ombres peintes

Les yeux ici la tête ailleurs.

In his reaction to their laments (tercet 18), there is an energy and the bitterness of suffering courageously borne with none of the help that might have been expected from the defence forces:

Un passant qui soudain les vit

Sauvagement rit de leurs plaintes.

The presentation is dramatic (tercets 19-20):

Il était noir comme les mines

Il était noir comme la vie

Il était noir comme les mines

Ce géant qui rentrait chez lui

A Méricourt ou Sallaumines.

Aragon gives the miner the qualities of the giants of Flanders. Barbara Eperon (1991, p. 168) tells us that:

The giants of Flanders were born in the 16th century when they were carried in religious processions. Usually they were of Goliath or St. Christopher [cf. tercet 31, 'Saints Christophes de grand chemin']. After the Revolution they became local folk heroes or people of local legend and were the heroes of carnivals, still carried in procession, as they still are.

Of particular significance, perhaps, to the poem is the giant Roland who appears on Trinity Sunday in Hazebrouck, which is exactly in the area in which 'Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie' is set.

Now the poem almost resembles a march as this giant calls out his defiant message (tercets 22-24):

Mieux vaut cent fois chez soi crever
 D'une ou deux balles dans le ventre
 Mieux vaut cent fois chez soi crever
 Que d'aller en terre étrangère
 Mieux vaut la mort où vous vivez
 Que d'aller en terre étrangère
 Nous revenons nous revenons
 Le coeur lourd la panse légère.

When we learn (tercets 26-27) that it is the French authorities who have prevented these civilians from escaping the German bombardment, we understand why the miners are described at the beginning of the poem as 'fous de rage' - they feel they are being thrown to the wolves:

Ceux qui vivent en paix là-bas
 Nous ont renvoyés sous les bombes
 Nous ont dit On ne passe pas.

Already in 1914, this region, unlike Paris, had been occupied by the Germans for the duration of the war. It is in this context that we have to see the irony of 'On ne passe pas', which inescapably recalls the 'Ils ne passeront pas' directed defiantly towards the Germans at Verdun in 1916 by...Pétain. When this poem was being written, the Marshal was presiding over a Government (reviled by Aragon) which had agreed readily to the virtual enslavement of the population of the Pas-de-Calais by the Nazis.

For a commentary on the words ' nous revenons / Sans larmes sans espoir sans armes' (tercet 25), it is worth turning to the thoughts of such miners at this point in the narrative of *Les Communistes* (1967, pp. 244-245):

Dans chaque guerre, comme ça, ce pays-ci sera un pays
 prisonnier? C'est le malheur des mines: elle leur font [aux
 Allemands] trop envie...Mais aussi, puisque les soldats ne
 nous défendent pas, pourquoi ne nous laisse-t-on pas nous
 défendre?

In the poem, the returning refugees face a bleak prospect (tercet 28):

Pas besoin de creuser nos tombes.

At the end of this *Complainte* there is a mixture of pity for the defenceless miners and admiration for their strength. One giant has now become many, and it is difficult not to see a political romanticization of these coal-black figures

silhouetted, as in the closing shot of a film by Eisenstein,
against the white sky of wrath:

Les géants qui se profilèrent
Sur le ciel blanc de la colère.

This couplet which concludes the poem receives a stress from the fact that Aragon is departing from the usual form of *terza rima* which finishes on a single line.

When one compares the simplicity of the presentation of the content of this poem with the complexity of 'Tapisserie de la grande peur', one cannot accuse Aragon of being master of one style only.

Richard II quarante

After the three weeks spent in August 1940 at the château of Renaud de Jouvenel in Varetz, Aragon and Elsa, learning that Gaston Gallimard was in Carcassonne, went there to make contact with him. Peter Rhodes (Josephson 1946, pp. 90-91) tells us:

Business was too uncertain, said Gallimard. He could advance no money for the moment, he could settle no pending accounts. Aragon then sent a cable to his friend and publisher in America, Samuel Sloan, who answered promptly, sending him funds to carry them until more could be earned [...]. The Aragons remained in Carcassonne from the end of August until the end of December.

The final five poems of *Le Crève-Coeur* were written there, 'Richard II Quarante' in the month of September. It was first published in *Fontaine* (Alger), II, no. 13, (fév-mars) 1941.

Variants

Title: MS1 has 'Richard deux quarante'.

Stanzas 4 and 5 in MS1 have a transposal line to show that their order should be reversed. This new order is that found in *L'OEuvre Poétique* (1979b, p. 147).

The poem's first publication in *Fontaine* (Alger) II, no. 13 (fév-mars), 1941 is not indicated in the *Bibliographie* attached by Aragon to the original edition of *Le Crève-Coeur* of April 1941.

Stanza 1

When Aragon compares his native land to a boat or barge (cf. *le petit Robert*) abandoned by the men towing or guiding it, he is referring to the political and military abandonment of France by her leaders in May-July 1940. To fully appreciate the charge being levelled (very boldly) by the poet here and the depth of his feeling, we need to understand the circumstances to which he is alluding.

After the piercing of the French defences at Sedan, a defeat that owed as much to the simple incompetence of the generals as to their surprise at German tactics, Prime Minister Reynaud dismissed Gamelin as Commander-in-Chief, replacing him on 18 May 1940 with Weygand. The latter, a representative of the most anti-republican forces in the army, made his views clear on the day he took up his new post:

J'accepte la mission de conduire les armées parce qu'il faut sauver l'honneur. Mais quand on aura sauvé l'honneur, il faudra sauver l'armée pour sauver l'ordre (Willard 1969, page 112).

Thus his primary concern was not with resisting Hitler, but rather, after the expected capitulation, with imposing the very kind of regime that Vichy was to embody.

On that same 18 May, the military and political direction of the country took a decisive turn with the appointment of Pétain as Deputy Premier. The latter's will to fight the war against Hitler may be gauged from the fact that he was at the centre of fascist hopes in France and that when, in September 1939,

Daladier had planned a broad-spectrum Government, running from Pétain to Herriot (President of the Chamber of Deputies), the Marshal had replied 'qu'il ne collaborerait pas en pleine guerre avec un belliciste comme le président Herriot' (Willard 1969, page 114).

After the collapse of the Somme front, the Government, abandoning Paris to its fate, moved on 10 June to Tours and then, on the 15, to Bordeaux. In the meantime, Pétain and Weygand were constantly pressing Reynaud to ask for an armistice. On 16 June, Reynaud resigned his office without even informing his Ministers, simply telling President Lebrun: 'Pour faire cette politique [signer l'armistice] adressez-vous au maréchal Pétain' (Willard, 1969, p. 127). When the latter was summoned by Lebrun, he showed that he had been planning for this moment by being able to draw his ready prepared list of ministers from his pocket.

The new Head of government went into action immediately. Jean-Pierre Azéma recounts (1970, p. 64):

L'armée tronçonnée, traumatisée, entendait le 17 juin le vainqueur de Verdun déclarer dans un discours radiodiffusé: 'C'est le coeur serré que je vous dis aujourd'hui qu'il faut cesser le combat.' C'était décupler la pagaille, au point que la préfecture maritime de Brest affirma que c'était un faux forgé par l'ennemi; il fallut diffuser une seconde version - celle-là incompréhensible - : 'Il faut tenter de cesser le combat'.

All this although the armistice was not officially requested until the 18th and did not come into effect until the 25th June.

Azéma gives further details of how widespread the abysmal behaviour of the military and civilian leadership was:

Un simple caporal allemand faisait prisonnier l'état-major de la Xe armée tandis qu'à La Rochelle on diffusait cet ordre impératif: 'Désarmer tout le monde. Rassembler toutes les armes et les maintenir dans un même local. Consigner officiers et hommes au Quartier. Attendre sur place sans tirer ou résister d'aucune façon. Brûler les documents. Les officiers qui n'exécuteraient pas cet ordre seront traduits devant le Conseil de guerre.' Dans cette pagaille, la Wehrmacht rafla - avant et après la conclusion de l'armistice - près de 2 millions de prisonniers.

Ce profond désarroi gagna les administrations civiles, là où elles subsistaient. Après qu'Herriot eut obtenu - le 18 - que Lyon fût déclarée 'ville ouverte', la mesure fut vite étendue à toutes les cités de plus de 20 000 habitants. Ce fut la ruée: [...] à Poitiers, le maire se rendait au-devant des troupes allemandes, drapeau en tête (bid.).

If Aragon was not privy to the machinations of those surrounding Pétain, *L'Humanité* of 20 May proved that it was easily possible for someone of his ideological background to surmise what was going on, when it warned against an abandonment of France by the Government:

Si on les laisse faire, les malfaiteurs qui dominent le pays l'entraîneront encore vers de nouvelles et plus terribles catastrophes. Tels un Thiers qui, il y a 69 ans, accepta les conditions de paix les plus draconiennes de Bismarck contre

son aide pour écraser la Commune, ils sont prêts à sacrifier l'indépendance du pays à Hitler pourvu que celui-ci leur garantisse leurs privilèges capitalistes!

The terms of the armistice which did follow could only have confirmed Aragon in such a view: France was disarmed and her territory split into an occupied zone (well over half of the country) and a so-called 'zone libre'.

En zone occupée, placée directement sous l'autorité militaire, l'administration française est invitée 'à se conformer aux réglementations des autorités allemandes et à collaborer avec ces dernières d'une manière correcte' (art. 3). En zone non occupée, le gouvernement français, théoriquement indépendant, ne peut publier ses décisions qu'avec l'autorisation allemande (art. 17). Ce diktat pose les fondements d'une véritable colonisation de la France.

Afin de mieux l'assurer, Hitler entreprend le démembrement du territoire français. La zone occupée et la zone non occupée sont séparées par une ligne de démarcation pratiquement infranchissable aux personnes comme à la correspondance. La région du Nord devient une 'zone interdite', rattachée au gouvernement militaire allemand de Bruxelles. Des mesures amorcent immédiatement l'annexion pure et simple de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine au IIIe Reich: expulsions, installation de douaniers allemands sur la frontière de 1914, interdiction de la langue française (Willard 1969, pp. 135-6).

The occupation was to be paid for by France at the enormous cost of 400 million francs per day. As a guarantee, the Germans took away one and a half million prisoners of war.

In return, Pétain was able to do away with the Republic and institute a personal dictatorship. At Vichy, on 10 July, by 569 votes to 80, with 17 abstentions, the French Parliament, influenced in part by the fear of Weygand's soldiers and of the Germans, voted to give the Marshal full, unrestricted executive and legislative powers.

Again we may judge Aragon's reaction from that of *L'Humanité* of 7 July:

A Bas le Gouvernement des pourris

PEUPLE DE FRANCE

Un mauvais coup se prépare contre notre pays [...]. Laval et Pétain vont faire adopter à Vichy par des parlementaires domestiqués une Constitution qui étranglera toutes nos libertés [...]. **Soldats**, qui revenez de la guerre, convaincus d'avoir été trahis, sacrifiés, vous ne laisserez pas les responsables de vos malheurs mettre la France sous tutelle et pillage [...]. A l'heure où n'hésitant pas à violer la légalité, des Ministres indignes veulent faire de Vichy le cimetière de nos droits et de nos libertés, **Français unissez-vous, réalisez le front de la liberté, du travail, et de l'indépendance de la France** (emphasis in text).

Whether or not Aragon had access to *L'Humanité* is unclear. As we have seen above, he did, according to his own testimony, have knowledge of another source that influenced him profoundly:

nous étions légion qui avons lu l'appel du 10 juillet 1940, signé Thorez et Duclos, qui dissipait les équivoques, appelait à la résistance, nous disait: Ton coeur, camarade, a raison de battre, c'est cela, la France, et nous, les Français (1953, p. 268 ff.).

The final three lines of the stanza are illuminated by reference to Germaine Willard (1969, pp. 139-40):

Il est difficile, pour qui n'a pas vécu cette période, d'imaginer l'atmosphère qui régnait alors [...], l'accablement causé par l'effondrement brutal de la France. En deux mois les Français ont vu la guerre perdue, la République renversée, les partis traditionnels désagrégés. Autant d'événements qui, pour beaucoup, apparaissent stupéfiants et irréversibles. Car Hitler et ses complices sont les maîtres de l'Europe.

In keeping with the noble register of the first two lines of the stanza, Aragon now adapts a quotation from Shakespeare in order to help convey his own grief. It is from *Richard II*, Act IV, scene 1, when the usurper Bolingbroke has summoned the deposed king in order that the latter may publicly surrender his crown. Richard hands it over but expresses sorrow. Bolingbroke says hypocritically:

I thought you had been willing to resign.

Richard replies:

My crown I am; but still my griefs are mine.

You may my glories and my state depose,

But not my griefs; still am I king of those.

Thus, the meaning of the title of the poem becomes clear: Aragon in 1940 is in the same situation as Richard II in 1399 - betrayed by those who had pledged to defend his realm, he has been deprived of his very identity and reigns now only over his sorrows.

But, even as Aragon seems to be sharing the despondency so widespread in France at the time, he conceals here a different message that becomes clearer by the end of the poem. The technique is elucidated by the poet in his discussions (1968, p. 140) with Dominique Arban:

J'expérimentais donc un vers qui posait des questions même aux ministres, mais dont le but était d'amener les gens à en rechercher la clef, laquelle était pour bien des raisons plus facile à trouver pour ceux qui éprouvaient les mêmes sentiments que moi, qui étions prêts à en chercher l'utilité nationale. Ainsi le poème devenait l'agent naturel de la contrebande, politique si vous voulez, mais en tout cas nationale, anti-allemande.

And so, just as he makes an attack in the first two lines of the stanza on those who, in his eyes, had caused the collapse of his country, Aragon now directs the discerning reader to the scene from which Richard's speech is taken, there to find the king, a moment before his words of apparent resignation, addressing the usurpers of his state with biting sarcasm:

I hardly yet have learned
 To insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my knee.
 Give sorrow leave awhile to tutor me
 To this submission.

