

GUSTAVE LANSON

ÉTUDES D'HISTOIRE LITTÉRAIRE

RÉUNIES ET PUBLIÉES PAR SES COLLÈGUES

SES ÉLÈVES ET SES AMIS



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LIBRAIRIE ANCIENNE HONORÉ CHAMPION

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—
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THE NEW POETRY IN FRANCE¹

When Victor Hugo, in 1885, took his leave of the world amid an apotheosis, it seemed as if he had carried French Poetry with him. Their ancestor gone, the generations who came after him felt that they were, indeed, already very old: Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Sully Prudhomme, Coppée, — all those who, for the last thirty years, had struck new chords, no longer had anything to say, and could only repeat themselves. They still published beautiful verses, but their models were known. That air of youth and novelty was lacking in their finest things, which once pervaded them.

Poetry, which gave no indications of progress, seemed in its last throes. And, after all, was not its day past? There were not wanting people who really believed this; some praising and others cursing the age of science in which poetry could not live.

Meanwhile, Verlaine, of the Parnassian school, in his « Sagesse », (1881) had finally broken with his fellow Parnassians, and a group of young men, the true « Jeunes », were entering upon the scene. Between 1885 and 1888 there were published the « Complaintes » of Jules Laforgue, « Les Syrtes » and « Cantilènes » of Moréas, Arthur Rimbaud's « Illuminations, » the « Palais Nomades » of Gustave Kahn, Stuart Merrill's « Les Gammes », Viélé-Griffin's, « Les Cygnes » and « Ancaeus », and « Les Épisodes » and « Les Sites » by Henri de Régnier. In both France and Belgium a new art was being ushered in through the numerous reviews and organs of as many different clubs and schools: « La Vogue »,

1. Translated by Miss Susan Hillis Taber, Burlington, Vt. — *The International Monthly*, October, p. 433-465, 1901.

the « *Revue indépendante* », the « *Revue Wagnérienne* », « *L'Ermitage* », the « *Revue Blanche* », and « *La Wallonie*. » The « *décadent* » or « *symbolist* » poetry, the « *polymorphous* » verse, — whimsical, alluring, and striking names, — were praised, explained, and practised with a sincere and violent zeal. A tumultuous and furious effort was made to put the rusty chariot of French poetry into running order again, and to start it in roads unknown to both Romanticist and Parnassian. But all this life was spending its agitated being underground, as it were, in the basement of literature, and the noise did not carry to the general public on the street. The « *Déliquescences* » of Adoré Floupette¹ scarcely caused the Journalists to smile, even for a moment, and many of them, indeed, could not at first decide whether they had before them an essay by a sincere and original writer, or a parody by some facetious « *crank* ».

Little by little, however, the critics of the first magnitude began to perceive that this younger generation was heartily bestirring itself, and they endeavored to discover what it was about. M. Jules Lemaitre², at once both charmed and offended by Verlaine, set him apart from other young men who called themselves symbolists; their obscurity startled him, and he feared lest he might be the dupe of a band of mystifiers. M. Brunetière³ rebuked the foolish extravagancies of the innovators, but not without a certain pleased forbearance at seeing their movement fall in so well with his own doctrine. A slight discussion arose over a book by Charles Morice, « *La littérature de tout à l'heure* », in which the programme of the new art was set forth in terms that were fairly intelligible. And then suddenly, in 1891, as if in obedience to an order, all the journals and magazines began to occupy themselves with the question of symbolism. M. Brunetière in the « *Revue des Deux Mondes* »⁴,

1. By Gabriel Vicaire and Henri Beauclair, 1885.

2. *Revue Bleue*, Jan. 1, 1888. In 1888 there also appeared « *Nos poètes* » by Jules Tellier; but the public at large did not know Tellier as he was one of the younger writers.

3. *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Nov. 1, 1888, *Symbolistes et Décadents*.

4. *Le Symbolisme contemporain*, April 1, 1891.

M. Anatole France in the « Temps »¹, M. Psichari in the « Revue Bleue »², and M. Huret in his sixty-four interviews, which appeared in the « Figaro »³, made Verlaine and Mallarmé, the free verse and symbolism fashionable, made them the forced material for conversation at the dinner of the « bourgeois ». Symbolism and the symbolists became a living topic, one of these Parisian curiosities of which the provincial or stranger is ashamed not to have heard. A Dutchman, W. G. C. Byvanck, who came to Paris at the time, went in search of the poetry of the future, seeking it in the wine-shops of Montmartre and the Latin Quarter, and published his discoveries in a curious book⁴. Finally in 1893, an editor was bold enough to offer the public a selection of the works of Stéphane Mallarmé⁵; and a most significant fact is that he made money by the venture.

But the « Jeunes » had not yet carried the day. The public observed them, and that was all. But the inclinations of this public were singular indeed; beneath the snobbery that was content with showing that it was up to date, there was a curious mixture of amused scoffing and routine in revolt, of cautious scepticism and timid respect. And what was more marked than any other sentiment, an amazement at not understanding, in close touch with the secret desire that there might be nothing there to understand. The critics and reporters confused the public rather than enlightened it; the critics, in order to win sure triumphs for themselves in the doctrinal discussion, and the reporters that they might give spice to their copy, applied themselves to bringing to the light all that was most obscure and unreasonable in the works and formulas of symbolism, all that was most eccentric and immoral in the manners and lives of the symbolists themselves. Without quoting Verlaine's beautiful poems, they pointed out his mask of a faun, his Bohemian fashions, his strange lodgings, his debauches,

1. *Vie littéraire*, April 19, Aug. 16 and 30, and also. *Les jeunes poètes, notices et extraits*, Sept. and Oct.

2. *Le vers français et les poètes décadents*, June 16, 1894.

3. *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, 1894.

4. *Un Hollandais à Paris en 1891*, published by Perrin et C^{ie}, 1892.

5. *Vers et prose*, Perrin et C^{ie}.

hospitals, and prisons ; they drew for the « bourgeois » the disquieting sketch of a man, now dependent on public assistance, and now a victim of the laws relative to misdemeanors ; they represented him as a drunkard, a vagabond, almost as an assassin. The life of Mallarmé was too simple and modest to be related ; so they brought forward his poetry :

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui
 Va-t-il nous déchirer avec un coup d'aile ivre
 Ce lac dur oublié que hante sous le givre
 Le transparent glacier des vols qui n'ont pas fui ¹ !

What could a reformation be worth in the eyes of sensible men, which placed itself under the standard of Verlaine, a shameful drunkard, or of Mallarmé, a maker of riddles? — a reformation extolled by so many unknowns with foreign names? These proud enemies of tradition, these Belgians ², Americans ³, Slaves ⁴, Greeks ⁵, and Jews ⁶, — were these indeed competent doctors for French poetry and the French language? And were there no consequences to be feared from this assault delivered by all the nations at once upon the ancestral genius of our race?

