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THE THEME OF MOVEMENT
IN THE POETRY OF PIERRE REVERDY

by

JEAN SCHROEDER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in French in partial fulfillment
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INTRODUCTION

The limited scholarship which exists concerning the work of Pierre Reverdy is directed primarily to the cubist phase of his esthetics, including his affiliation with the art movement known as cubism and with the literary avant-garde led by Apollinaire which was to later inspire both Dada and surrealism. Besides biographical studies, some analyses have been done of Reverdy's poetics. However, there are few studies of the poetry itself, although Reverdy wrote three major collective works, Main-d'oeuvre, Flupart du temps I and II, and Flaques de verre, in addition to numerous other poems for minor collections and journals. In the literary criticism which does exist concerning Reverdy's poetry, there is very little textual analysis, with the notable exceptions of studies done by Mortimer Guiney, Robert Greene, Jean-Pierre Richard, Georges Poulet, and Anthony Rizzuto.¹

If Reverdy is to be remembered for his role in organizing the poetic avant-garde around Apollinaire, for fostering a poetry of cubist orientation, and providing the future leaders of surrealism, André Breton, Louis Aragon,

¹For additional details concerning Reverdy scholarship, a list of major contributors is provided in the Appendix.

Paul Éluard, with an apprenticeship, his contribution as a poet should also be weighed. In poems born of the fears of hostility, solitude, and meaninglessness, Reverdy explores at length the theme of movement, more specifically the motif of displaced elements out of phase with each other. Reverdy's narrator, upon initiating movement, passes from being to becoming; being suggests acceptance of the status quo, becoming implies change and reorientation. By his actions the narrator refuses the established pattern of events which may eventually triumph but only after withstanding considerable opposition. Although two Reverdy scholars, Robert Greene and Mortimer Guiney, mention in their work that there is a particular type of movement in Reverdy's poetry, namely, that of collapse and dissolution, no critic seems to have discussed the different types of motion and their sources, the theme to be treated in this dissertation.

Two methods of textual analysis will be used to examine the theme of movement. The first part of this study will analyze by means of the explication de texte method the sources of movement, some freely permitting the motion of slipping, others greatly limiting it. Those poems which instead emphasize the particular type of movement involved will be discussed in the second part of this study where the explication de texte approach will be replaced by an analysis of only the relevant portions of the poem in question. Throughout both parts of this study, the various themes of motion will be treated chronologically, drawn from texts which show either evolution or variation.

In order that the reader may appreciate more fully an analysis of Reverdy's poetry, as well as individual texts, a brief discussion of his life and esthetics follows---

Biographical Sketch

Little is known about Pierre Reverdy's life. Indeed, such would have been his wish, for he greatly valued personal privacy, living most of his life as a recluse. In keeping with the poet's preferences, this chronological sketch will briefly summarize those events and circumstances in his life which in future chapters will relate to the topic under discussion, the theme of movement in Reverdy's poetry.

Reverdy left his native Narbonne where he was born in 1889 to live among the participants of the avant-garde movement in Paris. There in 1910, several literary groups were developing which were to influence Reverdy's poetry. The new generation of poets of which Reverdy was to become a member, was disenchanted with the idealism and introspection of the declining symbolist movement and in lieu of the symbol, became interested in the object, and more precisely, in the most "quotidian" of objects.² This new art movement which became known as cubism was represented especially by the painters Picasso, Braque, Gris, and the poets Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Blaise Cendrars, André Salmon. The still lifes of cubist tableaux abounded with the most commonplace, banal objects,

²Robert W. Greene, The Poetic Theory of Pierre Reverdy, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, Vol. LXXXII (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 9.

drawn not to imitate physical reality but rather to illustrate the artist's own conception of what a newspaper, wine bottle, etc. really looked like, isolated from social preconceptions.³

In response to the influence of the cubist milieu, Reverdy in his first volume of poetry, Cale sèche, written during 1913-1915, but not published until 1949, echoed the disenchantment of his colleagues, Apollinaire and Max Jacob, with the symbolist tradition. Moreover, throughout his early work, from the Poèmes en prose (1915) to La Guitare endormie (1919), cubist subjects abound: tableaux of collages, pipes, views from windows or scenes whose modest aspects are derived from cubist influence---rooms, tables, lamps, stairways, streets, mirrors, horizons. Later on, as the cubists sought the independence of the object from fixed notions of physical reality, Reverdy attempted to separate the authentic, pure, semantic properties of words from arbitrary conventions.

In addition to cubism, Apollinaire and Max Jacob were interested in "simultanéisme" and futurism, again encouraging Reverdy's participation. The basic doctrine of "simultanéisme", later assimilated into futurism,⁴ was "the process of presenting without any transition events taking place at the same time but in different places."⁵ The reaction in poetry was

³Ibid., 12.

⁴For a detailed discussion of simultanéisme and futurism, see Par Bergman's Modernolatria et Simultaneita. Sweden: Svenska Bokforlaget/Bonniers, 1962.