It is in this contempt for his conquerors that the poet also resembles the unhappiest of monarchs who was born...in France Aragon was to make use of another king of England for the purposes of French patriotism with 'Richard Coeur-de-Lion' (1979b, pp. 239-240).

That Aragon was in fact not prepared to let his sadness overwhelm him is shown by a letter that he wrote while in Carcassonne to his American friends, the Josephsons, whom he had visited with Elsa in the summer of 1939:

What a terrible road since the days we spent together! Note that the rest of this letter would be false to my meaning if you concluded from it that I have become pessimistic. I believe on the contrary that God moves in a mysterious way and that the gate is strait through which we must pass. In my country, even when it is unfortunate, even when it is crushed, I have a confidence that there is no way of expressing except by deeds; and there is nothing to change in what I told you there in your country house, of which I dream to-day as if it were some image of childhood or a scene from a novel... (Josephson 1946, p. 12).

A similar confidence and determination is recalled by Elsa in *Préface à la contrebande* (1964, p. 28):

Nos amis, aux Etats-Unis et en Amérique du Sud, nous pressaient de venir chez eux. Mais pour nous la question ne se posait pas: ni toi, ni moi, nous ne voulions quitter la France. Nous étions certains que le pays ne se laisserait pas faire, et il ne s'agissait pas seulement de Londres, non, cela allait s'organiser sur place. Il nous fallait trouver les bouts, toucher ceux qui justement s'organisaient pour cela. Ou que ce soit eux qui nous trouvent.

The poems written after the armistice were intended to make this kind of contact possible. Aragon exemplifies his strategy in his discussion (1968, p. 142) of the poem 'Plus belle que les larmes' (which was first published in *Tunis-Soir* on 10 January 1942):

Le poème a été repris par le journal suisse *Curieux* qui pénétrait en zone sud.

Or, dans le nombre considérable de gens qui l'ont lu, il y en avait qui ne savait où s'adresser, comment faire pour retrouver comme on disait la 'liaison', et quand ils ont vu le vers:

Il y a dans le vent qui vient d'Arles des songes.. beaucoup ont compris que, sous ma signature, les songes en question étaient ceux qui étaient liés au congrès du parti communiste à Arles en 1937, et se sont arrangés pour me faire parvenir des lettres, me demandant comment faire.

Stanza 2

Such is the pain felt at the disaster that has befallen his country that living has lost its sense of reality for the poet,

it is merely an artifice, a pretence. He must hate all that he loves because it is no longer the same, it is no longer his, it is in the hands of the Germans and Vichy. Here there may be an echo of a sentence in the 'Appel du 10 juillet' of Thorez and Duclos: 'Le peuple de France connaît l'occupation et ne se sent pas chez lui' (Noguères 1967-81, vol. 1, p. 461).

This is a theme that can be found repeatedly in his poems of this period: in 'Richard Coeur-de-Lion' which Aragon wrote in July 1941 in the prison of Tours:

Si l'étranger sillonne nos luzernes

Si le jour aujourd'hui n'en finit plus

Faut-il garder le compte de chaque heure

Hair moi qui n'avais jamais hair

On n'est plus chez soi même dans son coeur

O mon pays est-ce bien mon pays (1979b, p. 239);

and again in 'Imité de Camoëns' which dates from 1942:

Ce que je chérissais jadis a tant changé

Qu'on dirait autre aimer et comme autre douloir (1979b,

p. 257);

as well as in 'Lancelot' (first published 1942):

En étrange pays dans mon pays lui-même

Je sais bien ce que c'est qu'un amour malheureux (1979b,

p. 263).

In the final two lines of the stanza, resignation seems to triumph once more, but we notice that the refrain has changed from the third to the first person and we shall see the

importance of this. When Aragon was writing 'Richard II Quarante' in September, his feelings must have been influenced by the fact that, on the second of that month, he had received the *Croix de guerre avec palme*. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the line 'Je reste roi de mes douleurs' has another, more positive meaning that emerges by the end of the poem.

Stanza 3

The poet's grief would find a welcome end in death, indeed a kind of death seems to have already occurred as all warmth has left his blood, all life ebbed away. How differently Aragon was to use the words of the first line of this stanza to express his feelings at the liberation of Paris:

O mois d'août quarante quatre
 Maintenant maintenant il peut
 Ce vieux coeur s'arrêter de battre

Je sais ce que c'est qu'un ciel bleu (1980, p. 433).

When (lines 3-4) Aragon seems willing to accept that two and two no longer make four 'Au Pigeon-Vole des voleurs', he is going further than Elsa Triolet when she evokes the period of 'cet étrange monde qui marchait sur la tête et où rien n'était à sa place' (1964, p. 29). 'Pigeon-Vole' is defined in *le petit Robert* as follows:

jeu d'enfants, dans lequel un joueur lance rapidement le mot vole précédé d'un nom d'objet susceptible ou non de voler, les autres joueurs ne devant sous peine de gages, lever le doigt que si la chose en question peut en effet voler.

The obvious pun on 'voleurs' makes clear that basic truths are no longer valid in a game of forfeits where thieves make the rules. We know the forfeit France was paying to those who had stolen her independence. The accusation here levelled at the German occupiers invalidates the apparent acquiescence of the poet and affects the tone of 'Je reste roi de mes douleurs' in line 5.

Stanza 4

Time passes but life has no flavour, everything seems drab and meaningless. If, for Baudelaire in 'Le Goût du néant',

Le Printemps adorable a perdu son odeur!;

for Aragon now that his country has been taken from him,

Le ciel a perdu ses couleurs.

The pain is expressed in the degree of the beauty of what he seems to have irreversibly lost as he conjures up the colour and warmth of spring in a farewell to the Quai-aux-fleurs, the emblem of the tender Paris of his youth. That he chooses Paris to express his heartbreak is not merely a poetical device. In this exile from his native city, he was to write in 'Le Paysan de Paris chante':

Arrachez-moi le coeur vous y verrez Paris

C'est de ce Paris-là que j'ai fait mes poèmes

Mes mots sont la couleur étrange de ses toits[...]

J'ai plus écrit de toi Paris que de moi-même

Et plus que de vieillir souffert d'être sans toi

Plus le temps passera moins il sera facile

De parler de Paris et de moi séparés (1979c, p. 87).

The attractions of the south of France during this period could not compensate him. Thus in 'Absent de Paris' in 1943 he wrote:

nous vivons dans l'exil

D'un paradis terrestre auquel secrètement

Nous préférons l'enfer Paris et ses tourments

Grand merci pour l'aubaine et l'azur et l'asile

(1979c, p. 103).

An essential feature of the capital for him is not made explicit in this stanza of 'Richard II Quarante' but, given the end of the poem, it must have been at the back of his mind:

Lui qui sait des chansons et qui fait des colères [...]

Paris qui n'est Paris qu'arrachant ses pavés

('Plus belle que les larmes' in 1979b, page 253).

Stanza 5

The contraband here has been misinterpreted by Georges Sadoul (and by Pierre Daix, who follows his lead). Sadoul (1967, p.33) says:

Vichy célébrait les bienfaits de la défaite, dont on accusait pourtant les 'mauvais maîtres', écrivains ou cinéastes. Dans 'Richard II 40' [sic] le poète répliquait à ces diatribes:

Taisez-vous oiseaux querelleurs

Vos chants sont mis en quarantaine

C'est le règne de l'oiseleur.

This is surely a misreading that neglects the context of the poem, disregards the first line of the stanza and the sense of 'le règne de l'oiseleur'.

The situation is clarified by Aragon in the letter he wrote to the Josephsons from Carcassonne:

In the Occupied Zone my books, like those of many other French writers, can no longer be sold, while in the Free Zone that question does not even arise, since all the printed copies are in Paris and the publisher is forbidden to ship them across the line of demarcation (Josephson 1946, p. 11).

Thus, Aragon himself is one of the 'oiseaux querelleurs' (in the sense of 'batailleurs') whose 'songs have been put in quarantine'. The main 'songs' of protest against the Occupier and Vichy were, as far as Aragon was concerned, in the forbidden Communist press. *L'Humanité*, which circulated clandestinely, complains time and again as in the edition of 5 August 1940: 'On tolère une certaine presse, mais "l'HUMANITE" et "CE SOIR" sont interdits' [capitals in text].

On 22 August it castigated the publications that were permitted: 'Contre cette criminelle presse de plumitifs à gages, Français qui voulez que la France reste maîtresse de ses destinées, unissez-vous!'

In the second last line of the stanza, Aragon cleverly develops the metaphor of the silenced birds to make clear to the informed reader the target of his attack:

C'est le règne de l'oiseleur.

Here the poet uses **German** mediaeval history to put over his point. The reference is to Henry the Fowler [cf. *le petit Robert* 2: 'Henri Ier l'Oiseleur. Roi de Germanie (919-936)'], who three times attacked across the Rhine with the aim of establishing his dominion over Lorraine. His expansionist tradition is being carried on by the Nazis.

The motif of birds forbidden to sing is common in Aragon's poems of the time. In 'Richard Coeur-de-Lion' (written July 1941), he complains:

Si l'étranger sillonne nos luzernes [...]
Je ne dois pas regarder l'hirondelle
Qui parle au ciel un langage interdit (1979b, p. 239).

In *Plus belle que les larmes*, he declares in reply to an attack by Drieu la Rochelle who had been put in charge of the *NRF* by the Germans:

Vous pouvez condamner un poète au silence
Et faire d'un oiseau du ciel un galérien
Mais pour lui refuser le droit d'aimer la France
Il vous faudrait savoir que vous n'y pouvez rien
(1979b, p. 250).

The 'code' of the forbidden songs of the birds is deciphered in 'Le Paysan de Paris chante' (published 1943):

Que renaisse le chant que les oiseaux imitent
Et qui répond Paris quand on dit liberté (1979c, p. 84).

What Aragon means by 'C'est le règne de l'oiseleur' was expressed in direct language by *L'Humanité* on 10 September 1940 (i.e. at the time when the poem was being written). The paper was

outraged by the fact that the Germans were themselves holding Communists as political detainees in prison or in concentration camps and were delivering others to the tender mercies of Vichy. For *L'Humanité* it was clear: 'C'est le règne de la barbarie triomphante.'

Stanza 6

This stanza is constructed on two lines of thought, one of resignation, the other of resistance. The two different strands are picked out by their rhymes, thus:

Il est un temps pour la souffrance [...]

Ah coupez en morceaux la France;

and then,

Quand Jeanne vint à Vaucouleurs [...]

Le jour avait cette pâleur

Je reste roi de mes douleurs.

In the lines of resignation (the first one being adapted from Apollinaire's prophecy (1965, p. 174) in 'Les Collines': 'Il vient un temps pour la souffrance'), it is difficult not to see an allusion to the lesson being preached by Vichy. In his speech of 13 August 1940, for example, Pétain said:

Aujourd'hui la France est en proie au malheur véritable [...]. Il faut que les Français s'attachent à supporter l'inévitable, fermement et patiemment.

In *Vichy, Année 40*, Henri Michel (1966, p. 120) comments:

Le Maréchal met une sorte d'acharnement à répéter aux Français qu'ils ont été vaincus parce que, ^{par} leurs fautes passées, ils méritaient de l'être. La Révolution Nationale

[de Vichy] [...] se nourrissait de défaitisme et, loin de susciter le sursaut nécessaire au redressement, elle répandait l'esprit d'abandon et de résignation.

The second strand of thought in the final stanza of 'Richard II quarante' invites Frenchmen to reject such a surrender, reminding them of their glorious history, of how, when Jeanne d'Arc went on her improbable mission to Vaucouleurs in 1428 and told Robert de Baudricourt of the voices commanding her to deliver her country from the foreign invader, things looked just as bleak for France as they do in 1940 ('Le jour avait cette pâleur').

Any doubts on Aragon's intentions here are removed by what he wrote in 1942 in *La Conjonction Et*:

Ce qui est pour moi essentiel dans Jeanne d'Arc, héroïne de France, ce n'est pas qu'elle entendit Monsieur saint Michel, c'est qu'elle ait sauvé le royaume de France (1979c, p. 43).

The poet was to use this heroine time and again to inspire resistance to the Nazis, e.g. in *La Diane française*:

Je vois Jeanne filer Roland sonne le cor

C'est le temps des héros qui renaît au Vercors (1979c, p. 365).

Now, at the end of 'Richard II quarante', it becomes clear that the poet's apparent acceptance of the defeat and division of his country ('Ce que je n'ai plus donnez-leur'; 'Ah coupez en morceaux la France') was a provocation to his fellow Frenchmen to do no such thing. How could they consent to such an abandonment as was being urged by Pétain? Certainly for Aragon it

was unthinkable. His views were represented by *L'Humanité* (in an undated number of August 1940):

Pour une FRANCE libre et indépendante, FRANÇAIS! UNISSEZ-VOUS! [...] Notre France où tout au long des siècles se sont fondues vingt races dans la communauté des luttes, dans la communauté de la langue, dans la communauté de l'amour de la liberté, cette France que nos ancêtres de la Révolution française proclamaient une et indivisible [Capitals in text].

Now we understand the true sense of the refrain 'Je reste roi de mes douleurs' (which is constantly supported by the rhyme-scheme): he is the ~~master~~ of his griefs. For, as he says in 'Absent de Paris':

Je ne veux plus pleurer car pleurer nous désarme
(1979c, p. 106).

He could not accept the situation where Frenchmen were to be treated as vassals by the Germans:

Ils nous dirent Jetez vos livres
Un chien n'a que son maître à suivre [...]

Ils nous dirent Les yeux à terre

Il faut obéir et se taire ('Marche française' in 1979c, p. 358).

Of 'Richard II Quarante', Georges Sadoul (1967, p. 33) justly concludes: 'Ce poème [...] appelait à "bouter" les armées étrangères hors de France'.