In the nebulous enthusiasm and apocalyptic solemnity of the accounts given of their doctrine, one thing only was clearly shown, that all these reformers of poetry and verse did not agree with each other. Marie Krysinska, René Ghil, Gustave Kahn, Jean Moréas, all worked in their own way for the salvation of French poetry ; and if Charles Morice crowned them all one after another, Robert de Souza condemned them all in a lump in the name of his own pet theory ⁷, which he held to be the only true one ; and Jean Moréas, who had baptized symbolism, denied it, and in its place founded what he termed « la Poésie romane ⁸ ».

1. See Brunctière, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Nov. 1, 1888.

2. Mockel, Maeterlinck, Rodenbach, Verhaeren.

3. Stuart Merrill, Viélé-Griffin.

4. Marie Krysinska.

5. Moréas.

6. Ephraïm Mikhael, Gustave Kahn.

7. In an essay on *Rythme poétique*, very original and instructive, although it does not give full evidence.

8. Byvanck, p. 85.

The wiser minds also began to ask themselves whether there was not more advertisement than infatuation in this pompous display of formulas. Among these symbolists, these decadents, these Romanticists of the younger generation, were found a few, who wrote their poetry noisily in the old way, the Parnassian or Lamartine school of verse. It was, indeed, a case of new labels on very old merchandise. At bottom, was it not simply the younger generation bidding the older depart, — in their own hurry to take their place? Were these not new men who desired to come forward, rather than a new art?

For once, the wiser ones were wrong. There is no doubt of this to day. We have passed the time when M. Brunetière believed himself obliged to warn us that « the value of the critical ideas of our symbolists was entirely independent of that of their works¹ ». The works have come, of a real value, and often of the very first order; to-day they commend the theories by which M. Brunetière formerly excused them. Out of this indistinct, tumultuous crowd of young poets, whom M. Anatole France placed all upon the same level in 1891, have emerged many original and superior talents: MM. Henri de Régnier, Viélé-Griffin, Rodenbach, Samain, Verhaeren, and to these must be added Fernand Gregh. I might name many others who have succeeded in creating something of note². But let us not be severe even on the mediocrities, the failures; no attempt has been lost. The unsuccessful ones marked out the path over which the famous have trodden, and the extravagant quest of the impossible has determined the boundaries of the field of the possible.

Success came with talent; the new poetry is at home among the pages of the « *Revue des Deux Mondes* » and the « *Revue de Paris* ». The French Academy has crowned the symbolists³, and even lines of fourteen syllables, or rather the volume which contains them⁴. Sometime in the

1. *Revue des Deux Mondes*, April 1, 1891.

2. See the Anthology published by Ad. Van Bever and Paul Leautaud: *Poètes d'aujourd'hui*, 1900.

3. Samain, *Au Jardin de l'Infante*.

4. Gregh, *La Maison de l'Enfance*.

early years of the present century, Adoré Floupette will sit down among the Forty.

This crisis that the bourgeois public and its critics believed to be the final agony of French poetry was, in fine, nothing but a crisis in its development. The time has come for us to study this development. I shall pass over the individual characteristics, the divergencies, and contradictions of the new school, that I may confine myself more closely to its common tendencies and its general results. I should like to show by what means, and by what efforts, French poetry, which sixty years of glorious production threatened to leave petrified in a condition of deadly inactivity, regained the impetus necessary for its life.

I. THE INSPIRATION.

I shall not stop to tell of what influences, towards 1885, urged so many of the younger generation to conceive the ambitious hope of creating a new form of poetry, Naturalism was struggling in its last throes¹, and with it the Parnasian poetry, its contemporary and ally. Science seemed to have done in literature all that it was capable of doing; we were weary of it. Idealism was springing up once more. The soul and the mysterious were all the fashion. Against the living masters of literature, they invoked the dead, eccentrics, or foreigners. Lamartine, Vigny, Baudelaire, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, — all had their chapels; Tolstoï, Ibsen, Björnson, and, later, Nietzsche, were confusedly, frantically applauded. We became enamored of artists who by relief or color desired to give other than the real and earthly: Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Rodin, Burne-Jones, the Pre-Raphaelites. We revered Ruskin; we applauded the painters who endeavored to render by more subtle characters whatever was more variable, intangible, and well-nigh immaterial in the life of nature, — the independents and impressionists. Wagner was deified

1. It was in 1887 that M. Zola was disowned in a resounding manifesto by a certain number of young novelists, among them M. Paul Margueritte.

as the great musician of the soul and of the ideal, and also because the « bourgeois » had not yet become resigned to him. In a word, one part of the younger generation needed something different from the official literature which was enthroned in the Academy, which was decorated by the government, and which sold at an advantageous rate. Shaken by an inner need, and excited by influences from without, the men of the younger generation who felt within them the inclination to write in verse rejected all the poetry of the time in its form and inmost content.

To tell the truth, it was not easy to remodel the very basis of lyric poetry, which is, and can only be, the reaction of an individual consciousness against the universe and against life, the manifestation of the fundamental problems of the universe and of life in the original vibrations of a soul. There are differences of intensity and quality in lyric inspiration, but the source is everywhere and always the same.

The Romanticists had fully understood this : they had all sounded the mystery of human existence in writing the journal of their own life ; they had all told of human suffering in their own suffering. All the particular accidents of their humor and of their existence were grouped around eternal ideas, — God and nature, love and death, humanity and progress.

The Parnassians had not really placed lyricism upon new ground. That there was in Leconte de Lisle a deeply bruised sensibility in relation with a personal conception of the universe and of life ; that there was in Sully Prudhomme an original sentimentality, a subjective perception of the relations between man and things, — no longer needs demonstration. As for the third star in the Parnasian Pleiades, M. Coppée, he escapes personality only by the commonplace ; and because his soul is that of every man, is the reason he does not appear to reveal it in his poetry.

But the Parnassians had desired to work in a direction exactly opposed to that of Romanticism. If they had not been able to dry up within themselves the personal source, without which there is no lyricism, they hindered it from flo-

wing forth in their poetry into the broad light of day; they made it to run in underground rivulets. Impressed by the positive and critical minds of the middle of the century, the contemporaries of Taine and of Flaubert, they desired to create an objective poetry, picturesque or philosophical, which should reflect natural or historical realities and rational truths. Scenes from the past, landscapes, popular customs, psychological analyses, ethical exposition, — they put all the sensible and all the intelligible world into their works; they sought, with haughty impassiveness or methodical abstraction or personal vulgarity, to put everything into their art, except themselves.

It was against this doctrine, after it had produced the best works that it contained, that the symbolists reated. Supported by two Romanticists of a later time, — by Banville, a capricious juggler with rhythm, without rule or reason for his fantasy, and by Baudelaire, an exasperated pessimist, absorbed in the culture of an abnormal sensibility, — but pursuing, in reality, an entirely different aim from Banville and Baudelaire, they rebelled against the Parnassian school and reestablished the reign of the soul in poetry. They reopened it to the subjective affirmations of the absolute and the unknowable.