⁵Richard L. Admussen, "Nord-Sud: 1917-1918" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1966), p. 26.

to depict an object from several different angles, capitalizing upon the disorder of the interrupted perceptions.⁶ The futurist movement, less popular in France than in Italy where it originated, absorbed the "simultanéiste" technique of rupture and multiple views, using them to emphasize its new values of danger, conquest, speed, courage, war.⁷ Although he denied being a futurist, just as he had refused to be classified a cubist, Reverdy nevertheless reveals traces of futurist influence in several of the Poèmes en prose (1915) and later in the Jockeys camouflés (1918), in which objects are presented in various stages of motion simultaneously.

While Reverdy was composing his early poetry, he worked as a typesetter and proofreader for several Paris newspapers. Then in the spring of 1917 until the fall of 1918, he directed a literary review, Nord-Sud, the title of which was inspired by the subway line which connected the two major artistic communities, Montmartre and Montparnasse.⁸ Reverdy looked upon Nord-Sud as an opportunity to unite two directions in poetry, that of the generation of 1914 and that of the post World War I avant-garde. The former artistic group led by Apollinaire contributed their faith in the progress of the modern era, together with a pre-symbolist heritage, the thematic traditions of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, who

⁶Ibid., 26.

⁷Ibid., 22.

⁸Ibid., 32.

were to later influence Reverdy. The latter poetic generation, by collaborating in the review, sought to announce new trends in poetry, first, Dada, founded by Tristan Tzara, and then, a movement in embryonic form later to be known as surrealism under the aegis of André Breton.⁹ Although associated with both art groups, Reverdy never belonged to either one.

As the Nord-Sud era came to an end, Max Jacob, who had exposed Reverdy to the literary forces of the period, now began to focus his attention upon Reverdy's spiritual development. A recent convert to Catholicism, Jacob urged Reverdy to join him, and as a result of Jacob's evangelism, Reverdy and his wife converted in 1921. In order to more fully devote himself to poetry and God, Reverdy retired with his wife to the monastery of Solesmes five years later. They lived in seclusion there for the remainder of their lives, despite the fact that Reverdy himself had completely lost his faith by the end of the second year.¹⁰ In contrast to the religious fervor of his prose work Le Gant de crin (1926), a collection of aphorisms, the poetry written after 1928 becomes more and more lugubrious, revealing Reverdy's metaphysical anxieties.

Disillusioned by his loss of faith, Reverdy grew bitter towards life and his fellow men. Religion was a human institution and by that doomed to failure:

⁹Ibid., 157.

¹⁰Mortimer Guiney, La Poésie de Pierre Reverdy (Geneva: Librairie de l'Université, Georg & Cie., S.A., 1966), pp. 40-41.

La grande inquiétude de l'homme ne lui vient pas de la mort. Ce sont les religions qui ont beaucoup contribué à la créer, à l'aggraver avec leurs promesses sinistres dans le bien et dans le mal, en tout cas la vie éternelle dans le feu ou dans le miel.¹¹

Having failed to find a spiritual ideal, Reverdy saw himself as a derelict cast out from the fold, condemned eternally to "cette marche incertaine et précaire sur le vide."¹² At approximately the same time as his religious crisis, Reverdy quarreled with two of his closest friends, Max Jacob and Jean Cocteau, both of whom were never close to him again. Another cause for his pessimism was the decreasing notice his work received once he had permanently moved to Solesmes. Removed from the mainstream of avant-garde Paris, Reverdy was soon almost forgotten. Spending his life in voluntary exile, Reverdy considered meaningful relationships with his fellow men to be impossible; even the world of nature, he felt, had turned against him:

La nature m'est apparue comme quelque chose d'hostile, d'inhumain, de terriblement angoissant, en lutte contre l'homme; l'homme est aux prises avec son rocher.¹³

Art was to be the means by which man might protest the alienation and absurdity of his life; art was to be his only

¹¹Pierre Reverdy, "Fausses Notes," Verve, VII, Nos. 27-28 (1952), 11.

¹²André Rousseaux, "La Poésie de Reverdy," Le Figaro littéraire, December 10, 1949, p. 2.

¹³"Lettre à Jean Rousselot, du 16 mai 1951," quoted in Hommage à Pierre Reverdy---Entretiens sur les lettres et sur les arts, ed. by Luc Decaunes (n.p.: Subervie Editeur/Rodey, n.d.), 16.

dignity--- "... l'art, ... le plus efficace bouche-abîme dont l'homme se soit prémuni pour assurer son existence..." Human existence had been reduced to a void inhabited by one who vainly waited for orientation; art, however, could make the wait seem shorter and more palatable:

... que l'homme s'ennuie littéralement à mourir sur la terre et qu'il y serait certainement mort sans traces, depuis longtemps, si l'art n'était venu le distraire.¹⁴

Composed as appeals against the injustice of human alienation, some of the last volumes Reverdy wrote will be remembered as his best--- Sources du vent (1929), Flaques de verre (1929), Ferraille (1937), and Le Chant des morts (1948). He died at Solesmes in 1960.

Esthetics

Even before Reverdy's religious crisis and deepening pessimism, he believed that art, and more specifically poetry, was the most authentic means of expression for human feelings. In addition to his poetry, he wrote several volumes of esthetics which provide a theoretical context for themes expressed in preceding poems.