ZONE LIBRE

Written in September 1940 at Carcassonne, this poem first appeared in *Fontaine* (Alger), II, 13 (fév-mars) 1941 (this is not acknowledged in the *Bibliographie* attached to the first edition of *Le Crève-Coeur*).

There are no variants.

In the poem Aragon tries, with the knowledge provided by hindsight, to retrace the development of his outlook over the previous month, spent for the most part, as we know, in Varetz at the home of Renaud de Jouvenel.

Stanza 1

In that castle of pink stone the memory of the heartbreak he had felt at France's defeat faded away like the signal of a transmitter (once again the poet has recourse to radio technology), growing ever weaker until it disappeared entirely. Ashes whitened the embers of the pain that had been burning so intensely within him. He savoured the beauty of this existence in the warmth of summer as though it were a sweet wine. When he says, 'J'ai rêvé' (line 5), it is clear that he had fled from reality into this fairy-tale atmosphere so far removed from the horrors he had experienced in May and June.

Stanza 2

The sound of a sudden, unexplained sob, a muted reproach in the breeze had threatened to disturb his happiness, but he refused to waken from his dream, he wanted to prolong the idyll, despair was

losing its force. If 'démobiliser' is used transitively here and not absolutely, the sense would be that despair takes away his strength.

Stanza 3

For a moment, in the midst of the corn, he had thought he had heard the muffled noise of battle. There was a deep sorrow within him but he did not know its source. In the perfume of the carnations and the rosemary there was no trace of the memory of tears. And so the beauty of the natural background also served to insulate his mind from a reality he could not face.

Stanza 4

Looking back now from the perspective of September, the poet realizes that, because his suffering had been unbearable, he had tried to block it from his consciousness. In this sense he had lost the 'dark secret' of his torment' (line 2).

Aragon is attempting to recreate his actual responses of the month of August, but there is also the intervention of the knowledge of what followed. This is highlighted by the interplay of past and present tenses at various points in the poem, and nowhere more startlingly than in this stanza. The present tense of 'se démembre' (line 3) is no doubt influenced by the need for a rhyme with 'septembre' (line 6), but it also gives a vivid impression of his understanding *now* of the darkness surrounding the secret. His mind had been endlessly searching out the 'forgotten' origin of the pain he felt, when suddenly, with the dawning of September, came the moment of recognition.

Stanza 5

The source of the suffering within him was revealed when, as he lay in the arms of his wife, he heard someone outside murmur 'une vieille chanson de France' (line 3). This reminder of the culture of his native land was what made it impossible for him to evade the tragic memory any longer.

Of the final stanza of this poem Georges Raillard (1964, page 83) says: 'C'est par son amour chanté qu'Aragon retrouve la réalité française, dans sa tradition et dans la promesse de sa renaissance'. Certainly, the kind of love that he has for Elsa makes him want to fulfil his commitment to his ideals, but here it is also because of the **contrast** between the poet's happiness with his love in this 'château rose' and the **unhappiness** of France that he is brought back to the terrible reality. This interpretation is supported by Aragon's remarks (1964, p. 92) to Francis Crémieux on the subject of the poem 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux' which was written in 1943: 'Comment aurait-il pu y avoir un amour heureux dans les conditions dramatiques de la France?' He speaks later in the same context (p. 102) of 'l'impossibilité du bonheur dans le malheur commun'.

The actual feelings of the couple by the time 'Zone libre' was being composed are related by Elsa (1964, p. 27):

Les douleurs ne se ressemblent pas, varient à l'infini. Ainsi le sombre malheur que nous éprouvâmes à Carcassonne aux derniers mois de 1940 ne ressemblait-il à aucune des peines

jusque-là connues. Une mélancolie comme l'immobile eau noire
du canal, noire comme les cyprès de cette ville.

In 'Zone libre' Aragon recounts how he had succumbed to the temptation to try to escape, to forget the disaster that had befallen his country, and this had been the cause of the 'sourd reproche dans la brise' (stanza 2, line 3). His consciousness had been reawakened by a song. He does not identify it, any more than the one to which he alludes in 'Richard Coeur-de-Lion', where, with the rule of the foreigner in his land, he tells us:

Je ne dois pas dire ce que je pense

Ni murmurer cet air que j'aime tant.

We may wonder whether it was *La Marseillaise*.

The refrain disturbed the green and stagnant water of the silence which had been his response 'pendant ce mois d'août' (stanza 1) to the plight of France. Here the poet suggests that this passivity is at an end.

The reproach Aragon addresses to himself in the poem could have been applied widely. Many Frenchmen convinced themselves that there was such a thing as a 'Zone libre'. They 'dreamt' and remained silent until they had to face harsh reality when the whole country was occupied by the Nazis in November 1942. Aragon did not wait. Indeed, we find it difficult to believe that he succumbed even temporarily to the temptation to 'escape' given the titles of the poems he wrote when in Varetz: 'Enfer-les-mines', 'Tapisserie de la grande peur' and 'Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie'.

The title of Aragon's poem is of course ironic. It evokes a claimed short-lived lapse into the fantasy of 'un château rose en Corrèze', but it really points on a much larger scale to the illusion of Vichy. All of France is a prison, there is no escape from that fact and from the duty of resistance.

Aragon recounts in *La Diane française* (published 1945) how, just as he was awakened by 'une vieille chanson de France', the effect of such songs (and of modern ones like 'Zone libre' itself) came to be used as an important weapon in the struggle:

Alors nous chantions tout bas à notre manière. Les refrains murmurés se propagent fort bien. Vous savez, quand, sur les trottoirs d'une grande ville, **reprenant à un passant l'air entêtant qu'il sifflait** [emphasis added], vous le transmettez sans vouloir à cet autre homme croisé, qui plus loin s'en va et le porte. Notre chanson s'enfla, reprise et multipliée. Quels échos infinis recèle un peuple, quels mystères! Notre chanson montait aux lèvres, sans qu'on sût presque qu'on chantait [...]. Mon pays devenait le chant même du monde, la musique où se résumait enfin tout l'espoir et tout le désespoir [...]. Mon pays arrivait dans la nuit vers les régions où commence la lumière, il pressentait l'aurore, il savait qu'elle est un combat, qu'elle a dans sa pâleur des sanglots et du sang. Mon pays qui chantait abordait la lumière!...

Alors la diane française sonna (1979c, p. 299).

Ombres

This poem was written in September 1940 at Carcassonne and first published in *Le Crève-cœur*.

There are no variants.

Georges Sadoul (1967, pp. 33-34) speaks of 'Richard II quarante' and of

'Ombres' qui attaquait encore plus directement Vichy. Aragon me lut ces poèmes en septembre. Alors que les murs de la 'zone libre' étaient couverts d'affiches proclamant 'Je hais les mensonges qui nous ont fait tant de mal - Philippe Pétain', je l'entendis dire à haute voix:

Leur sang ressemble au vin des mauvaises années

Ils prétendent avoir mangé trop de mensonges

Ils ont l'air d'avoir égaré la clef des songes.

Avaient-ils du même coup perdu la clef des chants? Ces vers purent être publiés dans *Le Crève-Cœur* et mis en vente sans encombre au début d'avril 1941 dans toutes les librairies de la zone occupée ou non. On s'arracha ce livre alors que *Gringoire* et vingt autres journaux félicitaient Vichy d'avoir 'déjoué le complot communiste'.

The link made by Sadoul between the poster of Pétain and the quotation from stanza seven of 'Ombres' makes clear that the 'Ils' being attacked by Aragon in the poem are the men of the Vichy regime.

The words on the poster were taken from Pétain's broadcast to the nation on 25 June 1940, the day the armistice came into

effect. In order to understand fully the context of Aragon's poem, it is necessary to look at the Marshal's speech (quoted in Isorni 1973, pp. 141-143) in more detail.

Pétain reviewed the conflict in which France had been defeated, according to him, by an overwhelmingly superior military force:

Ce qu'il faut d'abord souligner c'est l'illusion profonde que la France et ses alliés se sont faite sur la véritable force militaire de l'Allemagne.

The armistice had been unavoidable:

Je ne serais pas digne de rester à votre tête si j'avais accepté de répandre le sang français pour prolonger le rêve de quelques Français mal instruits des conditions de la lutte.

He concluded by claiming to offer the truth instead of the lies of the past that had brought France to her present sorry state and he pointed the way to regeneration:

Vous avez souffert. Vous souffrirez encore [...]. Votre vie sera dure. Ce n'est pas moi qui vous bernerai par des paroles trompeuses. Je hais les mensonges qui vous [sic] ont fait tant de mal.

La terre, elle ne ment pas. Elle demeure votre recours. Elle est la Patrie elle-même. Un champ qui tombe en friche, c'est une portion de la France qui meurt. Une jachère de nouveau emblavée, c'est une portion de [sic] France qui renaît [...]. Notre défaite est venue de nos relâchements. L'esprit de jouissance détruit ce que l'esprit de sacrifice

a édifié. C'est à un redressement intellectuel et moral que, d'abord, je vous convie.

In this broadcast are to be found some of the main themes dealt with by Aragon in 'Ombres': the powerlessness before the 'supernatural' military force of the Germans; the 'esprit de jouissance' that had supposedly undermined the moral fibre of the French people; the 'retour à la terre' which Pétain maintained would lead them back to the healthy values of the past.

Stanza 1

As indicated above, 'Ils' are those whom Aragon was to attack in detail in *Le Musée Grévin* in the summer of 1943. There he describes the rulers of Vichy in terms that recall the title of this poem: 'ces rois d'ombre et leurs chantres pourris' (1979c, p. 194). For Aragon, these men are shadows cast over France by the Germans. They have no substance of their own. On 2 September 1940, *L'Humanité* described them as

les traîtres qui sont prêts à négocier l'asservissement de notre pays pour conserver leurs privilèges capitalistes à l'ombre des baïonnettes étrangères [et qui] maintiennent et jettent en prison de nombreux communistes partisans résolus de la liberté et de l'indépendance de la France (emphasis added).

In 'Ombres' the poet scorns the way in which those whom he considers responsible for the catastrophe compare it to a scourge visited on the people from above. The press actively supported the kind of presentation mocked here by Aragon. Thus, on 14 July 1940, Louis Mercier in *L'Union Républicaine du Sud-Est* wrote:

Mon Dieu, jusqu'à la dernière heure, nous avons espéré en Vous. Nous avons compté sur un 'miracle'. Nous n'en étions pas dignes. Le miracle, vous nous l'aviez accordé, il y a vingt ans. A peine avions-nous voulu le reconnaître.

Et nous avons continué à adorer les idoles qui nous avaient menés déjà au bord de l'abîme: le progrès matérialiste, le scientisme orgueilleux, le sensualisme effréné qui tue les vies qui veulent naître (quoted in Delperrié de Bayac 1975, pp. 55-56).

The German army that swept like a whirlwind through France (cf. 'd'où venait le vent', line 2)) was certainly presented as a superhuman force against which the brave resistance of the French soldiers was useless. Thus *La Montagne* of Clermont-Ferrand:

Harcelées par un adversaire quatre fois supérieur en nombre, dix fois supérieur en engins blindés, sans repos, sans espoir de relève, des jours et des jours, nos troupes faisaient face (Delperrié de Bayac 1975, p. 55).

In fact, the opposing armies were equal in numbers and the French actually had more armour than the Germans and some of their tanks were superior to those of Guderian.

The 'savants' (line 3) who were wise after the event were such as those attacked by *L'Humanité* in September 1940 as 'les professeurs de clairvoyance tardive d'aujourd'hui, les Déat, Bergery, Bonnet, etc...'. .

An example of the analyses given by such 'experts' can be found in the article entitled 'Le Parti de la Guerre' by Marcel Déat in *L'Oeuvre* of 27 July 1940:

Il y avait en France un parti de la guerre. Il y avait d'abord les communistes...Le Front Populaire, machiavéliquement noyauté et manoeuvré par les communistes, devint le puissant levier de cette belle entreprise...

(Delperrié de Bayac 1975, p. 49).

Stanza 2

Here and in the following two stanzas, Aragon ridicules Vichy's 'explanations' of the defeat by associating them with superstitions. Behind some of these it is possible to see actual arguments put forward at the time. Thus the first line, which asks if the thunderbolt (cf. 'guerre éclair') had been sent down from above as a punishment for 'nos rires', would seem to evoke Pétain's attack on 'l'esprit de jouissance' in his broadcast of 25 June. The real target of Vichy's wrath here was the changes brought about by the strikes in the summer of 1936: the forty-hour week, the salary increases, the paid holidays, the new attitude to employers. A typical representative of Pétain's line of thought was General Duval who, in a series of articles published in *Le Journal* in Limoges at the beginning of July 1940, denounced the state as having been incapable

ni d'organiser la mobilisation nationale, ni de réaliser la mobilisation industrielle...impuissant à donner à notre industrie l'élan qui eût été indispensable pour produire le matériel de guerre qui nous faisait défaut..

Cette incapacité ne fut pas due seulement à son impuissance, elle le fut surtout à la malfaisance de sa politique économique pendant les années qui précédèrent la guerre

[...]. Elle atteignit son point culminant en 1936. Alors se propagèrent dans les usines l'**insubordination et la paresse** [...] il n'y eut de faveurs que pour les éléments les plus **médiocres** (Delperrié de Bayac 1975, pp. 50-51, emphasis added).

L'Humanité was quick to reply to what it regarded as a shifting of the blame away from the real culprits. Thus, on 14 August, it pointed out:

Les responsables de la défaite accusent les ouvriers; les 40 heures; les congés payés; mais ils oublient de dire qu'ils ont laissé un demi-million d'hommes en chômage, au lieu de donner du travail; ils oublient de dire que dans les usines, ils faisaient fabriquer des modèles d'avions qu'ils faisaient démolir et recommencer; ils oublient de dire qu'ils obligeaient les ouvriers à rester onze et douze heures dans les usines pour les mater et non pour produire.