M. Charles Morice, in attributing to Edgar Allan Poe the « lyric sense of science », explains himself thus : « Art will touch Science with her foot, that she may feel in her certainty of a solid foundation, and, then, with a bound, will leap over her upon the wings of Intuition. »¹ — « Poets and thinkers », he exclaims in another connection, « we hear the winds of mystery which pour forth from the heart of phenomena, and we move towards light, towards life... To some this joy (of enthusiasm) will come as an intuition of genius before the face of Nature; they let the simple and sumptuous law of Forms and eternal Emotions sing in their work; to others all the resources of human wisdom : ... will be necessary, and the latter, more particularly the servants of the Évangél of harmo-

1. *Littérature de tout à l'heure*, p. 203. See, as to this question, my essay entitled « La Littérature et la Science » in « Hommes et Livres ».

nious relations and the laws of Analogy, will give in vast syntheses, according to the strength of their minds and their heart's good faith, a melodious and luminous explanation of the mysteries that are glorified in the reality of Fiction¹. »

M. Moréas by offering to the reader in his poems « a sentimental ideology »²; M. Gustave Kahn, rather more obscurely, by assigning to the « great subjects » the office of « celebrating the fundamental rites of Life and of the Intelligence »³; M. Mallarmé by giving to verse, that « evocation art par excellence », the power of illuminating the « pure of ourselves borne by ourselves, always ready to burst forth on occasion, but which in existence or outside of art never attains to an adequate expression »⁴; M. René Ghil by urging « the lyric and meditative poet » to extract « the Idea which is alone important » from the « ordinary thousand visions in which it, the Immortal, is disseminated », to revise from negligible realities « the holy lines » of which he will compose « the only worthy vision, the real and suggestive Symbol »⁵, — all these, in their many ways, promulgate the same doctrine.

M. Jules Lemaitre⁶, after having quoted the oracular lines of René Ghil, added, « But does it not seem to you that we have a slight suspicion of these things already? » Assuredly we have, but assuredly also many acted as if they did not. The symbolists retold an old truth, but the Parnassians had rendered it necessary to retell it. Poetry, for a long time, had entered into competition with the arts which copied, and with the sciences which analyzed exterior things, such as they were outside of the soul and without union with the soul. It busied itself with painting, with sculpture, with history, with the novel of manners, with the physical and the philosophical. Now it returned to the expression of ideal realities and of the interior life. All na-

1. *Littérature de tout à l'heure*, pp. 64-67.

2. *Le Pèlerin passionné*.

3. *Premiers poèmes, Cérémonials*, p. 196.

4. *Vers et prose, Cérémonials*, p. 196.

5. *Traité du verbe*.

6. *Revue Bleue*, June 1, 1888.

ture, all history, all life, were new only occasions for the poet to show his true being, its most peculiar and its most invisible modifications. All their images were but projections of the soul.

Soul, everywhere Soul! But this decadent and symbolistic soul, how far removed was it from the old *ego*, the solid and square *ego*, which thrusts back the *non-ego*, and which the *non-ego* circumscribes. Amalgamating the newest hypotheses of certain physiologists with the pseudosciences of the supersensuous and with the reveries of dreamer and seer, mingling hypnotism, telepathy, spiritism, occultism, and mysticism, — symbolism transforms the traditional representation of the relations between nature and man; it gives birth to a strange, intense, and awe-inspiring perception. The universe penetrates the soul and the soul is diffused throughout the universe; vague and impossible to determine is the limit which separates the two. By inconceivable correspondences nature and the *ego* are bound together; far beyond this arises common sensation; and the brutal contour of things is enveloped in a mist of harmonic impressions. The life and the spirit melt into each other; there are insensible and manifold passages from the object to the subject, from the material to the spiritual, from the conscious to the unconscious. Nowhere discontinuity, limit, or stop; nothing is distinct nor remains fixed. The world of the intelligence and of the sense is but the superficial level, the moving reflection of the invisible world, where life is. There is no other reality than the ideal forms in which the soul both attains to the essence of things and realizes its own essence: both being otherwise unattainable. This turn of the mind evidently obliged the symbolist poet to describe nature in an entirely different way from his predecessors.

For a century poetry had tended towards making its descriptions more and more truthful and local. Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier had passed from an imaginary landscape to the landscape as they saw it; even in Lamartine the evolution had been made from the attenuated locality of the « Méditations » to the more carefully defined locality of « Jocelyn ». The Parnassian school had offered us a splen-

did collection of historical, ethnographical, and geographical paintings; every image was a precise fact, and all proper accidents for characterizing time and place were strongly accentuated. In the new poetry the indefinite was the law. No detail of the landscape might give it time or place. It is a moment, somewhere; an extract from the complexity, a summing up of the multiplicity of the real; it was made up of the universal elements of nature and things.

Formerly painters of interiors and landscape took for subjects particular and finished things, and endeavored by exact portrayal to make a solid and distinct reality stand forth; to-day, real objects, means rather than ends, serve to render sensible the manifold accidents of air and light. It is all the divine poem of air and light that the modern painter proposes to celebrate. Poetry has followed the evolution of painting. It emphasizes less the precise contours and local circumstances which make up the real object, than the eternal properties peculiar to the material of which the object is a casual example, and than the everlasting laws of life which write themselves for a moment in the woods and fields and mountains Viélé-Griffin did not perceive Touraine or Tuscany¹, but the hour and the season, the mobile picture laid upon things by eternal time. The sea of M. de Régnier² is not the sea of Jersey or of Gascony; it is the Sea, the circuit of innumerable billows, in which is expressed an incomprehensible fluidity, — the universal essence of the water. The moment and the movement, this is what the symbolist painter translates. He shows life in things rather than the things themselves. He is the painter of the eternal continuity through fleeting forms, and this is the first period of the transformation in the poetical landscape.

Now comes the second. The artist who expressed the individual stability of things separated them from himself just in the proportion that he distinguished them among themselves. The poet who sees in the universe the conti-

1. See *Cueille d'Avril, Joies, Les Cygnes.*

2. *Médailles d'Argile, Apparition, p. 114.*

nual unfolding of the elementary nature, does not abstract himself from the universal life. It penetrates his soul and is reflected in it. He sees things in himself :

Debout, appuyé d'une main
A quelque pierre des temps anciens,
Je sentais cette vie en moi,
Et que je créais tout cela —
La ville, le lac, les faîtes blancs —
Du grand regard de mes vingt ans ¹.

And these things are the poet himself. He throws his whole self into his feeling of them. « Have you not understood », asked M. de Régner of his readers, « that these medallions that I model are not the frivolous play of my fantasy ? »

Que tout le grand songe terrestre
Vivait en moi pour vivre en eux,
Que je gravais aux métaux pieux
Mes Dieux,
Et qu'ils étaient le visage vivant
De ce que nous avons senti des roses,
De l'eau, du vent,
De la forêt et de la mer,
De toutes choses
En notre chair, —
Et qu'ils sont nous divinement ² ?

From this comes the flowing lightness, the hazy transparency of the symbolist descriptions, in which things assume an ideal appearance, and have the air of things in a dream, impalpable, impondérable.

A third period is soon passed over. If things are in us, are ourselves, what need for the description to the objectively complete and consistent? The poet's aim is not to construct the universe. It matters little to him to illumine only incoherent fragments of exterior reality, if it is only in these fragments that the life of his soul is passed.

Here we lay hold upon the principle of the desultory

1. Viélé-Griffin, *Les Cygnes* (Le Fossoyeur), *Poèmes et Poésies*, p. 251.

2. *Médailles d'Argile*, p. 15.

character, the obscurity, the awkwardness, of certain descriptions in recent poetry.