The theme of movement, its sources as well as the particular types of motion involved, permeate Reverdy's impressions of the poetic process. For Reverdy, poetry is change, transformation occurring in several interrelated spheres, dream, thought, and material objectivity. Poetic change or

¹⁴Pierre Reverdy, "Georges Braque Une Aventure méthodique," Mercure de France (July, 1963), 369.

transformation will occur first at the intersection of dream and reality (le rêve and la réalité).¹⁵ Reverdy defines dream by comparing it to thought (la pensée), dream being considered an extension of thought. Dream will seek a more unrestrained form, "une forme plus libre, plus abandonnée," while thought will follow a more restricted course, "plus sobre mais plus serrée."¹⁶ The term reality refers to everyday existence, the objective material world where man in the Pascalian tradition is thrown out like debris, une épave, condemned for the present to make his existence meaningful while immersed in an alien environment and doomed for the future to fall prey to death. The theme of movement in the poetry written after 1930 is concerned primarily with the world of objective existence.

The intersection or crossroads appears frequently in Reverdy's poetry as a potential source of slipping, although it is not always referred to as a point at which dream and reality converge. Associated with the crossroads are the edges of a precipice from which the poet will fall only to subsequently slip upward to the apex of artistic purity. The descent into the abyss is synonymous with the poet's entry into the world of dreams where he yields to his imagination and sense impressions which will exploit the treasures of

¹⁵Pierre Reverdy, Le Gant de crin (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), p. 18.

¹⁶Ibid., 16.

inspiration:¹⁷

Pour le poète le rêve est un filon d'où
il faut extraire les morceaux d'or.
Il faut descendre bas dans la mine du
rêve pour trouver les plus belles pépites.¹⁸

The poet's sojourn in the world of dreams is only temporary and as the locus of creation changes, the ascension into the realm of deep reality (la réalité profonde) begins. This new plane of existence, often called the real (le réel) by Reverdy, is located above the sphere of the concrete world and is dominated by the infallible mind (l'esprit): "C'est l'esprit qui, au delà de l'apparence qui arrête les sens, pénètre librement jusqu'au réel, l'essence des choses."¹⁹ The cycle descent/ascent derived from the heritage of Rimbaud and Mallarmé is found in Reverdy's poetry in conjunction with the theme of the disillusioned traveler who drifts aimlessly

¹⁷Ibid., 17. Reverdy's descent into the world of dreams recalls Rimbaud's plunge into hell, although for Reverdy, the voyage downward is much less violent. He, too, seeks to free the imagination of the bonds imposed by logic, and thereby to enrich the sources of poetic inspiration. However, Reverdy is more concerned with exposing the creative soul to as many planes of reality as possible than with letting it come to know itself through the destructive forces of chaos and immoderation. The voyage into hell, as interpreted by Rimbaud, is an exploration by the soul of the depths of its subconscious, while the Reverdian plunge into the world of dreams is "an increase in awareness through the total liberation of the imagination," the dream itself signifying "a kind of rêverie poétique." Greene, The Poetic Theory of Pierre Reverdy, p. 49. See also Anna Balakian's discussion of Rimbaud's descent into hell in The Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York: New York University, 1947), pp. 78-79.

¹⁸Reverdy, Le Gant de crin, p. 23.

¹⁹Ibid., 40.

through the channels of the mind.

However, the exploration of the human psyche must soon terminate. The mind has sought to free itself from the material world through the vehicle of dream and then thought, isolated from emotion and the senses. Yet to refuse to confront the pitfalls of the objective, mundane world would be to abstain from life:

Il ne s'agit donc pas de quitter le plan du réel
[material world], ce qui équivaldrait à aboutir au
néant, mais de le rejoindre, ... après un saut dans
la hauteur, ... ²⁰

A truer, fuller reality can be experienced at the point where dream, thought, and material objectivity are superimposed one upon the other. Once poetic change occurs at these three levels of existence and the raw material from the process is eliminated, all opposition and contradiction will cease.²¹

In addition to the context of poetic creation, Reverdy in his esthetics discusses movement--- its presence and absence---as a possible motif in poetry. In one of his earliest collections of esthetic theories, Le Gant de crin (1926), Reverdy places a great deal of importance on the static quality of art, de-emphasizing "ce qui n'est qu'apparent et fortuit, superficiel et accidentel;" accentuating "ce qui est constant et permanent."²² Reverdy's interest in static

²⁰Reverdy, "Fausses Notes," p. 10. The return to the concrete world is also treated in Guiney's La Poésie de Pierre Reverdy.

²¹The surrealists will later describe the spatial location where all oppositions are resolved as la surréalité.

²²Reverdy, Le Gant de crin, pp. 40-41.

art at this particular time is attributed to the influence of the cubist theory that existential or experiential context must be excluded from a tableau.²³ Accordingly, in the collection of prose poems entitled "Carrés" from the volume Quelques poèmes (1916), a mask is presented in an environment isolated from other related subjects and suspended in time:

Les cheveux coupés, la
tête tranchée, le sabre
restait encore entre ses
dents. Le bourreau ama-
teur pleurait et sa figure
était un masque. On l'avait
importé de Chine et il ne
savait plus être cruel.²⁴

In a prose poem from Étoiles peintes (1921), "Vieux Port," an immobile scene is described in which no incident occurs; the objects simply exist at an indefinite moment in the present. Although future motion is alluded to, the immobility of the poem is never broken:

Un pas de plus vers le lac, sur les quais,
devant la porte éclairée de la taverne.