The second line of this stanza offers another possible 'cause' of the catastrophe: someone may have turned bread (which often had a cross scored on its surface) the wrong way up, thus making the angels weep. Paul Sébillot in *Le Folk-lore de France* (1906, vol. 2, p. 244) gives an example of such a superstitious belief when he cites how in Brittany, on the first day of the New Year, people would throw bread into springs to see the fate that awaited them: 'si le côté beurré se tournait en dessous, c'était le trépas'.

Sébillot also helps us understand line three. He tells us that:

Les paysans clouent assez souvent aux portes des écuries ou des granges les chats-huants qu'ils peuvent tuer, pensant qu'ils préservent les granges des maléfices' (ibid., vol. 3, p. 190).

Apollinaire alludes to the suffering imposed in this way on the owl in *Le Bestiaire*:

Mon pauvre coeur est un hibou
 Qu'on cloue, qu'on décloue, qu'on recloue,

and in the variant form:

Mon pauvre coeur est un hibou
 Que j'ai cloué à votre porte (1965, pp. 30 and

1038).

Aragon himself was to re-use the motif in 'Lancelot' in *Les Yeux d'Elsa* (1979b, p. 263). There he affirms his will to resist those who have taken over his country:

Et pareil à l'oiseau que l'on cloue à la porte
 Ce que vous affirmez regardez je le nie.

The fate meted out to the owl has done no good nor has the silencing of the voice of the toad. Its sin is recorded by Sébillot (1906, vol. 3, p. 256): 'ces batraciens ont continué à chanter le jour de la mort du Sauveur'.

STANZA 3

The superstition to be found in lines 1-2 is obviously typical of 'Plusieurs légendes [...] qui ont pour but d'entretenir le respect que l'on doit aux eaux destinées à être bues par les hommes' (Sébillot 1906, vol. 2, p. 192).

Behind these lines, however, may well be a reference to another 'pollution' that was at the centre of intellectual interest at the time 'Ombres' was being written: the 'corruptive' influence on the moral fibre and patriotic sense of French youth supposedly exercised by the writers of the inter-war period. Supporters of Vichy and other enemies of the Third Republic and the Popular Front were making this claim and accusing the writers concerned of bearing a responsibility for the defeat.

The debate that flared up over this charge in the summer of 1940, above all in the press of the unoccupied zone and in publications readily available there from Switzerland, was baptized by the critic André Rousseaux in *Le Figaro* of 8 September 1940 as 'la querelle des mauvais maîtres' (referred to by Sadoul (1967, p. 33) in connection with 'Richard II quarante'). This was an allusion to the attack made by Guy de Pourtalès in the *Journal de Genève* of 11-12 August 1940:

Certains écrivains, appelés par moi (et par bien d'autres) les mauvais maîtres, ont une responsabilité dans le terrible drame dont notre vaillante jeunesse et le vieux pays de France ont été les victimes.

Already on 9 July 1940 in *Le Temps* an unsigned article entitled 'La Jeunesse de France' had accused Gide:

[Il] a fait une fâcheuse école. Il a formé une génération orgueilleuse et déliquescence; il l'a élevée, sous prétexte de sincérité, dans la perversion du sens moral.

The campaign was broadened by Guy de Pourtalès on 28 July in the *Journal de Genève*:

Le mauvais maître a exercé une influence entre toutes redoutable. L'intelligence s'est ingéninée à tuer la conscience [...]. Parcourez les rayons de votre bibliothèque: pessimistes, défaitistes, immoralistes et corydons (beaucoup d'un talent incontestable) vous renseignent sur la profondeur du mal 'intellectualiste' [...]. On a fait taire sa raison pour mieux entendre la voix des enchanteurs. On a souri des surréalistes; on a couronné les bolchevistes; on a applaudi les futuristes, les unanimistes, les fustigistes. On a dit: *Après nous le déluge*. Mais le déluge est venu avant, et plus vite que nous l'attendions [...] on doit préparer la nation [à] punir les responsables. A limoger les incompetents. A vider les terrasses des cafés pour contraindre les fainéants au travail.

We know that Aragon was aware of this campaign because he recalled it in 1945 in 'Jacques Decour ou "Comme je vous en donne l'exemple"': 'Dans ces années-là, les traîtres qui régnaient à Vichy avaient pour habitude de parler des mauvais maîtres de la jeunesse française, et de rendre les professeurs comme les écrivains français responsables de notre défaite, de notre déchéance' (1979c, p. 395).

Furthermore, the defence of the so-called 'mauvais maîtres' was largely conducted in *Le Figaro* which published 'Les Lilas et les roses' on September 21. In that newspaper on 8 September, André Rousseaux refuted the charges of such as Pourtalès by exclaiming: 'C'est la faute à Voltaire ou la querelle des mauvais

maitres'. Here we find an irony as dismissive as Aragon's when in 'Ombres' he associates the arguments of Vichy with mere superstitions. It was an irony lost on the accusers who were to go on and extend the blame to the earlier 'corruptive' influence of Rimbaud and of... Racine. (The quotations of the material in French and a full discussion of the debate to which I am grateful are to be found in Babilas [1986a]).

The final two lines of stanza 3 of 'Ombres' are made clearer by reference once more to Sébillot (1906, vol 1, pp. 50-51). On the subject of shooting stars, he tells us of 'Les chaudes soirées d'été où il y a de véritables pluies d'étoiles' (emphasis added), and also that

D'après une croyance assez répandue, le souhait qu'on a eu le temps de préciser avant que l'étoile ait disparu, sera infailliblement exaucé.

That these should not be 'des souhaits sacrilèges' is especially important because the *étoiles filantes* are '[de] courtes et brillantes apparitions [...] destinées à ranimer la piété des chrétiens et à solliciter des prières qui peuvent abrégier le temps d'épreuve des défunts.'

Stanza 4

The next superstition offered as a cause of the disaster is one of the most familiar, but we may wonder whether Aragon in using the formulation 'échelles franchies' is not also referring to stages of social development attained and passed under the Popular Front that were perceived by Vichy as a curse (cf. the 'insubordination' complained of by General Duval) weighing on its

conception of the way productive forces ('nos vignes [...] nos troupeaux') were to be organized in the future (see also the remarks on stanza 8 below).

The final line of the stanza evokes a common theme of the period, developed primarily by the Catholic press which warmly welcomed the advent to power of Pétain. Thus Canon Thellier de Poncheville in *La Croix* of 27 June 1940 declared: 'L'heure est venue de racheter nos péchés dans nos larmes et dans notre sang' (Delperrié de Bayac 1975, p. 48). On 4 July Cardinal Gerlier opined of France:

Plus profondément encore que les coups de l'ennemi, elle a subi l'effet désolant de ses erreurs: l'oubli ou le mépris des vieilles traditions françaises de vie morale, de vertus familiales, d'éducation chrétienne de la jeunesse, ont affaibli la patrie. De douloureuses propagandes ont perverti des légions d'âmes..' (Delperrié de Bayac 1975, pp. 70-1).

Note in this stanza the *rime enjambée* of 'épaules - troupeaux/La'.

Stanza 5

The presentation of Vichy's explanations of the defeat in terms of absurd superstitions serves not only to ridicule them but also to attack the reactionary outlook of Pétain and his supporters.

In this stanza these men are compared to savages amazed to see 'birds' flying with the humiliated colours of France on the underside of their wings. The command of the air had played a cardinal rôle in the victory of the Nazis. How often the French soldiers had wondered where **their** planes were to be found (this

explains the bitter irony behind the words 'chose insensée' in line 2). It was Pétain and his ilk who had had the decisive influence on French military thinking in the inter-war years, and their lack of understanding of modern combat was such that in the most recent of the manuals on *L'Instruction sur l'emploi tactique des grandes unités*, only 4 pages out of 177 were devoted to aviation (Azéma 1970, pp. 70-1). And so Aragon is attacking the antediluvian military strategy of the men who had been unable to recognize the importance of air power. Now these dodos were in command of Vichy and seeking the most incredible of reasons for the defeat which the poet considered they had brought about.

The particular reference seems to be to the fact that the June armistice had imposed the complete demobilization of French air forces. This included the thousand or so planes which had succeeded in escaping to French North Africa. In September 1940 (the month the poem was written), eleven bomber groups had been called back to France. If the Blimps of Vichy could not understand what these strange birds in the air meant, everyone else knew that they were planes which should have been employed against German tanks while the fighting had been going on but which had been absent from the skies. Their appearance there now heralded the fact that they were to be handed over to Hitler who was certainly going to use them to ensure his dominance over France and to prosecute his war aims.

Stanza 6

When Aragon says that Nostradamus (16th century astrologer, famous for his predictions), Cagliostro (18th century Italian

adventurer, wonder healer, occultist) and Albertus Magnus (13th century 'Doctor Universalis') are the shadowy refuge of the Vichystes and their 'instrument for stupefying', he is exposing the way Pétain and his men fall back on soothsaying, 'mystical' powers and claims of universal knowledge to try and bamboozle people into accepting bogus and irrational explanations and projections. Again the linking with superstition (in the star-shaped splinters of fallen mirrors that have brought misfortune) takes away all credibility from their analyses.

In the associations of Nostradamus and Albertus Magnus, Aragon is doubtless trying to convey the presentation of the Marshal himself at the time. Delperrié de Bayac (1975, p. 112) reconstructs how (much to the disgust of Aragon on the evidence of this stanza of 'Ombres' in particular) Pétain was viewed by so many Frenchmen in the summer after the armistice (and later):

Il est le patriarche à cheveux blancs qui détient les secrets d'autrefois, les vérités éternelles du monde; il est l'homme solaire, le guide, le thaumaturge qui guérira la France'.

Robert Aron in his *Histoire de Vichy* (1954, pp. 162-3) presents a similar picture:

La France, brusquement, croit voir incarné en Pétain ce miracle que Paul Reynaud, désespéré, invoquait dans un de ses derniers discours: ne sait-on pas gré au Maréchal d'avoir mis fin à une guerre impopulaire? Son allure majestueuse, et aussi sa simplicité, impressionnent ceux qui le voient.

Miracle que d'aucuns attribueront, comme il se doit, à des causes surnaturelles [emphasis added] et que même certains prélats sanctionnent de leur autorité spirituelle: 'Pétain, c'est la France!' proclame le cardinal Gerlier [...].

Des femmes, quand [Pétain] traverse les villes et qu'il se mêle à la foule, tendent vers lui leurs bébés pour qu'il les touche et que l'enfant doive, à ce simple contact, à cette onction renouvelée de saint Louis, une protection surnaturelle pendant tout le cours de sa vie.

Delperrié de Bayac (1975, pp. 112-114) tells how Vichy took no chances on this initial fervour evaporating:

Très tôt, dès août 40, commence l'organisation du culte du Maréchal. La presse, le cinéma, l'édition, les ondes vont être utilisés [...]. Vers la fin de l'été les bustes de Marianne disparaissent l'un après l'autre des mairies: des bustes du Maréchal les remplacent [...]. Les brochures et albums de propagande sont très nombreux: 'Le Maréchal refait la France', 'Le Maréchal protège la famille', 'Le Travail du Maréchal'.

It is this perception and this cult of Pétain that Aragon is trying to explode here. The inclusion of the name of the charlatan Cagliostro helps him in his purpose, but we can see his assessment also of Nostradamus in *Les Communistes*:

[Au début de] l'an quarante [...] Les journaux sont pleins de prédictions. On a ressorti Nostradamus et Sainte Odile, et les célébrités de l'astrologie contemporaine

surenchérissent. La guerre finira cette année par l'éclatante victoire des Alliés (1966b, p. 137).

Writing in *En français dans le texte* of the circumstances of *Brocéliande*, Aragon uses words that could be applied to the first two lines of this stanza: 'les sorciers de Vichy [...] avaient donné à toutes les paroles une valeur incantatoire pervertie'. (1979c, p. 68.)

Stanza 7

In the first line, the poet evokes memorably the thin and sour blood (like the wine in bad years) of the men of Vichy, their lack of life, their negativity (aspects that he develops in the final stanza).

The second line alludes, as explained above by reference to Sadoul, to Pétain's speech of 25 June. It is possible that it adapts another formulation of the Marshal's words which was reported in *L'Humanité* on 27 July 1940 (and no doubt elsewhere): 'Le politicien MARQUET [Minister of the Interior in the first Vichy cabinet] a dit au micro que les Français ont vécu sur des mensonges' (emphasis added). Aragon's version conjures up unhealthy faces that express an inner malaise, anything but confidence-inspiring in the circumstances that confronted France.

The impression is reinforced when we learn that they seem to have 'lost the key to dreams', which indicates a bewilderment on their part.

The final line leads on to the next stanza in the way it shows their alarm at anything that is associated with the modern world of technology.

Consternation and bewilderment do seem to be the key impressions that emerge from the group photograph of this first Vichy cabinet (reproduced in *le petit Robert 2*): the dazed-looking Pétain; the notorious Laval, in his ill fitting clothes, appropriately directing his shifty eyes groundwards; the superannuated brasshats; Mireaux, the co-director of *Le Temps*; Ybarnegaray, the flotsam of 6 February 1934; Paul Baudouin, the director-general of the Banque d'Indochine; Adrien Marquet, mayor of Bordeaux and fascist colleague of Déat. Henri Michel (1966, p. 114) quotes the opinion of a witness of the time:

On ne comprendra jamais le régime de Vichy si l'on oublie qu'il fut dans son essence un gouvernement de ratés. Ratés, l'étonnante collection de fantoches, militaires battus, amiraux sans navires, avocats sans clients, parlementaires blackboulés, financiers malheureux, laissés pour compte de tous les concours.

Stanza 8

In his speech of 22 August 1940, Pétain developed a major theme of the broadcast of 25 June. There he had told Frenchmen: 'La terre, elle ne ment pas. Elle demeure votre recours.' Now he announced: 'La France redeviendra ce qu'elle n'aurait jamais dû cesser d'être, une nation essentiellement agricole'. This was the famous 'retour à la terre' which Vichy actively encouraged (with, as it turned out, little success) (Azéma 1970, p. 98).