But also what expressive depth, what living vibrations will be within the reach of the landscape! Each picturesque note causes the resonance of a sentimental harmony. In perceiving the life in things, the poet tells of the relation between his soul and life :

INSTANT

Une étoile fleurit, pâle dans le ciel bleu ;
De l'infini, légère et vague, la nuit pleut.

Sur le fleuve, là-bas, dans la brume sereine
Un bateau longuement fait pleurer sa sirène.

Un pas doux va et vient dans la chambre à côté,
C'est elle, l'âme élue et la sœur de bonté.

Je travaille, je suis sans regret, sans ennui.
Il fait triste, il fait doux. Rien de plus. C'est la vie ¹.

This, at first, seems to be a Dutch picture, secluded and refined, a dimly lighted chamber with a window opened on the deep country, — « Rien de plus. » But the poet adds three words, « C'est la vie. » How much more profound does the impression then become! In the fleeting moment the aspect of eternity is found. The soul during this moment has recognized the taste of life, the essential savor that is always distilled for the soul from the limitless diversity of experiences. Consequently the picture unites the two extreme notes of particularity and universality; it becomes symbolic, and this is the last stage, in which description and sentiment blend with each other in a unique and homogeneous form. Nature for the Romanticists was a frame in which were sumptuously enclosed the different attitudes of consciousness; they set it up as a picturesque decoration in which was played the drama of their passion; and the more the decoration and the passion contrasted, the more powerfully were both accentuated. Sometimes when a gra-

1. Gregh, *La Beauté de vivre*, p. 155. The landscapes also of Vielé-Griffin (*Poèmes et Poésies*) are generally the revelation of life in the soul of the poet.

phic description became representative of the interior thought, it retained its objective reality, and it was only after having stamped upon us the intrinsic character of things, that the poet in a commentary told us the ideal meaning¹. The Parnassians, who did not allow themselves these commentaries, and could not prevent their personal feelings from filtering through their impersonal work, were setting out involuntarily towards symbolic poetry². Baudelaire turned towards it knowingly; he gave the formula and the example of a symbolic interpretation of nature:

La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles:
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards singuliers³.

This is the Evangel of the new poetry; the process of the symbol, until now exceptional, becomes the fundamental type of poetic composition. Even the poet's vision becomes symbolical: the forms of things are to him the hieroglyphics of the ideas, and ideas have no longer the need of being formulated except in pictures.

Déjà, pour nos regards émerveillés, des plaines
Gisent dans la splendeur matinale et sa joie,
Sous le ciel tendre que la brume pâle noie
De son rêve; et vers nous une rumeur d'haleines
Parmi des branches monte, et l'horizon déploie
Au loin l'immensité vaporeuse des plaines⁴.

It is thus that the symbolist express the standpoint of the youth discovering with intoxication this new and magnificent life.

By integrating the idea in the picture, the symbol is other than a process of composition. It translates or produces an original fashion of treating the inner life as poetic material.

From the time of Rousseau and of Chateaubriand, it

1. Victor Hugo, *La Vache (Voix intérieures)*; *La Caravane (Châtiments)*; Vigny, *La Mort du Loup*; *La bouteille à la mer*.

2. See Leconte de Lisle, *Bhagavat*.

3. Baudelaire, *Fleurs du Mal (Correspondances)*.

4. Viélé-Griffin, *Poèmes et Poésies (Cueille d'Avril)*, p. 72.

has been acknowledged that the *ego* was the source of lyric poetry; they had caused it to spring forth by telling of themselves. The Romanticists used all forms, poetry, drama, the novel, and history in which to confess themselves and express their intimate thoughts. Thus a critic could speak of the immodesty and *naïveté* essential to the modern lyric; immodesty in telling the secrets of the heart, naïveté in believing yourself the privileged of misfortune. The Parnassians had repressed this frenzied ostentation of self. « I will not sell you my intoxication and my misfortune, » said Leconte de Lisle to the public: —

Je ne te vendrai pas mon ivresse et mon mal,
Je ne livrerai pas ma vie à tes luées.
Je ne danserai pas sur ton tréteau banal
Avec tes histrions et tes prostituées¹.

These lines were the safeguards of the « Jeunes ». They did not wish to be « exhibitors ». They pretended to express themselves without making themselves known, to give the revelation of the life which went on within themselves without betraying their life's confidence. The very « Meditations » of Lamartine are an exact autobiography beside the veiled characters that are given us by Henri de Régner, Viélé-Griffin, Verhaeren, and Gregh. The latter separate sentiment from fact, gather up the emotion of their soul, while detaching this emotion from the object and the occasion which have given it birth. But as the concrete and the actual are necessary in order to realize modes of sensibility, nature has lent her forms and phenomens. Thus, recent poets tell of themselves through the woods, the waters, the wind, and the light. Through the subtle play of harmonies, they symbolize their life in order not to relate it. They tell only what they have felt of life without telling what has made them feel it so. Their poetry, consequently, could remain pure poetry without being turned into oratorical or philosophical discourse. The problems of life were presented in vibrations of awe, not in discussions, and the philosophy of the poet, without being explicitly

1. *Poèmes barbares* (Les Montreurs).

formulated, is as though in dissolution in the waves which mount up from the bottom of his soul.

At one time it might have been thought that general conceptions would be wanting in the new art. The decadents and symbolists had somewhat the appearance of being merely the apes of Banville and of Baudelaire ; they had the air of being maniacs or copyists, proudly developing, in the frenzied dance of their rhythms and in the foolish arabesques of their images, all the abnormal perceptions or eccentric fantasies which rose in their brain. But Verlaine pointed out a pathway. His « Sagesse » is the journal of a penitent soul ; it is the crisis of the conversion of the sinner, the song — one of the most beautiful that there is — of the soul, both bruised and joyful before the life whose mystery a ray of God has illumined. In the collection which followed « Sagesse¹ », pious verse alternated with sensual, the effusions of contrite humility and pure faith with slightly veiled images of the sins of the flesh. Verlaine was not, I believe, insensible to the rhythmic grace of this alternation. But through these contradictions he only became more largely the representative of religious humanity, eternally torn between God who commands, and the flesh which refuses to obey. So, with him, poetry, taking once more the path of the « Méditations » and the « Contemplations » was filled with metaphysical anguish ; it returned to its duty of expressing the absolute and the universal, or rather its individual dream of the absolute and the universal.

It is necessary to be the old devil that Verlaine was, in order to find a new inspiration in the philosophy of the « petit catéchisme ». The younger generation, who would not, or could not, return to the old faith, would have been occasionally embarrassed to invent a general conception of life. It is because the philosophies along with religion were departing, — humanitarianism, deism, Kantism, idealism, scientific materialism, the pessimism of Schopenhauer, all the great systems, which for a century have furnished an intellectual armature for poetry, — had had their day, and

1. *Le Bonheur, Parallèlement, Chansons pour Elle, Liturgies intimes.*

had not yet been replaced. A more subtle philosophy, at once less abstract and more scientific than the old, fond of precision, and in love with life, was being elaborated. Without a system's being imposed, a tendency was taking shape among the poets.