Le matelot chante contre le mur, la femme
chante. Les bateaux se balancent, les navires tirent
un peu plus sur la chaîne. Au dedans il y a les
paysages profonds dessinés sur la glace; les nuages
sont dans la salle et la chaleur du ciel et le bruit
de la mer. Toutes les aventures vagues les écartent.
L'eau et la nuit sont dehors qui attendent. Bientôt
le moment viendra de sortir. Le port s'allonge, le
bras se tend vers un autre climat, tous les cadres
sont pleins de souvenirs, les rues qui penchent, les
toits qui vont dormir.

²³Everett Franklin Jacobus, Jr., "Pierre Reverdy and the Poetry of Cubism: Literary Responses to a Revolution in Art" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1971), p. 249.

²⁴Reverdy, "Quelques poèmes," Plupart du temps, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 66.

Et pourtant tout est toujours debout prêt à partir.²⁵

The last line suggests that the poem could almost immediately be transformed into mobility, but since motion is only potential, the static quality of "Vieux Port" is all the more accentuated.

However, there is not always a correlation between Reverdy's art theories and his poetry. Although he states in Le Gant de crin that a work of art is "un équilibre de forces, de forme, de valeurs, d'idées, de lignes, d'images, de couleurs," and that it opposes "le déséquilibre du mouvement,"²⁶ his early poetry written from 1913-1926 cannot generally be classified as static, but rather should be described as more static than Reverdy's subsequent poetry. Besides the destruction of the existential context in many of his early poems, Reverdy is frequently preoccupied with themes which limit or preclude movement such as the cross-roads, implying indecision or neutrality, or the wall, suggesting immobility. Yet there are countless other poems of this same period completely dominated by images of movement, more specifically, slipping or sliding: rapid journeys along the horizon, cyclical transformation of day into night, changes in the focal point of a particular poem. Reverdy is, perhaps, at this point in his career trying to assimilate the influence of the avant-garde movement without succumbing to servile imitation.

²⁵Reverdy, "Étoiles peintes," Plupart du temps, II, p. 67.

²⁶Reverdy, Le Gant de crin, p. 46.

Later on, in Le Livre de mon bord, a series of notes taken during the years 1930-1936, Reverdy's esthetic writings bear witness to the metaphysical crisis he experienced after the loss of his faith. Gone is the worship of equilibrium and stability; art and life are inextricably bound to transformation:

Rien n'est immuable. La seule réalité c'est le perpétuel changement, la constante transformation de tout. La substance n'est jamais identique. Ce qui est constant c'est sa transformation, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'y a rien de réel en soi mais un mouvement dont la perpétuelle continuité est la seule réalité.²⁷

It is not simply change which dominates Reverdy's later poetry, but rather, violent movement. Beginning with the volume Sources du vent (1929) and especially Ferraille (1937), his poems are filled with chaotic scenes of world holocaust and the disintegration of Reverdy's own psyche. The themes of violence abate somewhat with one of his last great collections, Le Chant des morts (1948). Here the poet seems to resign himself to the instability of human existence, anticipating his own personal descent into the abyss from which there is to be no return. The theme of death overwhelms Reverdy, especially throughout his last poems, yet in En Vrac (1956), a collection of diverse aphorisms, he envisions his poetry as a mitigating force against human finitude---

La transformation perpétuelle de l'être relatif et limité seule réalité absolue--- ... Trait d'union du fini qui se désagrège perpétuellement (la vie est

²⁷Pierre Reverdy, Le Livre de mon bord (Paris: Mercure de France, 1948), pp. 190-191.

une perpétuelle désagrégation de la matière et même de l'esprit fini qui se transforment) avec l'infini sans déperdition.²⁸

Art ensures the poet a smooth transition from rupture in the sphere of the finite to continuity in the sphere of the infinite.

²⁸ Pierre Reverdy, En Vrac (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1956), p. 162.

PART I. SOURCES OF MOVEMENT

Part I of this study is an examination of those poems of Reverdy which emphasize the place in which motion occurs. Based on the explication de texte method, a textual analysis will be made in relation to exterior and interior origins of movement, linguistic location, and finally absence of spatial position. The poems presented for discussion show either evolution or variation in the theme of slipping; their order is, for the most part, chronological. The chapters which compose Part I are as follows:

Chapter I. Exterior Origin

The Horizontal Line
The Crossroads

Chapter II. Interior Origin

The Room

Chapter III. Interior-Exterior Origin

The Wall
Linguistic Location
Absence of Spatial Position

CHAPTER I

EXTERIOR ORIGIN OF MOVEMENT

Movement, discussed in general terms in Reverdy's poetics, occurs specifically in his poetry as le glissement, an act of sliding or slipping initiated by agents of change. Le glissement poétique also appears in the poetry of Francis Ponge as the act of passing from a false (arbitrary) meaning of a word to an authentic one, from being to becoming. However, slipping as used by Reverdy implies a broader definition: going, moving, passing smoothly, quickly, easily, imperceptibly; passing gradually into or out of some condition, activity, habit, opinion; moving out of place by sliding, deviating; declining slightly, falling off; loosening. The act of sliding or slipping arises from certain sources throughout Reverdy's poetry, assumes various shapes and characteristics, and brings about change.