Here, Aragon ridicules this aversion from the modern world and shows the Vichystes refusing ever again to consult even their watches, as if, in the midst of the industrial reality of the

twentieth century, they wanted to confine themselves to some timeless pastoral fantasy. Again he is attacking their reactionary stance and the absurdity of their ideas.

Pétain's plans for France were exactly what Hitler desired. René Château, a pro-nazi colleague of Déat's, explained in *L'Oeuvre* of 18 July 1940 how the new France would supply industrial Germany with agricultural products and be its fashion shop:

La France redeviendra paysanne, comme l'y dispose son sol et comme l'exigent les besoins de ses voisins; [...]. Par contre, elle n'aura plus, recevant en échange les produits lourds de l'étranger, à jouer coûteusement à la grande nation industrielle, ce à quoi d'ailleurs la disposait mal le caractère des Français, peu docile aux disciplines mécaniques (Delperrié de Bayac 1975, p. 65).

In November 1940, *L'Humanité* (no. 86) was to express in a rather less poetic way what Aragon is saying in this stanza:

Tout un tas d'imbéciles solennels parlent du retour à la terre comme d'une panacée, pour cacher le crime dont ils sont complices et qui consiste à préparer la désindustrialisation de la France [...]. Ils veulent faire travailler les paysans, les traiter comme des serfs et les payer avec de la monnaie de singe.

The failed policy of the past - the reliance on the Maginot line - is ridiculed in the final two lines of the stanza. Just as the French High Command (influenced strongly by Pétain) had thought it had made itself immune from the Teutonic plague ('la

grande peste', line 4) by relying on a defence strategy as outdated as the Great Wall of China (it disregarded the threat of air power), believing it could indulge in war games as unrealistic as flower regattas, so now the Marshal and his pitiful henchmen imagined they could isolate France from the 'virus' of the modern world. There is a deliberate incongruity in the elements of the metaphor here ('la muraille de Chine...la grande peste..leurs bateaux de fleurs') that successfully exposes the absurdity of Vichy's conceptions.

Stanza 9

The poet has now recourse himself to the language of astrology as he asks ironically what conjunction of the stars at their birth could explain the nakedness and the poverty of these men. Nakedness in the sense of defencelessness, their willingness to capitulate before the enemy, to lay France at Hitler's feet. In November 1940 *L'Humanité* (no. 86) was to make the point once more:

Vraiment, le gouvernement Pétain-Laval est de plus en plus une sorte de gouvernement de protectorat. Le discours du vieux Maréchal et son message témoignent de la servilité de ce gouvernement.

And the 'dénueement' (line 2) is the lack of moral strength to stand up for the future of the country. All they have to offer is a France on the model of the fairyland of Sleeping Beauty surrounded by a mocking world of petrol pumps. This is a devastating attack on the ludicrous attempts of the theorists of Vichy to escape from the industrial age they so feared to a safe

pastoral refuge, frozen in time. *L'Humanité* (no. 86), without the power of Aragon's images, made a similar assessment: '[Pétain] parle «d'ordre nouveau», mais il revient aux vieilleries les plus réactionnaires'.

In 'Ombres' one wonders whether behind the universally known tale of Charles Perrault there lurks another contemporary reference. Valéry's poem 'Au Bois dormant' (original title 'La Belle au bois dormant' (1957, p. 79) evokes perfectly the kind of fairy-tale escapism that Aragon is satirizing in this stanza of 'Ombres':

La princesse, dans un palais de rose pure,
Sous les murmures, sous la mobile ombre dort,
Et de corail ébauche une parole obscure
Quand les oiseaux perdus mordent ses bagues d'or.

Elle n'écoute ni les gouttes, dans leurs chutes,
Tinter d'un siècle vide au lointain le trésor,
Ni, sur la forêt vague, un vent fondu de flûtes
Déchirer la rumeur d'une phrase de cor.

Laisse, longue, l'écho rendormir la diane.

Here, in the guise of 'La princesse', Valéry presents a conception of 'pure poetry' undisturbed by contact with the outside world.

Aragon's attitude was at this time diametrically opposed to such a view. This is seen in 'Contre la poésie pure' (1979b, pp. 245-7), and, of course, *La Diane française* was to make poetry sound the bugle to supreme effect.

That Aragon was thinking of Valéry in such critical terms in the summer of 1940 can be shown by reference to *La Leçon de Ribérac*. There Aragon recalls his thoughts on happening on Stendhal's attack on the Abbé Delille (1738-1813) for writing poetry that was totally out of touch with the realities of his time:

Ces phrases me tombèrent sous les yeux à la fin de juin 1940 [emphasis added], et il était bien difficile alors de ne pas les traduire dans le langage de l'actualité [...]. Au vrai ce qui comptait dans ces mots de Stendhal, ce n'était guère ce que cela m'inclinait à penser, par exemple, de la poésie de M. Paul Valéry, dont l'idée me vint qu'on pouvait substituer son nom à celui de Delille [emphasis added]: mais bien que pour Stendhal les hommes qui ont vu certaines choses rompent nécessairement avec ceux qui ont si bien vécu sans les voir, et qu'ils ne peuvent se contenter d'un art qui ne tiendrait pas compte de ces choses-là (1979b, pp. 285-287).

In Aragon's mind, Valéry's name must have been unforgettably linked to that of Pétain. In 1931 the author of *La Jeune Parque* had welcomed the Marshal to the Academy with the most flattering of eulogies not long after the great soldier's exploits in the very Moroccan colonial war which had caused Aragon to join the PCF. In the summer of 1940, Valéry added his voice to the praise of the new *Chef de l'Etat*. In 1942 Valéry contributed to a homage to be presented (in 1944) by the city of Paris to Pétain. So

effusive were the poet's words that they were later cited by the Marshal's defence lawyers (Valéry, 1957, pp. 1795-6).

Perhaps it was this stanza of 'Ombres' that led Elsa Triolet to write in 1945 in *Le Premier accroc coûte deux cents francs*:

Rien ne peut se comparer à ces routes désertes du mois
d'août 1944, que les routes désertes après l'exode de juin
1940 [...]. L'atroce France de 1940, le pays de la Belle au
Bois dormant [sic], où chacun est resté pétrifié là où le
malheur le surprit, les trains immobiles, les autos dans les
garages (1973, p. 441).

Stanza 10

The inner negativity that characterizes the men of Vichy is treated with contempt here by Aragon. In the lesson of remorse, of atonement for 'sins' that have brought the wrath of God, constantly being preached by this régime there is a defeatism which the poet refuses. In *Le Musée Grévin*, he was to say of these men: 'Ils ont beau [...] / Nous imposer le pas de leur marche funèbre / [...] Enseigner d'être lâche et prêcher l'esclavage / [...] Ils ont peur ils ont peur' (1979c, pp. 193-194). Not so Aragon. The final two lines of the poem are elucidated by what the poet says at the end of *Arma virumque cano*: 'Je veux qu'un jour vienne où, regardant notre nuit, les gens y voient pourtant briller une flamme [...] Mon amour' (1979b, p. 195). This is the central value that no turn of fate can make him doubt. This is why he rejects those who 'd'un même blasphème nient et l'amour, et ce que j'aime' (ibid.).

Les Croisés

According to Aragon's own *Bibliographie* appended to *Le Crève-Coeur*, this poem was written in October 1940 at Carcassonne and first published in *Fontaine* (Alger) in December the same year. At the end of the poem in *Fontaine* itself, we find the words:

'Louis Aragon Septembre 1940'.

Variants

MS1 has a transposal line between stanzas 6 and 7 to show that their order is to be reversed. The new order is that found in *L'OEuvre Poétique* (1979b, p. 154).

MS1, stanza 6 (i.e. stanza 7 in *L'OEuvre Poétique* [1979b, p. 154]):

Si le prédicateur disait Jérusalem [This line scored out]
 Le clair obscur jetait sur sa robe un damier
 Et ses yeux s'éclairaient comme un vol de ramiers [This line scored out]
 L'écho blasphémateur répétait je vous aime
 Si le pr [These words scored out]
 Quand le prédicateur disait Jérusalem
 Et ses yeux s'éclairaient comme un vol de ramiers.

These changes thus produce the definitive version of stanza 7 as found in *L'OEuvre Poétique* (1979b, p. 154).

Stanza 9, line 1: MS1 has 'Plus tard quand la belle bannière', 'belle' is scored out and 'souveraine' written above it.

'Les Croisés' plays on the supposed preaching of a crusade by Peter the Hermit at Vézelay, a deliberate anachronism that Aragon

points out himself (1979c, pp. 55-58) in *De l'exactitude historique en poésie*, published in 1945:

Eh bien, je regrette d'avoir à le dire moi-même, mais à Vézelay, et en présence d'Eléonore d'Aquitaine, c'est saint Bernard, et non Pierre l'Ermite, qui prêcha la deuxième croisade, cinquante ans après que Pierre l'Ermite eut prêché la première.

He goes on to give us interesting reasons for this 'inexactitude historique':

Il faut être ignorant comme une carpe pour ne pas voir que l'auteur apparemment au courant de l'épisode auquel il se reporte (on vend à la porte de l'église abbatiale de Sainte-Madeleine, à Vézelay, des cartes postales montrant saint Bernard en pleine action), que l'auteur n'a substitué Pierre à Bernard que parce que l'*Ermite*, d'abord, rimaît avec la *reine maudite* du vers suivant, et que s'il eût pu [mettre], à ne tenir compte des pieds à écrire indifféremment, ici et dans la strophe suivante, Pierre pour Bernard ou Bernard pour Pierre... il en a été retenu par le fait que le *bernard l'hermite* ou l'*ermite* est un crustacé du genre pagure dont l'arrivée dans un poème sérieux eût probablement prêté à sourire.

We see here further evidence of how carefully Aragon chooses his words, but also of how considerations of rhyme may affect the development of the ideas and expression of his poems.

What follows shows us the poet's twin concerns of reaching the widest audience possible with his message and of delivering it in the form of 'contrebande':

Enfin, dans l'état actuel des connaissances historiques de nos contemporains, Pierre l'Ermite est le seul précheur de croisade universellement connu, et qu'ici je vous demande un peu ce que cela fait qu'il s'agisse de la première ou de la deuxième croisade? puisqu'il ne s'agit pas du tout des croisades, ni de Pierre, ni de Bernard, ni d'Eléonore, mais que tout le poème, écrit en 1940, au mois d'octobre, est évidemment mené pour la dernière strophe [...] qui se comprenait, et se comprend encore parfaitement, parce qu'elle répond non pas à l'exactitude historique des années 1096-99 ou 1147-49, suivant que l'on envisage la croisade de Pierre ou celle de Bernard, mais correspond parfaitement aux sentiments des hommes de l'automne 40.

Stanza 1

For Aragon to say that the poem is not about Eleanor of Aquitaine is not exactly true.

In *La Leçon de Ribérac* (published in June 1941 in *Fontaine* no. 14) he gives us a clue to what inspired him to exploit her name for his 'contrebande'. The essay recalls how on the day of the armistice he had found himself in this small town in the Dordogne, the birthplace of the mediaeval poet Arnaud Daniel. He had reflected on this troubadour and his times:

Ce qui faisait que je ne pouvais me détacher l'esprit de Maître Arnaud, c'était que, dans un temps où mon pays était

divisé, et par la langue et dans sa terre, où il y avait un roi de Paris, et un roi d'Angleterre qui tenait la moitié de la France [...] dans un temps où mon pays était encore épuisé par les folles saignées des Croisades [...] il se soit développé une poésie qui porta plus loin et plus haut que les étendards de ces princes la grandeur française [...]. J'étais saisi de cette idée, quand tout paraissait perdu, elle venait me rendre le courage et la confiance en nos destinées, et c'est de quoi je resterai à jamais reconnaissant à Maître Arnaud Daniel (1979b, p. 292).

And it was in the second half of that twelfth century that his country had thus *poetically* invaded Europe with courtly literature and courtly morality:

Née dans le règne de la violence, et en quelques années portée à une floraison sans égale, cette morale qui vient indiscutablement de Provence, grandit, on le sait, dans les cours désertées par les Croisés, autour d'Eléonore d'Aquitaine et de ses filles, Marie de Champagne et Alix de Blois. Elle est une réaction prodigieuse à la barbarie féodale (ibid., p. 296).

And so we can see the thought processes that led to the composition of 'Les Croisés' and how, through the name of Eleanor, Aragon is evoking the cultural grandeur of his country and a morality that is totally opposed to the 'nouvelle Barbarie' of the Nazis. In this light, it is no accident that he chooses to introduce Eleanor by the periphrasis : 'Reine des cours d'amour'. Again, *La Leçon de Ribérac* helps us:

La morale courtoise [...] envahit l'Europe avec cette énorme littérature nouvelle de la fin du douzième siècle, la poésie, la chanson de geste et le roman français. Cette morale de l'amour [emphasis added] est vraiment le prélude des idées qui feront plus tard de la France le flambeau du monde [...]. Elle porta à travers l'Europe une passion de la justice, le goût de la chevalerie, de la défense des faibles, l'exaltation des hautes pensées. Et avec elle le renom français (ibid. p. 298).

These are exactly the values that Aragon seeks to identify with the name of his country in opposition to the pitiless brutality of Nazism which despised them.

In this same essay, the poet refers to what he calls the 'livre capital' of Gustave Cohen on Chrétien de Troyes which he recommends to the wider public. If we look at Professor Cohen's text (1931, p. 13) we understand why Aragon does this and we can see the book's relevance to 'Les Croisés':

Multiples sont les trésors que pour nous [le moyen âge] accumula: [...] un patriotisme naissant qui, suivant la belle expression de Joseph Bédier, inventa la caresse de ces mots: *douce France, France la douce, terre majour* [terre des aïeux] [...] le culte de la femme, la scolastique de la passion.