Poetry since Chateaubriand had been of a sad cast. Christians, spiritualists, and materialists had vied with one another in crying out against the wounds, betrayals, and wickedness of human life. With Leconte de Lisle, Ackermann, and Richepin, pessimism had been installed as lord. To condemn God and curse Nature seemed the natural function of poetry. The Christian illusion, even in retreating from souls, long time soothed by immense hopes, had left in them a distaste for the mean and fleeting realities of life. They revolted against the incomplete in its process of eternal dissolution, against the eternal and ever unfinished becoming of life; life was irredeemably bad.

But in good time the idea sprang up among the « Jeunes » that Art should be one with Joy. It was sufficient to dispel the aspirations for Nirvana, the apostrophes to Nature as a cruel stepmother, — all the rhetoric of blasphemous pessimism. It no longer seemed foolish to feel a love for life. Poetry was still sad, but it was no longer desperate, except among certain Belgians¹ with an imagination too deeply tinctured with Catholicism. There was a gentleness in its sadness; an inclination was shown to accept life just as it is, in its misery, in its fleeting character, in its inachievement; to love it because it is, and because nothing can exist save in it and by it, — the universe, truth, beauty.

From the Christian point of view, which makes life appear wicked by directing us to the beyond, to eternity, poetry returned to the Greek point view, which embraces life in all its nakedness, — rich in evil and in good, and filled with this sweet and clear charm of being.

With M. de Régnier, with Viélé-Griffin, the insufficiency of the real is denounced with an affectionate assent. « All things are eternal and vain », says M. de Régnier², and he

1. Rodenbach, Verhaeren.

2. *Médailles d'argile* (La trace), p. 50.

loves them as they are, not as an Epicurian eager to enjoy, nor like Vigny, that tender stoic, who believed he ought by his love to compensate mortals for their unhappiness in being born to die; he loves them with their law, in their transition, which is a perpetual beginning again of joy and beauty.

M. Gregh, enlightening the thought tendency of his contemporaries with his intellectual acuteness, has given his latest collection of verse the title « La Beauté de Vivre ». « Life wounds and deceives », he says, and knows it: —

Et pourtant je ne maudis pas l'antique sort,
Vieux joug, doux d'être usé, sous quoi nous nous couchons,
Ni les hommes, trop douloureux pour être bons,
Ni Dieu même, le seul vrai coupable, s'il est...
Pourquoi? Parce que tout, en me blessant, me plaît
Étrangement, absurdement, infiniment...
Et que, bon ou mauvais, n'importe, vivre est beau¹.

Do not take this for a dilettante affirmation; the poet does not lose his interest in the objects of life. Suffering and acting — he accepts all — even his ignorance of what it all means. The happiness of living can dispense with other happiness: —

Vivre est bon, vivre est beau, je le sens, je le crois,
Arrière ennuis, chagrins, regrets, tourments passés,
Mélancolie immense et sans cause, ardeur triste:
Rien de cela n'est vrai, rien de cela n'existe, —
Il n'est rien de réel que la joie ici-bas².

In this new attitude of the poet, poetry changed its note entirely.

II. THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE.

In the evolution of the symbolists³, the outlines of two opposite tendencies were, at the beginning, apparently visible. Some, like Verlaine and Laforgue, who set at

1. *La Beauté de vivre*, p. 80.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 168. — See Viélé-Griffin, *La Légende de Wieland le forgeron*, the meaning of which is identical.

3. See the substantial and somewhat severe pages of Brunot, *Histoire de la Littérature française*, published under the direction of M. Petit de Julleville, vol. VII. p. 791, ff.

defiance the Academy and the magisterial word of the Parnassians, and the literary cant of the bourgeois, approached poetical style to the inorganic fluidity of the spoken phrase, and gave free play in their poetry to all the incorrect and undignified slang, all the jovial and coarse vocabulary of the faubourgs and the taverns. But the others, Mallarmé¹, René Ghil, and Péladan, who looked with scorn at Coppée and Musset, and despised the « *langue omnibus du fait divers* » in the novels of M. Zola, desired to separate the language of art from the rude spoken speech, and the aesthetic word from the everyday locution. The point of coincidence between these two doctrines was the principle of the individuality of their style; the suppression of all stereotyped rules and traditions, the right of the artist to break through mere convention and public opinion (Verlaine) as through grammatical customs (Mallarmé); the liberty to compose for himself in his own way the style which alone expresses him, and expresses him exactly.

Hence away with all scruples! All vocabularies are good, — those of the sciences, those of business, that of the street, the most modern slang, and the most Gothic archaism, — the Latin, the Greek, or English² word. The poet will draw from all vocabularies, and outside of these he will forge the word which gives the dreamed of caress to his nerves.

These innovations were accepted more easily in the vocabulary than in syntax, because the syntax of a language reflects the century long habits of a people's thought, the very structure of its mind.

« War on rhetoric and peace to syntax », cried that cautious revolutionist, Victor Hugo. The symbolists have overturned syntax. The place of the adjective, the construction of the verbs, use of moods, prepositions, and conjunctions, the order of the words, — everything was turned upside down in the venerable French grammar. The result was, first of all, an inexpressible rigmorole, over which it was easy to make merry.

1. *Divagation première, Vers et prose*, p. 187.

2. « *Le grand ciel étoilé révolue dans la nuit* », Viélé-Griffin, *Poèmes et Poésies*, p. 170.

The French language was the language of the intelligence ; they wanted to make it the language of sentiment. « To paint and define », to trace exact images and precise ideas, to order the images and ideas according to the real relations of nature or the abstract relations of logic, — this was all the art of the classic writer. Romanticists and the Parnassians had « painted » rather than « defined », but they had hardly encroached upon the intellectual and analytical phraseology that the eighteenth century had carried to perfection. The symbolists, on the contrary, have no care either for « painting » or « defining ». They haughtily reject the picturesque precision of the Parnassians. « Abolished the pretention, aesthetically an error, notwithstanding it rules almost all the masterpieces, of enclosing within the subtle leaves of the book anything else, for example, than the horror of the forest, the mute thunder scattered through the foliage ; not the essential and dense wood of the trees ¹. » That is, poetry should give up striving in rivalry, not merely with nature, but with painting and sculpture. Poetry has neither color nor relief, nor three dimensions, nor even two, nor one ; it has only words, which are the tokens and modifiers of the soul. Consequently it may not imitate things ; it invokes and suggests the impressions of things.

Thus, the poet will give preference to the sentimental rather than to the picturesque vocabulary, even in creating a landscape². He will transpose all the words of the soul to the things ; he will substitute for their perceptible shape our affective relations to them :

Le son du cor s'afflige vers les bois
D'une douleur on veut croire orpheline...
Tant il fait doux par ce soir monotone
Où se dorlote un paysage lent ³.

This procedure intimately mingles the soul with things ; it flows naturally in the ways of feeling that I have defined

1. Mallarmé, *Divagation première*, *Vers et prose*, p. 185.

2. Lamartine has said, « Assis aux bords déserts d'un lac mélancolique. » This is the foundation of the process of the symbolists and its simplest application.