The Horizontal Line

Exterior movement in Reverdy's earliest poetry frequently occurs along the horizontal line. His first two collections of poems, Cale nèche (1913-1915) and Poèmes en prose (1915), introduce the horizon as a line which, as it slides, unfolds, and twists, defines the profile of the countryside. Motion along the horizon indicates the principal features of

PASSANT²⁹

Horizon du destin à force poursuivi
 Plus clair chaque matin
 le soir évanoui
 Allons toujours ailleurs
 Le soir pousse la nuit
 Et le jour en revient meilleur

Un long ruban de camelote
 lie les paysages embrouillés
 Sur l'un ou l'autre que je saute
 Mon Dieu mes souliers sont percés

Mais le chemin qui se déroule
 comme une bande de papier
 C'est un tapis roulant qui tourne
 donnant le vertige à mes pieds

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

²⁹Written during the period 1913-1915. "Cale sèche,"
Main-d'oeuvre (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), p. 455.
 All references are to this poem unless otherwise indicated.

the physical terrain and foreshadows those of a human life. The horizontal line may, then, be considered an indication for a certain destiny, some of whose characteristics can be predicted.

Among the several poems from Cale sèche which treat the theme of movement along the horizontal line, the poem "Passant" is one of the more successful attempts. In many of the poems from this collection Reverdy tries to combine too many themes, with the result that no one particular motif is successfully developed. An additional problem is the thematic material itself. Frequently Reverdy relies upon the conventional motifs of nostalgia for times past, faded memories of happiness, and change caused by the passing of time. However, in those poems where he concentrates upon a specific theme of a more original nature, he increases the richness in thought and clarity of style.

Reverdy begins the poem "Passant" from Cale sèche with a rather immobile series of horizontal lines which he enlivens progressively by adding extensions of unwinding bands. Throughout the first stanza all elements are centered around the focal point horizon. It is at the horizon that day will change into night and night into day and, in addition, the horizon is the line which man will follow to seek the events of his life. Thus the horizontal line is "à force [d'être] poursuivi." The oppositions clair/évanoui, matin/soir, soir, nuit/jour reflect the great force accessible to the world of nature, the power to transform at will. By repeating these oppositions in the lines "Plus clair chaque matin/le soir

évanoui," and "Le soir pousse la nuit/Et le jour en revient meilleur," Reverdy emphasizes the horizon as a location of cyclical transformation. Man seeks change in order to avoid the status quo. Implicit in Reverdy's "Allons toujours ailleurs," is the idea that pursuit of change may lead to improvement, a hope more apparent in "Et le jour en revient meilleur."

The horizon appears in more detail in the second stanza. It has become "un long ruban de camelote," a ribbon or band of junk. The hope for change grows fainter as the countryside, previously unspecified, is seen as entanglement or complication ("les paysages embrouillés") and linked to the negatively described horizon. The past participle embrouillés stands in contrast to the impression of order given in the cycle jour/nuit. In addition, the verb lier usually suggests unity and logical succession, whereas here, it is used to connect lines of disorder. And does not the term embrouillés also represent a variety of directions---vertical lines, spirals, or circles? The noun camelote contributes to the elements of shock and surprise; its occurrence is all the more unexpected since in the first stanza there are no completely negative terms nor are there any which connote a loss of value. The first two lines of the second stanza seem to ironically suggest, then, that any of the events encountered at different loci along the horizon will occur to man's disadvantage. Their effect upon him is made evident in the next two lines of which the significance is hidden until the final word---"Sur l'un ou l'autre que je saute/ Mon Dieu mes

souliers sont percés."³⁰ Each point along the line of confusion symbolizes an act of hostility on the part of the environment.³¹

The involuntary movement implicit in the term embrouillés is confirmed in the slipping of the horizontal line. Instead of merely stretching out in front of the reader, it has become "un chemin qui se déroule."³² The verb se dérouler suggests the action of unwinding, developing as opposed to only extending. Reverdy then compares the horizontal line (the road) which unfolds to a spool or ball of paper. The sense of movement increases as the unwinding road is likened to a "tapis roulant qui tourne"---a band or

³⁰These lines bring to mind Rimbaud's poem "Ma Bohème," in "Poésies," Poésies complètes (Paris: Éditions Gallimard and Librairie Générale Française, 1963), p. 43:

"J'allais sous le ciel, Muse! et j'étais ton féal:
.....

Où, rimant au milieu des ombres fantastiques,
Comme des lyres, je tirais les élastiques
De mes souliers blessés, un pied près de mon coeur!"

³¹Reverdy comments upon the hostility of nature in "Réflexions d'un poète sur la vie et sur l'art," Le Figaro littéraire, March 10, 1956, p. 3:

"Foncièrement antireligieux, j'ai ce fond de pessimisme qui vient du sens inné et trop aigu de l'abandon de l'homme dans la nature, de cette lutte implacable qu'il est obligé de mener sans relâche contre la nature, la sienne propre, celle des autres et les aspérités de tout ce qu'il entreprend."

The verb percer indicates that the shoes are worn out not in a passive sense (user), but in an active sense. The environment, offering neither welcome nor refuge, forces the traveler to continue and causes him both pain and anguish.