As we have seen above, the poet tells us that 'Les Croisés' 'est mené pour la dernière strophe' where we find the lines:

Et blessés à mourir surent qu'Eléonore
C'était ton nom Liberté Liberté chérie.

The final words evoke *La Marseillaise*:

Amour sacré de la patrie
 Toi qui soutiens mon bras vengeur
 Liberté, liberté chérie
 Combats avec tes défenseurs.

Thus, 'Les Croisés' is about Eleanor to the extent that she is used by the poet to symbolize the values generated by his country and which differentiate his patriotism from that of the invading German armies of 1940. It is true, however, that at the end of the poem he reveals that in the love dedicated to Eleanor by the Crusaders he is really evoking the emotional commitment of Frenchmen to the freedom of their native land from foreign oppression and is calling on them to resist.

The way in which Aragon has constructed 'Les Croisés' means that it has to be read a second time for its full significance to be appreciated, for us to realize that the name of Eleanor is to be equated with liberty. This has the effect of impressing its message on the sympathetic reader while diverting the attention of the uninitiated censor who might be expected to see a poem ostensibly about the Middle Ages as proof of Gustave Cohen's view (1931, p. 12) that the current vogue the period enjoyed was above all due to 'un vague désir d'échapper à l'angoisse, aux incertitudes, aux difficultés de l'heure présente'. Aragon was using the Middle Ages for exactly the opposite purpose and thus fulfilling an injunction of Cohen's:

C'est simplement oeuvre de justice que d'arracher le moyen
 âge aux arcanes de la philologie et de la diplomatique, de

le rendre accessible à tous, au lieu d'en faire l'objet d'une science fermée et abstruse. Il faut le rendre intelligible et sensible, le décaper aussi de la rêverie ignorante qui en déforme la vraie figure, et *le faire entrer dans le plan de la littérature française* (1931, p. 13, italics in text).

Aragon was certainly a leader on this last front.

If we return to the text of the first stanza, we see that on the literal plane Eleanor (c. 1122-1204) was the 'Reine des cours d'amour'. She was the grand-daughter of the first troubadour, Guillaume IX d'Aquitaine. From him, says Gustave Cohen, 'elle tient, non pas des territoires nouveaux, mais des acquisitions spirituelles, le goût de la poésie, des poètes qui la créent' (1931, p. 19).

She brought these acquisitions to her first marriage (in 1137), with the man who was soon to become Louis VII of France, and to extend their influence to the court of her second husband, Henry II of England, after her divorce from the French king in 1152. It was above all, however, at her own court at Poitiers, to which she returned in 1168, that she presided at these 'cours d'amour'. According to Desmond Seward (1978, p. 111):

[They] were essentially a court game whose most obvious expression was the *tenso*, a two-part song. In this, one troubadour would sing a stanza about a problem that his love had encountered, whereupon another troubadour would sing a second stanza giving his opinion, after which the performance would be repeated. Usually, neither could decide

and they would then agree to submit to the judgment of some great lady.

The description 'princesse incertaine' (line 1) is appropriate to the historical Eleanor. She was suspected of adultery with her uncle, Raymond de Poitiers, at Antioch where she was with her husband, Louis VII, during the second Crusade. Some modern commentators, for example Régine Pernoud (1968 pp. 72-74), are circumspect in their assessment of the French queen's behaviour. Not so Marcel Pacaut (1964, p. 59):

Il ne sert à rien, là-dessus, d'être gêné par quelque fausse pudeur. Ce que maints documents laissent entendre à mots couverts est évident: le roi fut trompé et cela se sut.

Lines two and three refer, again on the literal level, to the Crusaders who perished in July 1148 at the siege of Damascus and who had, according to the poem, taken the Cross for the love of Eleanor.

Naturally, when we have read the final stanza and substitute 'Liberté' for 'Eléonore', the lines take on a different significance. We understand that freedom presides over love in Aragon's interpretation and that (as he knew only too well in October 1940) liberty is an uncertain princess. Similarly, the 'Beaux fils désespérés' (as will become clear from stanza eight onwards) are those whom the poet had himself tended as they lay dying the previous summer not in some distant desert, but in Flanders and in Anjou. They had taken up the Crusade not to liberate Edessa, the gateway to Jerusalem which had been captured by the Moslems in 1144, but to protect the holy places of France.

Here we see an interesting view of the recent campaign. Aragon and his party had opposed the war as being imperialist, but the poet and his comrades had fought bravely once the conflict had been unleashed against their country. The poet reveres the young men who had fallen dreaming of the liberty of France.

Stanza 2

The substitution process does not work here as Aragon evokes only Eleanor. He credits her with inventing the complicated rules of courtly love. These did involve stages of suffering ('crucifiements', line 2) for the troubadour in his devotion to an inaccessible noble lady. When Aragon talks of the 'coeur fou des sages' (line 1), he is perhaps recalling lines such as those of Guillaume IX in 'Mout jauzens me prenc en amar': 'par elle le plus sage peut sombrer dans la folie' [in the translation by Jean-Charles Huchet (1987, p. 114)]. A similar motif is used by Cercamon in 'Quant l'aura doussa s'amarzis':

Il me plaît qu'elle me rende fou et me fasse muser et bayer
aux corneilles; il me plaît qu'elle me fasse affront ou me
raïlle devant ou derrière car après le mal me viendra le
bien, et ce sera bientôt, si tel est son plaisir (translated
Huchet 1987, p. 168).

Perhaps Aragon was inspired by Arnaud Daniel himself in
'L'aura amara':

Doux visage, orné de toutes les qualités, il m'appartiendra
de souffrir pour vous maints affronts, car vous êtes le but
de toutes mes folies (translated Huchet 1987, p. 186).

The 'sages' of Aragon's poem are those versed in the art of the *fin' amors*.

Of Eleanor, Gustave Cohen says (1931, p. 19) that she possessed 'une libre fantaisie et une indépendance de caractère, qui ne craint même pas les foudres toujours brandies de l'Eglise', and he tells us that while she reigned at the court of Louis VII:

Elle, la fille du Midi, passionnée aussi, mais légère et sensuelle, habituée à la vie facile du Sud, trouve trop grave cette cour du Nord, où règne les prêtres. Elle encourage le roi à résister à l'Eglise, au sage et intelligent conseiller Suger, le moine-artiste de Saint-Denis et à saint Bernard.

In line three of this stanza of 'Les Croisés' we are told that Eleanor was excommunicated. Both of her husbands were but she herself does not appear to have been. Perhaps this inexactitude is to emphasize Eleanor's identification with courtly love, disapproved of by the Church, but which Aragon claims in this poem was the true inspiration of the Crusaders.

The 'excommunication' would seem historically to be the divorce from Louis VII in 1152. Gustave Cohen (1931, p. 21) relates:

Le 21 mars, au château de Beaugency-sur-Loire, l'archevêque de Sens mande les deux époux; les parents du Roi affirment sous serment, ou plutôt sous faux serment, *artificieuse juramento*, la 'consanguinité', qui est la forme religieuse ou le prétexte du divorce dans l'Eglise. Le lien du mariage

est dissous, la nullité du sacrement prononcée. Aliénor libre regagne son Aquitaine libérée.

This last sentence, along with the fact that in Poitiers a mere eight weeks later she married the Duke of Normandy (soon to become Henry II of England) make it improbable that Eleanor was 'Livide au milieu de la fuite des pages' (line 4). It is almost certain that she had already been secretly negotiating with Henry before the divorce.

The troubadours were immensely proud of the skill of their composition. Guillaume IX, Eleanor's grandfather, writes for example in 'Pus vezem de novelh florir':

Je vous dis, au sujet de ce 'vers', que celui qui l'entend bien et y prend plus de plaisir vaut davantage car tous les couplets sont réglés sur la même mesure et la mélodie, il est normal que je m'en vante, est bonne et belle;

and again in 'Ben vuelh que sapchon li pluzor':

Je suis dans ce métier si savant, et je m'en vante, que je suis capable grâce à lui de gagner mon pain sur tous les marchés (translated Huchet 1987, p. 102).

Aragon perhaps evokes this tradition by the *rime enjambée* he creates here between 'cérémonial' and 'excommunia / L(ivide)', which of course emphasizes the link between Eleanor's key rôle in forming the rules of courtly love and her unhappy 'excommunication'.

Stanza 3

Here the poet builds on the first stanza. The Crusaders whom he had pictured dreaming of Eleanor as they lay dying in the desert

are now described as 'ses adorateurs', underlining that their motive for taking the Cross had been the love of this queen. Again, the fact that her admirers were not merely 'barons' but 'troubadours' and 'Chevaliers' stresses the courtly nature of their devotion.

As they lay dying, they remembered how they had followed 'Pierre l'Ermite'. In his decision to commit this inexactitude, Aragon may have been encouraged by two remarks of Gustave Cohen's that he had read (1931, pp. 42 and 64): 'le moyen âge n'ayant, à aucun degré, le sens historique' and 'avec sa mentalité un peu enfantine de chroniqueur, n'admet que le témoignage de celui qui a vu, il le croit sur parole et ne songera pas à contrôler à cet égard son affirmation.' The poet certainly hoped that the censor was of a similar disposition.

In the third line Aragon talks of Eleanor as 'la reine maudite'. The historical reference here seems to be a legend about Guillaume IX which she herself apparently told to Henry II. Desmond Seward (1978, p. 17) relates:

A holy hermit came to see [Guillaume IX], protesting in God's name at the rape of Dangerousa [of Châtellerauld]. He was received with the duke's usual mocking banter. The hermit thereupon laid a curse on [Guillaume]; neither he nor his descendants, whether through the male or the female line, would ever know happiness in their children.

The curse was fulfilled in the rebellions, fostered by Eleanor, of her sons against her husband Henry II. The word

'maudite' is associated here with the supposed excommunication mentioned in the previous stanza.

The 'Chevaliers perdus de la reine maudite' (line 3) take on another meaning, of course, when we have realized that once again Aragon is referring to the French 'knights' who had recently fought unsuccessfully for the ill-starred liberty of their country.

The final line evokes an exotic picture of Eleanor, again not described by the modern biographers.

Stanza 4

Here Aragon recalls the emotion at the preaching of the Crusade at Vézelay. In *De l'exactitude historique en poésie*, the poet cites 1147-49 as the dates of the second Crusade, but the actual ceremony at which Saint Bernard made his appeal took place on 31 march 1146. It was then that Louis VII and Eleanor took the Cross. It is factually true that many knights joined the venture because of the queen. The evidence is reported by Régine Pernoud (1968, p. 50):

That Eleanor had played a really active part in preparing the expedition, there can be no doubt. A study of the old title-deeds of the area shows that a remarkably high proportion of these Crusaders came from Poitou. This is very probably due to the fact that she had made a personal tour of her private estates. Her own example must have been highly persuasive. Everywhere she garnered financial support and rallied men to her side. A great many Gascon and Poitevin knights took the Cross.

The final line of the stanza seems to refer to the chains that 'Pierre' saw as weighing on the Holy Lands unless freed by the Crusaders from the threat of the Infidel. Again, in a re-reading, the call for a different liberation can be heard.

Those sympathetic to the ideas of Aragon cannot have read the repeated invocation of Vézelay (a technique which gives an impression of the oration) without thinking of Romain Rolland (a member of the French Communist Party since 1927) who famously resided in that very place. His values represented the noblest expression of French culture, quite at odds with the barbarism of this war, visited on his native land by the Hitlerites. In April 1939, Romain Rolland had published a protest at the occupation of Prague by Hitler's troops:

Allemagne [...] tu as envahi et asservi une fière nation qui n'était point de ton sang, et qu'il n'est au pouvoir de personne de réduire moralement: car elle a résisté à des siècles de domination étrangère, et elle en est sortie indomptée, indomptable, objet d'admiration et d'amour pour le monde entier (in Aragon 1979b, p. 67).

These words could now be applied to France and might be seen as the sermon from Vézelay to which Aragon is really alluding. Romain Rolland's statement was published in *Europe*, a review he had himself founded. Aragon was on its editorial board when the letter appeared there.

Stanza 5

The 'frisson' experienced by the knights when they heard the appeal of the holy man had nothing to do with orthodox religion.

Their true commitment was to the love of an earthly goddess. The repetition here of 'amoureux' corresponds to that of 'Vézelay' in stanza four and evokes the way the expected pious response to the rhetoric of the preacher was translated by the devotees of Eleanor into a quite different sphere.

The 'lèvres diaphanes' (line 2) would seem more appropriate to the figure of Eleanor than to 'Pierre' and this ambiguity in the presentation of the orator will be developed in stanza seven as will the sense of the 'jeu terriblement profane' (line 3).

Stanza 6

In MS1 a transposal line has been added to show the poet's decision to change round the original order of stanzas six and seven. And so the present stanza six was formerly stanza seven and vice-versa. Knowing this may help us with the interpretation of line three in what is now stanza six.

In the minds of the knights who adored Eleanor there was an association between her name and what the orator proclaimed as holy. We are told in the next (originally preceding) stanza

L'écho blasphémateur répétait je vous aime

Quand le prédicateur disait Jérusalem.

Similarly, in this stanza, 'La Terre Sainte', these 'purest of words', called forth a shower of kisses that were directed towards the queen by those who worshipped her and not the religious ideal that aroused the fanatical response of the others present. Thus we have the poet insisting on the alternative cult of love that inspired Eleanor's admirers.

The final line of the stanza presumably refers to Eleanor although syntactically this is not at all clear. The 'presence' of an absence inevitably makes the reader think of Mallarmé (who is quoted in *La Rime en 1940*). But, as Jean-Charles Huchet shows, Mallarmé had a precursor in the evocation of 'l'absente de tout bouquet': the troubadour Jaufré Rudel (who was reputed to have gone on this very Crusade). His *amor de lonh* is exemplified in 'No sap chantar qui so non di': 'j'aime ce qui jamais ne me verra car mon coeur n'a joie d'aucun amour sinon de celui que jamais je ne vis' (translated Huchet 1987, pp. 139-141).