3. Verlaine, *Sagesse*, *Œuvres complètes*, t. I, p. 276.

above. Here is another rarer fashion, and, at first, most disconcerting: « Le vent bleu d'outremonts fait palpiter les frênes¹. » The two words are concrete and picturesque, but their alliance destroys their objectivity. It is the analysis of the mind which divides qualities among objects. The expression of the poet respects the synthetical integrity of sensation: he writes while placing himself at the centre of consciousness.

With picturesque precision departs intellectual precision. The business of the poet is to show the inner life, not to explain either the world or himself. Mallarmé desired that the poet should put away « even the temptation to explain himself »; that he should be an impartial spectator of the work of words in himself; abdicating « all personal direction » of the phrase. « Pure work implies the *locutionary* disappearance of the poet, who gives up the initiative to the words mobilized through the shock of their inequalities ». This very arbitrary view presupposes that the spontaneous association of words in minds be adequate to the changeable relations of the deep life of the soul; it led Mallarmé to the most unintelligible, and, at bottom, the least suggestive writing that ever existed. For the rest, this subtle and charming talker had not the creative gift.

The greater part of the symbolists have retained, more or less, that part of the intelligible which it is illogical to wish wholly annulled, when one works on words. But they have tried to replace the logical structure of the sentence by a purely affective order. They have placed in the background, behind veils of mist, the definite and common meaning of words, and especially do they utilize their unstable and vague values, these impressions and associations which envelop the solid core of the definition, these effects of physiognomy and of accent, which speak only to the mind and to the heart. Through the relations of grammar and of syntax, they no longer strive to translate the relations of ideas, of judgments, and of reasoning, but all that desultoriness of the coëxisting and all that subtlety of intercourse, which ceaselessly, in the mysterious harmony of life, dis-

1. Viélé-Griffin, *Joies*, in *Poèmes et Poésies*, p. 111.

concert the logic of the mind. Read these bewildering lines of Verlaine, from the « *Crépuscule du soir mystique* », and you will find in them a precision of sentiment which has nothing to do with intellectual precision :

Le Souvenir avec le Crépuscule
 Rougeoie et tremble à l'ardent horizon
 De l'Espérance en flamme qui recule
 Et s'agrandit ainsi qu'une cloison
 Mystérieuse où mainte floraison
 — Dahlia, lys, tulipe ou renoncule —
 S'élance autour d'un treillis, et circule
 Parmi la maladive exhalaison
 De parfums lourds et chauds, dont le poison
 — Dahlia, lys, tulipe, ou renoncule —
 Noyant mes sens, mon âme, et ma raison,
 Mêlé dans une immense pâmoison
 Le souvenir avec le crépuscule.

This style would have made Voltaire roar with rage. And this time he would have been wrong. But it is true that this way of using the language and syntax is the very opposite of the way in which Voltaire used it.

III. THE VERSE.

The public would perhaps have become accustomed to not understanding ; the unintelligible imposes respect. But they could not endure being given in place of poetry lines in which nothing was to be found of that which serves to distinguish poetry from prose. The symbolists removed all the signs by which an educated Frenchman might perceive that he was not reading prose. With some indeed, there was a tendency to the « *enjambement* », the running of one line over into another, thus breaking the verse as Hugo would never have broken it. With them all, there was a multiplying of the hiatus : the regular caesura falls in the middle of a word or on a mute syllable ; the rhyme, now inexact, now enfeebled, and often abolished, but in revenge reappearing in the middle of the verse ; no alternation of mas-

culine and feminine rhymes; the masculine rhymes with the feminine, and the singulars with the plurals; isolated lines of eleven, thirteen, fourteen, and sixteen syllables reappear suddenly here and there, with lines which cannot be reduced to any number of syllables on account of the caprice of the *e* mutes, which are sometimes counted and sometimes annulled. Under the names of polymorphous, liberated, or free verse, we have false verses, « deliciously and intentionally false », friends would say, or sophisticated prose paradoxically cut off into unequal lines.

And here, again, beneath the extravagancies, and in the contradictions, was followed the natural evolution of French versification, — a clear and legitimate evolution.

Ronsard, who had reinstated in honor the Alexandrine, had not perfected its technique, and had multiplied its irregularities before defining its regularity. Malherbe had fixed the simple form of the Alexandrine; he made it a rational basis for all future complications. He renders the ryythm sensible to the rudest ear by the constant caesura on the hemistich and by the strength of the rhyme emphasized by a pause. Thus the classic Alexandrine is solidly constructed on two principal rhythmical accents that always coincide with the tonic accents on the sixth and twelfth syllables, and are always strengthened by pauses of the meaning. Within the hemistiches, secondary accents that are purely intensive and without obligatory pause, and that are distributed according to the sense, lessen the monotonous oscillation of the rhythm, without effacing the principal accents.

But it has not been sufficiently noticed in studies on French versification, that one of the most efficacious factors of poetical rhythm is the relation which unites the line to the phrase. Malherbe founded this relation on the agreement of the meaning and the rhythm, by the subordination of the sense to the rhythm. I mean to say that the rhythmical design determines the grammatical design, and marks the place of the principal punctuations before hand. The meaning pauses at the caesura, at the rhyme; and the phrase always finishes at the end of a line. Thus the poetic phrase of the classics was distributed through quatrains and distiches; each line, each hemistich even, containing a dis-

tinct element of syntax. Maynard, pushing this principle to its logical conclusion, desired that each line should be « detached », should offer a complete meaning; and the absolute harmony of the phrase and of the line was realized.

Neither Chénier, nor the Romanticists themselves, destroyed the classic type of the Alexandrine. They merely introduced into it discords which, to have their full effect, implied the persistency of the regular rhythm, with which they were destined to contrast. They practised the discord of the phrase and of the line; they over balanced the middle accent by changeable accents which the sense indicates, and which strong punctuation could enforce: they weakened the final accent by removing all suspension of the meaning. The regular accents could always be visibly perceived in Chénier; less visibly, but as readily in Victor Hugo, who never consented to make the sixth syllable of the line fall on an *e* mute, nor in the middle of a word. The irregular and troubled design of the Romantic phrase is traced in the « quadrillage » of the classic line, and it is the perception of this discord which gives their savor to many of the Romantic rhythms.

The classic line is found almost in its native purity among the Parnassians; save in the lines of the drama or story, discords, the displacing of the caesura, and the running over of the line are rare. Writing in distiches reappears. The special survival from the Romantic agitation is that the caesura has ceased to be a stop; it is an intensity, not a pause of the voice. The meaning is arrested only at the rhyme; and since the inner accents of the hemistiches often have a value equal to the middle accent not sustained by a pause, the line seems to glide along all of a piece, hardly articulated by the caesura, to the full and sonorous rhyme. While in the classic verse, the fundamental element was the hemistich, so, with the Parnassian school, rhythmical unity consisted in the verse being written out at a single throw.