³²Reverdy, "Passant," p. 455. All references are to this poem until otherwise indicated.

belt which travels along as a conveyor. The verb tourner reinforces the idea of aimless movement, connoting lines that twist and spiral, as in the term embrouillés. As the poet attempts to follow the unfolding line or the twisting band, he experiences dizziness introduced indirectly in the past participle "percés." The repetition of the consonant t in the line "C'est un tapis roulant qui tourne" further accentuates the force of the twists.

The action of unwinding, turning, and twisting, having reached its height, soon abates in the fourth stanza. The immobility of the beginning of the poem is re-established. The road, now "la route," stretches out in front of the reader. Interrupting the calm of the stanza, the sun sets the road ablaze. Reverdy, who is disposed here to exaggeration, uses the forceful verb incendier to depict the reflection of the sun's rays, seen as a conflagration upon the horizon or road. The terms "Ce dur miroir" suggest some degree of ambiguity. They may perhaps refer to the sun itself---the harshness of its reflection---or, and most probably, to the road where the rays reflect and temporarily blind or startle the viewer. An interesting contrast is provided in the juxtaposition of the terms "dur miroir" and "m'a séduit"---callousness and inflexibility as opposed to sensitivity and responsiveness.³³ As the stanza ends, the advice given in the beginning of the poem, "Allons toujours ailleurs," is implicitly taken by the

³³The mirror may also be interpreted as a source of illusion, a mirage which attempts to deceive the poet into believing that pursuit of change can only be favorable.

poet. Accompanied by his doubt, and an intimate shadow, symbolizing perhaps an intellectual value, la conscience de soi, the poet departs once more along the horizontal line: "Nous sommes trois avec mon doute/Et l'ombre intime qui nous suit." Introduced at the beginning of the poem, the poet's intense interest in the pursuit of change has now become limited enthusiasm.

A variation upon the theme of a man proceeding along a horizontal line is found in the prose poem "Voyages trop grands." Here, the horizontal line follows a circular course. Although movement again occurs against an exterior setting along the horizon, it is much more intense, for the traveler is in a speeding train. He is seated in such a way that as he looks out, the countryside appears to be moving backwards: "et il regardait distraitemment le paysage qui allait, à rebours, bien plus vite que lui." The simultaneity of the two exterior settings (linear and circular) is perceived at the beginning of the poem with the line "C'était peut-être la première fois qu'il voyait quelque chose de clair"--- although the traveler has passed this way before, this time his perceptions may be more acute. The past participle accroché suggests the desperation of the traveler. He is clinging to the voyage, the horizontal line, hoping that it will achieve the clarity and understanding which he seeks--- "quelque destination magnifique." The terms à rebours may also indicate that the passenger is slipping backwards along the line, while the train races forwards.³⁴ Because of his

³⁴A similar theme of contrast appears in the poem "Ma Danse" by Blaise Cendrars. There, the countryside seen from

VOYAGES TROP GRANDS³⁵

C'était peut-être la première fois qu'il voyait quelque chose de clair. Il se sentait accroché au dernier wagon du train de luxe pour quelque destination magnifique et regardait distraitement le paysage qui allait, à rebours, bien plus vite que lui. Avec la somme de tous les détails perdus on aurait fait un nouveau monde; mais lui n'avait besoin de rien. De son rôle, qu'il jouait avec le plus grand sérieux, il lui manquait la signification.

Les plus grandes gares n'avaient pas assez de bruit pour l'émouvoir; au coin de toutes les collines il comprenait mieux l'isolement des maisons blanches. Quand on longeait la mer il ne voyait que les voiles des barques qui en précisaient l'étendue.

Tout est inerte et trop grand pour ses yeux et son coeur. Sa tête doit rester vide et rien ne pourrait la remplir.

Quand il revenait enfin là d'où il était parti, sa tâche bien remplie, sa journée faite il ne pensait qu'au petit coin de terre où sa vie contenait [sic], où il aurait la place juste pour mourir.

the train holds no interest for the narrator, and indeed intensifies his isolation. His voyage is also both linear and circular, for it is an imagined journey which is repeatedly made over the same terrain, beginning and ending in the same place. Like his counterpart in "Voyages trop grands," Cendrars' voyager is bored and disappointed by the predictable itinerary:

"Je suis un monsieur qui en des express fabuleux traverse les toujours mêmes Europes et regarde découragé par la portière
Le paysage ne m'intéresse plus."

However, unlike the voyager in Reverdy's poem, Cendrars' traveler becomes intrigued and in a sense hypnotized by the movement of the countryside, actually an illusion created by the train: "Mais la danse du paysage/...../Je tout-tourne." Blaise Cendrars, "Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques," Du monde entier, (Paris: Denoel, 1947), pp. 81-82.

³⁵Written about 1915. Pierre Reverdy, "Poèmes en prose,"

disorientation, he cannot fully cope with the problems which present themselves. He could perhaps have made a fresh start ("un nouveau monde") with "tous les détails perdus"--- the bits and pieces which would have made some sense out of existence and defined his purpose in life. Reality here seems to be a series of appearances or masquerades. His true self-identity has not been realized: "de son rôle, qu'il jouait avec le plus grand sérieux, il lui manquait la signification."