Stanza 7

Essentially the same point is being made here as in the previous stanza: that it was the love of Eleanor and not religious love that moved these knights to take the Cross. The full sense of 'un jeu terriblement profane' (stanza 5) is made clear by the lines: 'L'écho blasphémateur répétait je vous aime / Quand le prédicateur disait Jérusalem'. In *La Leçon de Ribérac*, Aragon, taking issue with Montherlant who had criticized *la morale courtoise*, says:

Je ne suis pas très sûr que Montherlant, s'en prenant à la morale courtoise, [...] n'ait pas en réalité visé (il en est fort capable) toute la morale chrétienne. Je ne permettrai de lui signaler qu'il existe entre la morale chrétienne et la morale courtoise des divergences très singulières, où son goût du paganisme trouverait aliment (1979b, p. 297, emphasis added).

As in stanza five, it is almost as if Eleanor were present in some of the description done of the orator. Thus, in line one, is it on a robe (of the cleric) or on a dress (of the queen) that the half light casts a chequered pattern? Similarly, in line four, is the image of eyes lighting up like a flight of doves not appropriate to the woman in the context of the love being expressed to her by her admirers? When we look at the manuscript version, we see that this ambiguity seems to be deliberate on the part of Aragon. Originally this stanza read:

Si le prédicateur disait Jérusalem
 Le clair-obscur jetait sur sa robe un damier
 Et ses yeux s'éclairaient comme un vol de ramiers
 L'écho blasphémateur répétait je vous aime.

In this form, the syntax makes clear that the robe and the eyes belong to the preacher. But the poet has scored out the first and third lines of that version and substituted the present order of lines which creates the uncertainty in the reader's perception as to whom to attribute 'sa robe' and 'ses yeux'. This might be compared to the photographic technique of double exposure, underlining the message that behind the apparent religious inspiration exercised by the monk there is the real motivation of the love for Eleanor.

Stanza 8

Gustave Cohen (1931, p. 20) makes an interesting point about the knights who participated in the second Crusade:

Il n'est pas sûr que, dans les classes supérieures, la foi
 soit aussi neuve et vibrante et que le sentiment de

l'honneur et le goût de la gloire n'aient pas eu part dans
la grande aventure que constitue pour elles la Croisade
 [italics in text].

Aragon takes up the word 'aventure' (line 1) but changes the
 qualifier to 'démence'. It becomes clear after we have read the
 end of the poem that he is talking not only about the Crusade but
 about what he calls in this stanza 'une autre défaite', that of
 May-June 1940. The defeat in July 1148 at Damascus was due to a
 large extent to the incompetence of the leadership of the
 Christian forces and to rivalries within it. This was no less the
 case in the recent campaign in France. That Aragon should feel
 that it too had been conducted like a 'mad adventure' is not
 surprising given his own experience in it. But, as we have seen
 above, on 25 August 1939 Gabriel Péri had warned the Chamber of
 Deputies that without a consistent policy of anti-fascist defence
 'la guerre pouvait facilement «prendre le caractère d'une
 aventure équivoque qui risquait d'aboutir à la défaite»' (Willard
 1969, p. 34). This prediction had been fulfilled and it is
 understandable that Aragon does not want to speak of the
 disastrous events in Syria as they evoke the pain of the defeat
 by the modern Infidels, a defeat which cannot be simply expunged
 in the way a word is from printer's proofs by a *dele* sign.

Stanza 9

Aragon himself makes use of the rhetorical device of repetition
 as he moves towards the conclusion of the poem: the 'Plus tard'
 of the previous stanza gives its impetus to the present one also.

The allusion in lines one and two is historically to the departure of Eleanor from France for England to be Henry II's queen (1154). She was of course not 'bannie', and this is a deliberate inaccuracy on the part of the poet. He is really referring to the banning of liberty from France with the beginning of the Nazi occupation.

Stanza 10

Aragon supports the impetus of the repetition of 'Plus tard' with an *enjambement* between stanzas 9 and 10 as he heads towards the climax of the final stanza. The substitution of the emotion of love for religious fervour in the hearts of Eleanor's admirers is brought out in 'les mots passionnés de leurs litanies' (of stanza 9). And these words of passion evoked in the chevaliers the memory of the way they had replaced 'Jérusalem' with the 'rime inverse' of 'je vous aime'. It seems quite likely that the poet was influenced in this interplay of religion and courtly love by an expression of Gustave Cohen's which Aragon quotes in *La Leçon de Ribérac*:

'C'est sous l'adoubement du chevalier français et le blier en drap d'Arras ou de Reims que ces héros et héroïnes des lettres, Arthur et Gauvain, Iseut et Guenièvre, feront la conquête du monde et la croisade des cœurs' (1979b, p. 298, emphasis added).

That it was on the robe of the cleric that the half-light had cast a chequered pattern (cf. stanza 7) is finally made completely clear when the poet now talks of the 'prêcheur noir et blanc' (line 2).

But this is no longer merely 'Pierre l'Ermite'. In *De l'exactitude historique en poésie* Aragon, commenting on this poem, alludes to the real situation behind the mockery directed towards the preacher by these lovers of Eleanor. He speaks of

[les] hommes de l'automne de 1940, qui n'étaient pas nourris de la main du maréchal Pétain et qui étaient des carpes, sourds aux propos de ce vieillard (1979c, p. 58, emphasis added).

Pétain, as we have seen, very much adopted a preaching tone in his speeches to the nation at and after the armistice. The 'crusade' that he appealed for was that of the so-called 'Révolution nationale' which was not calculated to attract those who shared Aragon's views.

In telling us that 'La croix a pris pour eux un sens inavoué', the poet is of course asking his readers to see a hidden meaning in his interpretation of the Cross and the Crusaders. In this context it is important to remember that the stanza of *La Marseillaise* evoked by Aragon at the end of this poem has as its opening line

Amour sacré de la Patrie.

The application of religious vocabulary to secular contexts is, as we have seen in connection with 'Santa Espina, discussed by Aragon (1968, p. 82) in his conversations with Dominique Arban. There he talks of 'une revendication globale du langage de la divinité et de la religion, mais [...] pour en faire cadeau à d'autres'.

The claim to the wider use of religious language is expressed in this stanza by the line: 'Sans crime on peut nommer Sang-du-Christ les girolles'. The latter are chanterelles.

Stanza 11

Here the *crescendo* of 'Plus tard...Plus tard' is completed by 'enfin'. This brings us to what Aragon tells us is the key point of the whole poem. The realization of the true meaning of Eleanor's name came to these men 'dans quelque Syrie'. Thus not in Syria itself but in the desert of defeat in the aridity of 1940 France. In 'Plus belle que les larmes' in 1942 Aragon was to evoke a combat that did take place in Syria - that of the Free French soldiers who, in the summer of 1941, attempted (unsuccessfully) to wrest that land from the control of Vichy:

Pour toi se crèveront secrète Normandie
Les soldats en exil aux ruines de Palmyre (1979b,
p.253).

The final stanza of 'Richard Coeur-de-Lion' (published in *Les Yeux d'Elsa* in 1942) appropriately uses this most famous son of Eleanor to carry a message similar to the one at the end of 'Les Croisés':

Tous les Français ressemblent à Blondel
Quel que soit le nom que nous l'appelions
La liberté comme un bruissement d'ailes
Répond au chant de Richard Coeur-de-Lion (1979b,
page 240).

In *La Conjonction Et*, published in 1942, Aragon dared to allude in prose to those whom he was really evoking in the last stanza of 'Les Croisés'. He speaks of the new French heroes and says:

Déjà les Français ont répondu [...] par des hommes vivants et des hommes qui moururent, à la grande interrogation angoissée que tournait le monde vers la France au lendemain de Juin 40. Et ces hommes-là sont les garants de ce génie [français], dont on parle, et de sa perdurance, et de son incessante transformation [...]. Ce sont les Lancelots du temps qui court, et qui portent en eux ce feu qui vient du fond du temps, cet esprit renouvelé de la chevalerie française [emphasis added]. On les étonnerait bien, le leur disant. Car ils ont cette simplicité sans laquelle il n'y a pas de héros de France [...]. Ils ont l'ambition d'abord que vive la France, et c'est souvent tout ce qu'ils trouvent à dire au dernier moment de leur propre vie (1979c, p. 50).

The quotation in 'Les Croisés' from *La Marseillaise* shows that the poet is not merely honouring those who have recently died attempting to defend the freedom of France. He is appealing for a continued resistance to the foreign invader. The invocation is not of Damascus in 1148 but rather of the spirit of Valmy in 1792. In 'Marche française' in *La Diane française*, he was later able to speak of those who had meanwhile responded to such a call:

Croisés non pour une aventure

Une lointaine sépulture

Mais pour le pays envahi

Contre l'envahisseur haï

Chassons chassons nos nouveaux maîtres

Les pillards les tueurs les traîtres (1979c, p. 358).

Again, in the context of the allusion to the national anthem of his country and in his renewal of the *clús trover*, can one not hear at the end of 'Les Croisés' in the 'vocables sonores' of 'Eléonore' the echo of... 'tricolore'?

The circumstances of the time were very bitter for Aragon. The 14 July 1940 was declared a day of mourning, in the 'Etat français' of Pétain the new motto of *Travail, famille, patrie* ousted *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Of *La Marseillaise* itself, Ian Higgins (1982, p. 31) tells us:

[It] was forbidden in the occupied zone. In the southern zone, without being exactly forbidden, it was replaced by *Maréchal, nous voilà*, and it could be inadvisable to sing it. Quoting from it, as many poets did, was doubly subversive, anti-Vichy and anti-German.

As we have seen, Aragon was in the vanguard of such subversion.

The poet recounts in *Pour expliquer ce que j'étais* (written probably in 1943) how, at the time of the colonial war in Morocco of 1925-26, a communist intellectual had tried to persuade him that 'le communisme et le patriotisme étaient compatibles, ce qui me faisait rire avec insolence' (1989b, p. 68).

In the meantime he had come to realize his mistake. He had confused patriotism with the social and political group who had monopolized it:

Le Tout ce qui est national est nôtre des maurrassiens est un des premiers exemples de perversion totale des mots, dans un sens où par la suite le national-socialisme devait faire merveille. Il a fallu arriver en 1940 pour que le mensonge maurrassien devienne à tous les yeux éclatant, qu'apparaisse de façon incontestable derrière les mots Patrie, France, Nation, cette trahison profonde qui explique rétrospectivement quarante années d'excitations au meurtre, de falsifications des textes, de confusion entretenue (1989b, p. 63).

At a time when the 'Révolution nationale' of Pétain was attempting to perpetuate the 'maurrassien' perversion, 'Les Croisés' shows that Aragon was reclaiming the republican patriotism of *La Marseillaise*.

Elsa je t'aime

Written in October 1940 in Carcassonne, the poem was first published in *Fontaine* (Alger), No. II, 13 (fév-mars) 1941.

Variants

Stanza 2, line 2: MS1 and *Fontaine* (Alger), II, 13 (fév-mars) 1941 have 'Cet été fut trop beau comme un été des livres'.

Stanza 8, line 2: *Fontaine* (Alger), II, 13 (fév-mars) 1941 has 'Quand je te l'ai donné comme un trèfle flétri'.

Stanza 9: MS1 and *Fontaine* (Alger), II, 13 (fév-mars) 1941 have:

Au biseau des baisers
Les ans passent trop vite
Evite évite évite
Les souvenirs brisés.

Stanza 1

The refrain is fully explained only at the end of the poem. The metaphor of its first line associates the oblique edge of a bevelling tool with the shape of lips which by their kisses 'chisel away' at the years, making them pass too quickly. The alliteration of 'biseau' and 'baisers' supports this sensation of ever-repeated contact which is both positive (in the expression of love) and negative (in that every kiss diminishes the time left for love). The effect of 'vite' is then accentuated by the repetition of 'Evite évite évite' (line 3) which brings the poet unwillingly to the sadness of shattered memories.

There is a complexity in these lines that springs from the contrast between the forward movement of time (which has led to

the unhappy present) and the backward gaze at the memories (which have now lost the joy they presumably derived from kisses shared).

Some of the content of this refrain is also contained in 'Cantique à Elsa' which was written likewise at Carcassonne, two months later:

O mon enfant le temps n'est pas à notre taille
 Que mille et une nuits sont peu pour des amants
 Treize ans c'est comme un jour et c'est un feu de paille
 Qui brûle à nos pieds maille à maille

Le magique tapis de notre isolement (1979b, pp. 267-268).

Stanza 2

The six-syllable lines of the refrain which supplies the 'message' of the poem now give way to alexandrines which allow the poet to 'explain' the situation in more detail.

He recalls the storybook beauty of the past summer and here we remember the lines of 'Zone libre':

J'ai bu l'été comme un vin doux
 J'ai rêvé pendant ce mois d'août.

All the conditions seemed right for them to enjoy life together and so it might seem rather puzzling that he should say that he had been mad to think that he could make Elsa happy by taking her to the forest of the Grande Chartreuse (which is the mountainous area between Chambéry and Grenoble) or by sharing with her the charm of an evening in the port of Toulon on the Mediterranean.

There is a clue to this puzzle in the final line of the stanza which compares the brevity of that lovely evening to the happiness which finds it difficult to survive the shadow cast on it. Now we begin to appreciate why he says 'Cet été fut trop beau comme un été de livres': 'trop beau pour être vrai'. Just as the shadow of his country's unhappiness had fallen upon the joy of his love at the end of 'Zone libre' so it does here. In 1941 he was to write 'Plainte pour le quatrième centenaire d'un amour' (1979b, pp. 227-30), which evokes the love story of the sixteenth century poets Louise Labé and Olivier de Magny, and there we find a cognate image which is more explicit than the one in 'Elsa je t'aime':

C'est toujours l'ombre et toujours la mal'heure
 Sur les chemins déserts où nous passons
 France et l'Amour les mêmes larmes pleurent
 Rien ne finit jamais par des chansons.