The Parnassian verse sprang from the Romantic verse, but there might have issued from this something else. By no longer considering the running over of the line and the dis-

placing of the caesura as a deformation of the regular type, but as the basis of a new regularity, Verlaine created a new line. At the same time that, by legitimatizing the hiatus, he opened to poetry unexplored mines of locution and of resonances, he despoiled the sixth and twelfth syllables of all their metrical distinctions. He abolished the accents and pauses in these two places, and purposely installed in the rhyme, as at the middle caesura, prepositions and articles on which the voice could not rise without giving the rhythm the air of a parody.

Here is an example or two of these « emancipated » Alexandrines :

O tes manières de venir ! j'y mets du mien
Aussi, mais toi, que c'est gentil quand c'est du tien.
Oui, tes manières de t'y prendre pour venir
Me voir et m'étonner à ne plus en finir ¹.

Vous suspendiez aux branches des guirlandes, à
L'entour d'un bassin vénéré, cher aux naïades ².

Every vestige of classical rhythm has indeed disappeared ; the accent may be placed anywhere. There is nothing fixed but the rhyme which comes at the end of twelve syllables.

The rhyme, the only one of the traditional factors which remains, ought, it would seem, to gain in importance ; but, on the contrary, just the opposite has happened. Verlaine despises the « rich » rhyme, « this half-penny jewel which rings hollow and false under the file ». He ridicules the exact rhyme ; he rhymes feminine terminations with masculine ; he makes much use of assonance ; and he stifles the rhyme both by a diminution of its fullness and of its exactitude, and by the encroachment on the next verse, which juggles it away. In reality, the rhyme loses nothing ; it is only its function that changes.

Rhyme had always been regarded as a signal, the function of which was to mark the end of the line. But is the

1. Verlaine, *Dans les limbes*, Œuvres complètes, t. III, p. 51.

2. Viélé-Griffin, *Poèmes et Poésies*, p. 52.

line forced to bear external marks of its structure? is it necessary that the hearer should explain to himself how the line is made? With Verlaine, no more visible mechanism. the rhythm is made to be felt, not analyzed, by the public; Consequently, the rhyme, dismissed from its duty of automatical warning, will once more become a musical note, whose recallings, modifications, and degradations illustrate a melodious design through the confused riches of the contatenation of sounds. Symbolism, while seeming to weaken rhyme, removes from it all heaviness and monotony, endows it with a manifold resonance that is delicate and light.

Rhyme no longer cuts a line; it is merged in the continuity of the rhythmical development. Neither pause nor accent, nor even rhyme, any longer necessarily signalizes the end of the line; the individual distinctness of the Alexandrine has vanished. The rhythmical unity is no longer the line or hemistich; it is the member of the sentence, enclosed in a portion of a line, or running over two lines. The meaning determines every unity, and places the accents which give the line its music. So that, while pushing the Romantic discord to its limits, Verlaine, and after him symbolism, reëstablished the harmony between the meaning and the rhythm which existed among the classics. But the relation has been reversed. Malherbe molded the sentence upon the metre, and inserted the grammatical pauses at the pause or, the cadence; the present poetry molds the rhythm on the phrase, and articulates the line at the places where the meaning is held in suspense.

The transformation of the Alexandrine has naturally been extended to other verse, and to the strophe. The classics, who found it impracticable to realize small detached lines, grouped them in twos, threes, or fours, between necessary pauses. For example, the strophe of ten lines was broken by a quatrain and two triplets. But, as far as possible, the running over of the line in each group was avoided; each line contained a distinct grammatical element. Neither the Romanticists nor the Parnassians have changed the structure of the strophe in any very striking way. Ideas and style aside, neither the « Mages » nor « Ibo » would have

shocked Malherbe. Verlaine and the symbolists at first suppressed the necessity for inner pauses in the strophe; later, they abolished the distinction of the strophe as well as of the lines; they ran them over and put them out of measure; they carried on the rhyme from one line into the next, from one strophe to another, in such a way that the meaning and not the metre determined the accents and pauses. It was no longer the fixed structure of the strophe, it was the individual movement of the phrase which produced the rhythm. As in the case of the Alexandrine, merely the number of syllables and the rhyme remained, so of the strophe there remains only the number of lines and the distribution of the rhymes.

This was still too much, Every fixed form that imposed an exact rhythm was distasteful to the symbolists; so they strove to pervert the strophes in order to render them unrecognizable. Verlaine disguised his quatrains by designing in them the rhymes of the *terza rima*¹. Others add a fifteenth line to the sonnet. In the same way, they forsook the common and familiar verse for rare and unusual metres. They cultivated uneven lines, to which the ear was not accustomed²: the lines of five and nine syllables did not carry in themselves harmonies already made. They tried lines of eleven and thirteen syllables, which appeared like false Alexandrines. They braved the decreed of conservative theorists, who forbade, in the name of physiology, the existence of lines longer than the Alexandrine, and invented long lines of fourteen and sixteen syllables.

But it is difficult to prevent these long lines from seeming like a collection of shorter verses; to prevent all these new and rare lines of a precise number of syllables from having the appearance of being constructed with elements that have been always utilized, — with groups of three, four, five, or six syllables. Thus symbolism was to end forcibly in a « *vers-librism* », in which all fixed structure of strophe or line should disappear.

1. *Œuvres complètes*, t. I, p. 197.

2. Samain, Gregh.

3. Except the line of seven syllables which is used by the Classics and Romanticists.

The classics had known a kind of free verse in which the metrical diversity was liberated of the strophe¹. But these lines of every measure, whose succession was governed by no definite laws, were the positive types of French versification, from the line of three syllables to the Alexandrine. La Fontaine, by his displacings of the caesura and runnings over of the verse, joined the metrical unities and created a continued rhythm in which the rhyme, now purely musical, served no longer to announce the end of the line. This free verse, once more successfully resumed in our day², is not the free verse of the symbolists.

To tell the truth, there are five or six theories of free verse among the symbolists, and as many models. But from the individual oppositions of construction and theory there has emerged a common and convergent effort towards the abolition of the numerical relations in the line. No determined number of lines makes the strophe, no determined number of syllables makes the line. The poet causes the rhyme to appear at the end of a group of words; he puts together by rhymes and assonances, or merely by typographical disposition, many of these groups of words, without troubling himself about the number of syllables in the group that he calls a line, or the number of lines in the « *laisse* », which takes the place of the strophe. The movement and the pauses of the meaning alone delineate to his ear the line and the « *laisse* ».

There is nothing rash in constructing these undetermined « *laises* »; the Romanticists had already often preferred them to, or mingled them in, with their strophes. But free verse is truly the last step of the symbolist art. All the laws which based versification on mathematical relations have been successively rejected, — laws of accents and pauses, laws of the composition of strophes, and laws of the measuring of syllables. A rhythmical « *quadrillage* » no longer determines the arrangement of the words, nor the movement of the soul which is written in this arrangement.

1. *Fables* of La Fontaine; *Agésilas* of Corneille; *Amphitryon* of Molière.

2. See, for example, Jacques Madeleine (of the school of Catulle Mendès), *Le Sourire d'Hellas*.

There is no longer anything but the rhyme, which is caused to be heard where one wishes, as much as one wishes, and when one wishes.

But would not free verse be simply prose? The question is not answered.