The traveler's hope that the voyage will cure him of his self-doubt and despair fades. Although movement is inherent in the rising and falling profiles of the hillsides, the horizontal line is used primarily in the second paragraph to outline areas where there is no human activity, the vast expanse of the sea, or to pinpoint centers of population where the traveler sees no possibility for interaction. The largest stations hold little attraction since they bring to mind the aloofness of those people with whom he has unsuccessfully attempted to relate. The confusion and clamor of railway activity have a neutralizing effect upon the traveler, "les plus grandes gares n'avaient pas assez de bruit pour l'émouvoir." Instead of thrill, he experiences oblivion.³⁶

Plupart du temps, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 48. Reference is to this poem for all subsequent quotations until otherwise indicated.

³⁶A similar scene of alienation is found in another poem of Blaise Cendrars, "Prose du transsibérien et de la petite Jeanne de France." In this poem a voyager, waiting to depart on a train journey, reflects upon moments in the past when he was overwhelmed by multitudes of people seemingly apathetic in regard to his feelings:

The tranquil isolation of the houses dotting the countryside appears at first hand in contrast to the turbulence of the large railway stations. Yet, both scenes suggest isolation and distance; as the countryside stretches out, it too, paradoxically enough, represents a "paysage fermé." Silence and alienation along the secluded route resound with the din of urban voices, "il comprenait mieux l'isolement des maisons blanches." When the route along the hillsides is supplanted by the coastal road, the infinitude of the horizontal line is represented by the noun étendue. The sails of boats are the counterparts to the white houses. They break up the expanse of the road, yet since ultimately the view changes and they disappear, they also indicate the great distance and separation along the travelled route.

The brevity of the third paragraph emphasizes the anxiety of the traveler who has now become the focal point of the poem rather than the isolated route. Referring to the adverbial expression à rebours, the adjective inerte indicates that the voyager offers no resistance to regression, or finally to perpetual ignorance of those "détails perdus."

"Et tous les jours et toutes les femmes dans les cafés
 et tous les verres
 J'aurais voulu les boire et les casser
 Et toutes les vitrines et toutes les rues
 Et toutes les maisons et toutes les vies
 Et toutes les roues des fiacres qui tournaient en
 tourbillon sur les mauvais pavés
 J'aurais voulu les plonger dans une fournaise de glaives
 Et j'aurais voulu broyer tous les os
 Et arracher toutes les langues
 Et liquéfier tous ces grands corps étranges et nus sous
 les vêtements qui m'affolent ... "

The acuity of his perceptions has not increased: "Tout est ... trop grand pour ses yeux et son coeur. Sa tête doit rester vide et rien ne pourrait la remplir." As soon as the trip began, it ended. At the same time as he has pursued the horizontal line, the traveler has completed a circle. It is with irony that Reverdy uses the terms "sa tâche bien remplie," for although the traveler may have felt that he has accomplished something, a contradictory result is suggested in the image of the barren mind ("Sa tête doit rester vide ...") The verb devoir may indicate behavior prearranged by some exterior force which has convinced the traveler of his own inadequacies and of the futility of opposition. The negative connotation associated with the horizon in "Passant" is continued in "Voyages trop grands." While in the former poem, the horizon is an unfolding, twisting line of hostility, in the latter it forms a circle of bewilderment which ultimately becomes a deepening rut or groove. Content to pass by the same road each day, the traveler merely waits for the end to be reached, at which point he will passively lie down to die. Although beset by doubt and encountering resistance from the surrounding countryside, the traveler in "Passant" perseveres in his search for self-definition, whereas in "Voyages trop grands" he resigns himself to frustration and defeat by meaninglessness.

The theme of sliding along the horizontal line is most frequently found in Reverdy's work during the period 1913-1918---that is, beginning with the poems in Cale sèche up to and including those in the collection Les Ardoises du

toit. By the time he is writing Poèmes en prose (1915), Reverdy's preoccupation with the theme of line is apparent: "Dans ma tête des lignes, rien que des lignes; si je pouvais y mettre en peu d'ordre seulement."³⁷ Reverdy's symbols for the horizontal line are many: in place of the horizon, he does not hesitate to substitute the following nouns, all indicative of wayfaring and ironical horizontality---sidewalk, path (sentier, allée, chemin), corridor, procession, rivers and riverbanks, borders of objects, barriers, etc. Although the theme of motion along the horizontal line does indeed continue long after 1918, it is not as common. Sometime around 1918 Reverdy's fascination with this theme diminishes, and he shows more interest in the idea of movement associated with vertical lines, spirals, and circles. This particular aspect of his thematic evolution is most evident in the collections Les Ardoises du toit, La Guitare endormie, Étoiles peintes, and Cravates de chanvre which show a preference for the theme of movement at the crossroads, along the wall, or around and between objects.

The Crossroads

Numerous references to the theme of motion at the crossroads are made in Reverdy's poetics, particularly in Le Gant de crin and in Le Livre de mon bord. These passages underscore the flexibility and complete receptivity of the creative process. Creation, for Reverdy, is never contained

³⁷Pierre Reverdy, "Traits et Figures," Poèmes en prose, p. 35. The underlining is mine.

within a specific space but rather at the border of, at the intersection of different spaces, lines, and planes. Here three spheres of existence, dream, thought, and material objectivity intermingle in order to produce a truer, fuller reality.³⁸

The concept of the crossroads as a site of potential creativity becomes a principal source of thematic material in Reverdy's Les Ardoises du toit. The solitary traveler, upon approaching the intersection, is confronted with the problem of knowing which direction to take, which option to pursue. This dilemma affords him an opportunity to assert himself, to at last define himself. He will exhibit more initiative than his passive counterpart associated with the horizontal line. Persistent in his search, the voyager will ultimately find no sign or indication of direction. Nor will his natural surroundings offer him any assistance. Although given the most favorable environment, movement will frequently be deferred or completely refused at the crossroads. All efforts toward receptivity and adaptation will have been in vain.