The poignancy of the final two lines of this stanza of 'Elsa je t'aime' is enhanced by the *rime Aragon* of 'Toulon-Bref' and 'l'ombre'. There is a slight lingering on 'Toulon' which is brought to an end with the stress on 'Bref'. The rhyme adds to the effect of the alliteration of the last line.

No biographical source makes any mention of their visiting La Grande Chartreuse or Toulon in the summer of 1940. The nearest indication of their being in the area is given in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, pp. 458-459) where, in a context that immediately afterwards deals with their arrival in Nice at the end of 1940, Aragon says to Elsa:

Tu m'as conduit dans la garrigue à l'heure où l'air n'est
que cigales

Les troupeaux anciens n'ont laissé qu'un peu d'une terre
frugale

Et ce parfum de la lavande on dirait foulé de leurs pieds.

He then goes on to make clear that this obviously summer landscape was 'entre Carpentras et Venasque', that is to say not far from Villeneuve-lès-Avignon where, according to Daix (1975, p. 314), they visited Seghers in September 1940.

Stanza 3

The content of each stanza weighs on the meaning of the refrain that follows it. So here, the unexplained unhappiness amid the radiance of summer and nature, the transience of the beautiful evening in Toulon, both now sharpen the message of lovers' sadness and regret when they become aware of the too rapid passage of time and its destructive effect on memories that had been happy.

Stanza 4

The first two lines of this stanza recall the autumnal image of 'Vingt ans après' which he had used to celebrate Elsa's beauty the previous October:

Il n'en est qu'une la plus belle la plus douce

Elle seule surnage ainsi qu'octobre rousse.

Within the sadness of the separation from her was the fervent belief in their being reunited, as he says in 'Petite suite sans fil II':

Nous parlerons d'amour tant que le jour se lève
 Et le printemps revienne et chantent les moineaux
 Je parlerai d'amour dans un lit plein de rêves
 Où nous serons tous deux comme l'or d'un anneau.

The belief that the yellowing leaves of autumn did not signify a final departure is emphasized in the contrast in the sense of the rhyme-words, 'jaunirent' and 'revenir', which is all the more striking as the rhyme breaks the traditional rules (but not those of Apollinaire).

Behind the conviction that he would return was the impulse of fear also, as Daix relates (1975, p. 334):

Elsa avait dit à Aragon, durant la drôle de guerre, qu'elle ne l'attendrait pas s'il venait à se laisser faire prisonnier. Ce qui témoignait d'une sûre intuition du danger certes, mais, plus encore, d'une capacité de formuler l'incitation la mieux capable d'aider son mari, d'exacerber sa vigilance, bref d'accroître ses chances de ne pas se laisser prendre.

Thus we can believe the poet here when he says he sang the previous autumn, 'Celui qui dit adieu croit pourtant revenir'.

In the poems of the period of of the Phoney War, there is hope (personal as well Marxist) of renewal in the death of an epoch, hope of 'un monde merveilleux', and the poet was to reassert his faith in the future, for example in 'Elsa valse' in February 1942:

*L'enfer est sur la terre et le ciel y cherra
 Mais voici qu'à l'horreur il succède une aurore
 Et que cède à l'amour la mort* (1979b,
 page 282).

But in 'Elsa je t'aime' the line 'Il semble à ce qui meurt qu'un monde recommence' is completely negated by the second half of the rhyming couplet which expresses despair: 'Il ne reste plus rien des mots de la romance'.

The final two lines of the stanza are an appeal (vain, it seems) for her to respond to his continued passion for her. A similar situation appears to be evoked in 'Cantique à Elsa' (written, as we have seen, in Carcassonne in December 1940):

*Je te touche et je vois ton corps et tu respires
 Ce ne sont plus les jours du vivre séparés
 C'est toi tu vas tu viens et je suis ton empire
 Pour le meilleur et le pire
 Et jamais tu ne fus si lointaine à mon gré [...]
 Si je soupire à ton oreille*

Comme des mots d'adieu tu ne les entends plus (1979b, p. 267).

Discussing the circumstances of 'Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux' (1979c, p. 316), a poem which Aragon maintained was his response at the beginning of 1943 to Elsa's decision to leave him so that she could pursue resistance activities of her own, Daix (1975, p. 334) suspects 'l'existence d'une crise plus intime entre les deux romanciers, crise dont la version politique ne serait que la partie émergée.'

One wonders whether in 'Elsa je t'aime' there is also an element of such a crisis in Elsa's lack of response to his appeal here. Certainly in 'Cantique à Elsa' (1979b, p. 268) there is evidence that this emotional silence on her part had been a recurrent characteristic of their relationship since the beginning and that it had inspired fear and imagined perils in the mind of the poet:

Mon ciel mon désespoir ma femme
 Treize ans j'aurai guetté ton silence chantant [...]
 J'aurai tremblé treize ans sur le seuil des chimères
 Treize ans d'une peur douce-amère
 Et treize ans conjuré des périls inventés.

Stanza 6

In each of the long stanzas so far, the final line of the refrain with its 'souvenirs brisés' has been reflected in the recall of memories of the past year (the recent summer, the previous autumn), and each time they have been marred by a sadness ('Bref comme est le bonheur qui survit mal à l'ombre'; 'Il ne reste plus rien des mots de la romance'). Now the warmth of the summer sun has given way to the pale light of October and this pallor evokes another memory made sad by passing time, by the changes it has wrought. The wan sun recalls the pallor of the pianist who had sung in a bar in the days when they had lived in Montparnasse.

Montparnasse where they had met in November 1928 and where they had lived till 1935, first at the rue du Château in the company of Georges Sadoul, André Thirion and others, and then from the spring of 1929 at 5, rue Campagne-Première, in the

studio that Aragon had rented some time previously but left unoccupied, the home only of his furniture, his pictures and his books.

In *Il n m'est Paris que d'Elsa* (1981b, pp. 12-13) the poet gives us some more information about the period and this helps us understand the meaning in their lives of that time that has now gone forever.:

Je me souviens de Montparnasse aux premiers jours et de
l'automne

Tu demandes un café-crème et de nous voir les gens
s'étonnent

moins que nous-mêmes d'être ensemble avec l'avenir
devant nous [...]

Lorsque tu descendais de l'Hôtel Istria

Tout était différent Rue Campagne-Première

En mil neuf cent vingt-neuf vers l'heure de midi

Rien ne rappelle aujourd'hui ce pays bizarre

Où tu m'as pris au tournant de ma tragédie

Assis sur mon propre cercueil nouveau Lazare

Ayant oublié mon âme en des lieux maudits

Rien plus ne rappelle aujourd'hui ce grand bazar

D'Europe et d'Amérique entre rêve et hasard

Où les clients faisaient longuement le lézard

He recalls what seems to be the same piano player as in 'Elsa
je t'aime':

Le *College Inn* et son pianiste long et blême

Qui ne chantait jamais que les trois mots *Je t'aime*

We may be fairly sure that the rhyme required for 'blême' explains that the pianist sang 'Je t'aime' rather than 'Chérie' as in our 1940 poem. A similar motif is used in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 338) to evoke times he spent with Nancy Cunard:

La négresse irlandaise a soudain pour moi des airs de Manet
[...]

Elle ne se sert que des mots qu'on connaît *You'll miss me Honey*
Un de ces jours *Some of these days*.

In this stanza of 'Elsa je t'aime' the sun now, in contrast to its brightness in the recent 'été de livres', has taken on the pallor of that pianist of their past. There is a lack of colour in their lives (cf. in 'Richard II Quarante': 'Que le soleil meure ou renaisse / Le ciel a perdu ses couleurs') that corresponds to this change in the light. It is as if their reality has taken on the texture of a faded photograph represented by the memory of the pale musician whose constant repetition of the word 'Chérie' now seems to belong to a lost era, a chord from the days when they lived the unthreatened life of lovers in Montparnasse. The 'Il t'en souvient' of line three fatally recalls to our mind the 'souvenirs brisés' of the refrain and may be an echo of the plaintive 'Faut-il qu'il m'en souviennne' of 'Le Pont Mirabeau' (Apollinaire 1965, p.45). They become fully aware of how quickly time has passed (cf. in 'Cantique à Elsa': 'La vie aura passé comme un air entêtant' [1979b, p. 268]). The final line of the stanza evokes perhaps Baudelaire's 'Chant d'automne' (1961, p. 62): 'C'était hier l'été; voici l'automne!'. The cold that is returning and the

evening that has come upon them seem more than literal, as are the seasons in Baudelaire's poem. The emotions of Aragon and Elsa are behind the times, lingering in a past they know is now over. Their hearts have not caught up with their minds ('Le coeur retarde').

Stanza 8

He recalls here how the quatrain of the refrain which pleased Elsa for its sad music when he gave it to her had been lying uselessly like a sprig of flowering clover in the depths of his memory. The reading 'fleuri' is found in the manuscript of the poem and in the first edition of *Le Crève-cœur*, but in the original publication of the poem in *Fontaine*, the reading is 'flétri'. This version would seem to go better with the adverb 'stérilement'. Another argument in its favour is the *rime enjambée* thus formed by 'triste' and 'flétri-St(érilement)' rather than 'fleuri-St(érilement)'.

Perhaps adapting Baudelaire's 'Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré [...] / De vers [...] de romances [...] / Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau' (1961, p. 79), Aragon compares his memory to a cupboard in which the quatrain had been stored and forgotten (literally it is the cupboard which is 'forgetful'). He now brings the quatrain out from there because she had liked it as if the melody being sung were *Elsa je t'aime*. In the two adjectives that he applies to Elsa ('touchante', 'méchante') in line six, there is the same kind of duality that he has often expressed in his feelings for her in *Le Crève-Cœur*: e.g. 'Elle seule l'angoisse et l'espoir' ('Vingt ans après');

'Elle est la paix profonde et le profond délire' ('Pergame en France'). There emerges a sense of her human complexity and this corresponds to the mingling of emotions in the quatrain that he has revived.

Stanza 9

There are two versions of the refrain at this point. In the manuscript and in *Fontaine*, the pattern is exactly as before:

Au biseau des baisers
 Les ans passent trop vite
 Evite évite évite
 Les souvenirs brisés.

In the first edition of *Le Crève-cœur* and in *L'OEuvre Poétique* (1979b, p. 158) there is a change to:

Les ans passent trop vite
 Au biseau des baisers
 Evite évite évite
 Les souvenirs brisés.

The obvious effect of this latter version is to stress the rapidity of the passing of time.

Stanza 10

The poet turns his attention even more closely on the refrain. He describes it as crystal-like, which suggests a clarity and a sonority. And yet it is a low sound, a monotonous murmur that by its repetition impinges ever more on his and our consciousness.

Whereas, in the previous long stanza, he had claimed to have resurrected this quatrain because it had pleased Elsa, he now realizes that there is another cause.

'If you find the melody you are humming automatically suggesting words with the inevitability of magic spells, this is never an accident. A day comes when the words take on the shape of tears'. That is to say, the real reason why this refrain had re-entered his mind and he found himself humming it obsessively was that in the meantime it had acquired a tragic significance: it now charted the all too rapid course of their love which had led to a present in which France was occupied by the German army, it expressed this sadness which was corroding the happy memories of their shared past and coming between them as a couple.

There is a very poignant development of the image of the crystal refrain with words that have taken on the shape of tears that also suggest transparency, so that it becomes 'Ce refrain d'eau [qui] tombe entre nous comme une goutte' (line 6).

The constant repetition of the sound in the back of their minds is like a shutter that flaps in the wind so often that they do not listen to it, but finally they cannot bear it any more and he wishes to close it. A similar motif is to be found in 'Ce que dit Elsa' (1979b, p. 274):

Sur le bonheur volé fermons notre fenêtre
De peur que le jour n'y pénètre
Et ne voile à jamais la photo qui t'a plu.

But the final line of this stanza of 'Elsa je t'aime' makes clear that there is no escape for them. To close the shutter and try to withdraw within their own happiness cannot erase the knowledge of what has intervened in their relationship. As the poet recalls in *Le Roman inachevé* (1980, p. 460):

Je revois le papier mural dans notre chambre à Carcassonne
Et le désespoir qu'on ne pouvait partager avec personne

Stanza 11

The final refrain changes the order of its lines to emphasize the pain of the memories that have now been shattered. The last two lines seem to fade plaintively as the traditional moral of time passing too quickly for those in love takes on a truly heartbreaking import. In the *Préface à la contrebande* (1964, p. 33) Elsa gives us the sense of loss and bitterness behind the lines of the refrain:

Nous portions en nous mille regrets du passé, de notre vie
qui tombait en poussière. La seule contrebande de la
nouvelle, *Mille regrets*, écrite dans le boudoir de *Célimène*,
était ce goût de cendres que nous avions tous dans la
bouche. Car nous étions supposés être heureux de la défaite
qui devait nous apporter l'ordre, la discipline et la
régénération de la France.

In the same passage Elsa tells us: 'J'en voulais à tous ceux
qui ne songeaient qu'à tirer leur épingle du jeu. Comme s'ils
pouvaient écarter la mort de leur chemin! Fuyant le danger, ils
écraseront sous leurs pas leur propre vie, ils seront punis
d'impuissance...'

The the position of such people was not adopted by Aragon or
herself. The attitude of the poet and his wife can be found in
Les Communistes (1967, pp. 287-288):

C'est pourtant pour cela que l'on vit et l'on meurt, pour
que cela soit possible, le bonheur, non pour son bonheur à

soi, mais celui des autres, de l'espèce humaine, cette extraordinaire chose précieuse, qui se déchire elle-même, et semble avoir peur de sa propre croissance, de son avenir de lumière et de grandeur..

'Elsa je t'aime' is one of the finest poems of the collection, one in which the personal and the universal find a tragic harmony.

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