I will remark merely that it is not sufficient to abolish theoretically the numerical harmonies in order to prevent them from making themselves felt in the real rhythms, nor is it sufficient not to observe them to keep them from existing. Why do the long lines of free verse so often give the effect of heavy prose, while the shorter ones move so many times in delicious melodies? It is because the ear perceives (I do not say : analyzes) numerical relations in the shorter lines, and does not perceive those in the long ones. The free verse of the symbolists sings where, by the accents and pauses, a succession appears, as irregular as may be, of rhythmical elements of three, four and six syllables, that oppose and compose one another; and it answers to the free verse of La Fontaine, just as the Alexandrine of Verlaine answers to the Alexandrine of Racine. Without M. Kahn's being aware of it, number acts in his free verses, there where they have power of verse: even in prose, there is no rhythm without a numerical basis.

What the singing grace of the free verse (with M. de R gnier, for example, M. Verhaeren, or M. Vi l -Griffin) teaches us, is that mathematics and life are two things. Life is a perpetual approximation. Neither the exact formulas of science are strictly realized in nature, nor does poetry need to represent the precise relations of number. Certain relations that are inexact, but are, nevertheless, perceived, may, through their very inexactness, have a real charm in their fleeting and vague design :

Ma corbeille est pleine, prenez
 La grappe lourde qui d borde et saigne,
 Prenez la poire molle, ou la ch taigne
  pineuse que cuira la cendre ti de,
 Prenez les fruits du verger clair,
 Et les fruits  pres de la haie,
 Go tez-en l' corce et la chair,
 Blessure et plaie,

Saveur sucrée, arôme amer,
 Délice ou peine...,
 Puis allez boire à la fontaine ¹.

This exquisite couplet is built up around the numbers four, eight, and ten, with a certain indecision which has its grace, and which results, from excess or default in some measure, through the play of the *e* mute.

For here, indeed is the solution of this terrible question of the *e* mute, over which such war has raged. There are only foreign ears for whom the *e* mute is actually mute, and for whom « Un Dieu qui nous aimant d'une amour infinie », does not sound in any way different from « Un Dieu qui nous aimant d'un amour infini ».

That current pronunciation often annuls the resonance of the *e* mute, is of no consequence at all. There is no need of bringing forward through it the melodious qualities of words; but verse is, on the contrary, an instrument made to awaken all the sleeping music of the language.

The *e* mute is an important factor in the harmony of the line exactly because it alters it. The *e* mute introduces approximation in the numerical relation: by the feminine rhymes it lengthens the Alexandrine: counted in the middle of the line, it shortens this. It is never completely annulled, and it never attains the strength of a resonance syllable; it runs through a whole scale of delicate shades. Besides the sonorous syllables that are accented or not, it introduces a third uncertain and subtle value into the rhythm. Its rôle in our versification is analogous to that played in Latin and Greek prosody by the substitution of the feet, which alters the pure metre and gives the line a living freedom of movement. In certain places, one could well not count the *e* mute, just as Middle Ages did not count it at the caesura. But this would be on the condition of not thinking it is annulled, by not counting it. And this alteration would be

1. De Régner, *Médailles d'Argile*, l'Adien. p. 213. M. G. Kahn forbids the running over of the line: the line is a « long word ». The classic line was a « long word » of a measured length: the free line of M. Kahn is a « long word », of a length that varies *ad libitum*. With M. de Régner, the consideration of the relations of number naturally upholds dislocation and the running over.

purely theoretical : there would be nothing gained by it.

All this transformation of the technique of the line harmonizes with the aesthetics of the symbolists. When art strove to define and paint, the verse assisted the clearness of the idea, the intensity of the painting. It was the instrument of the condensing of the phrase, or the frame which gave it value. Even among the Romanticists, with the exception of Lamartine, and, where he wishes, Victor Hugo, — in whom everything is found, — and very evidently among the Parnassians, the verse has more color than music. Among the symbolists the musical form becomes the principal means of poetic expression. With them nearly everything is subordinate to rhythm, whose free and original line exactly portrays the undulation of the sentimental life :

De la musique avant toute chose...
 Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise,
 Où l'indécis au précis se joint...
 De la musique encore et toujours !
 Que ton vers soit la chose envolée
 Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée
 Vers d'autres yeux et d'autres amours ¹ !

This is the poetic art of symbolism. And, indeed, what can a poetry do that wishes to be neither body nor thought, but merely soul, that would contain neither picture of the universe nor knowledge of the mind, but the palpitation of life in the very heart of the *ego*, what can it do, if not create music and music alone ?

Symbolism has reacted against the Parnassian school by drawing near again to Romanticism ; but the Parnassians have obliged it to correct Romanticism. By occasionally brutally opposing itself to the two great forms of the poetry of the nineteenth century, it has continued these forms, thus realizing the vital condition of revolution, which is to recapitulate the past that it aspires to destroy. Symbolism has prepared the instrument for the twentieth century which will be able to create great and worthy poetry, and diffe-

1. Verlaine, *Jadis et Naguère*, OEuvres complètes, t. I, p. 312.

rent from that of the Romantic and Parnassian schools.

Is this saying that the symbolist art will have driven out the technique and all the anterior traditions of French poetry?

If the symbolists believed this in the first zeal of their ambition, the more eminent among them no longer claim this to-day.

Symbolism has recalled poetry to its definition, which is to be the emanation of a soul; it has recalled verse, too, to its function, which is to be the song of the soul. By questioning all French versification, it has put the old materials to the test. Certain principles of this versification have emerged all the stronger for the trial: but some sacred and ancient rules were found to be without a true aesthetical basis. The exclusion of the hiatus and the assonance, the refusal to allow singulars to rhyme with plurals, the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes, with other chance customs, can no longer tyrannize over the artist. Technique is free: that is, technique is subjected only to the idea: and the means employed to realize poetry, will be judged only by their effects.

The symbol and the free line enrich art, but the symbol is not the only form of poetry; and the free verse is the limit of the verse, to which it sometimes extends, but where it will not be able to rest. Neither the inspiration nor composition of Romanticist and of Parnassian art are abolished for the temperaments that are Romantic and Parnassian. Beside the symbolist and musical poetry, a picturesque and realist poetry, and another intellectual and thoughtful, may exist, and all these may resolve themselves into manifold combinations. Already in recent collections of verses symbolism is more tempered¹. With M. de Régnier sculptor and painter, who now and then goes hand in hand with M. de Hérédia; with M. Gregh, man of analysis and philosophy, who bears some resemblance to Sully Prudhomme, the new poetry broadly opens up to the world of the body

1. *Les Médailles d'Argile; la Beauté de vivre*. M. Gregh, author of the « *Beauté de vivre* » apparently desires to hold himself aloof from symbolism; but he is none the less the product of this movement.

and the intellectual world ; sensation is exteriorized even to the object ; sentiment is illuminated even to the idea.

A suppleness in the language and in the line will be left from symbolism, a deepening of the conditions of art and of poetry, a refinement of the musical sense, an over-excitement of the meaning of life, by which even poets who will reject the symbol and free verse will profit, and will pass it by only at their own cost—And to the symbolists, finally, is due the fact that poetry has become once more the dominating form of literature, the one that at present influences the other artistic forms, the novel and the drama.

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