One of the best examples of this theme of trial and solitude is found in the poem "Carrefour" from the collection Les Ardoises du toit. Reverdy indicates that at the point of intersecting lines he will find the sun, again, as in the poem "Passant", the most powerful natural force. The time of day is not clear. It is either after sunset or after sunrise. The indication of time provides a reference point

³⁸See my discussion pp. 10-11.

CARREFOUR³⁹

S'arrêter devant le soleil
Après la chute ou le réveil
Quitter la cuirasse du temps
Se reposer sur un nuage blanc
Et boire au cristal transparent
De l'air
De la lumière
Un rayon sur le bord du verre
Ma main dégue n'attrape rien
Enfin tout seul j'aurai vécu
Jusqu'au dernier matin
Sans qu'un mot m'indiquât quel fut le bon chemin

³⁹Written in 1918. Pierre Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit," Plupart du temps, I. p. 208. References are to this poem for all subsequent quotation until otherwise indicated.

for the cyclical theme day/night which is about to be introduced. By placing the second line of the poem just below and to the right of the last word in the first line, Reverdy emphasizes the noun soleil (the natural force) and, in addition, the time reference set apart from the rest of the poem.⁴⁰ The repetition of the sound [ɛij] in soleil and réveil accentuates the idea that the second line is a continuation of the first. Lines one, three, four, and five are parallel in structure; they all begin with an infinitive followed by an object. The first line introduces the only other character in the poem besides the voyaging poet. The indentation of the third line slightly to the right of the left margin indicates the beginning of the threefold wish which the poet expresses: "Quitter la cuirasse du temps/Se reposer sur un nuage blanc/Et boire au cristal transparent." The term cuirasse suggests protection and defense, hence the interpretation "to leave the armor of time." The poet seeks to abandon the traditional habits, concepts of time, and limits to which he has always submitted. Freed of such customary bonds, he hopes to attain an ideal state of intellectual

⁴⁰The second line may also be set off in order to reflect a pause (s'arrêter), a moment of meditation. The poet may perhaps be weighing the significance of the terms chute and réveil which possibly not only refer to the change in time, but also to the artist's attitude toward his work --- chute implying sleep, an unawareness of artistic freedom, réveil suggesting newborn consciousness of artistic individuality and authenticity.

Anthony Rizzuto calls Reverdy's spacing and line arrangement "visual verse." Style and Theme in Reverdy's Les Ardoises du toit (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1971), see discussion pp. 139-154.

freedom and perfection, reminiscent of Reverdy's "deep reality" and governed by the infallible mind.⁴¹

The ideal state of perfection is associated with the sun, for if it can change time, it can also facilitate the poet's passage into ethereal regions. As he drinks, or as he imagines he drinks, particles of transparent crystal, a ray of sunlight falls upon his glass. If he could catch it, it would perhaps help him to reach his ideal world or give him an indication as to which road to select. However, with disappointment the poet cries,

Ma main déçue n'attrape rien
Enfin tout seul j'aurai vécu
Jusqu'au dernier matin

Functioning as a mirror, the crystalline particles reflect the ray of sunlight. Since the particles are not transparent, passage through them is impossible. The ray of sunlight slips away and no assistance is given to the wanderer. As with the poem "Passant", the sun is only a source of deception. Motion will be impossible since the traveler has no direction. Movement is, thus, reduced to the passing of day into night.

The theme of the crossroads as an exterior source of movement does not reappear again with any regularity until the works Étoiles peintes and Cravates de chanvre, published in 1921 and 1922 respectively. The religious aspect of the theme is greatly increased in a poem of the former work, "Au Carrefour des routes," where the call for direction is not always met with silence. A Christ-like figure with hands

⁴¹See my discussion of "deep reality", p. 10.

AU CARREFOUR DES ROUTES⁴²

Les bras se levaient vers la croix et la tête restait pendue au flot de ses cheveux, sous la lucarne.

Sur les marches il n'y a plus que l'ombre que le soleil projette et les mains perdues dans les rayons l'empêchent de tomber. Une voix d'en haut sortait de derrière un nuage, mais le tonnerre, en roulant, l'a brisée. Et la prière qui montait du fond n'est plus qu'un souffle, une voix de poitrine qui se laisse tomber dans les plis de la robe après être sortie.

A gauche on monte par le chemin du ciel que ne révèle aucune plaque indicatrice.

⁴²Written in 1921. Reverdy, "Étoiles peintes," Plupart du temps, II, p. 85. References are to this poem for all subsequent quotations until otherwise indicated.

outstretched and head hung low gazes at the cross. The position of his head, "pendue au flot de ses cheveux," suggests despair and foreshadows a tragic ending. The intersection of the horizontal and vertical lines in the cross is doubly significant: first, as the source of religious faith from which God's word will be made known; second, this metaphysical symbol of choice posing itself as an obstacle to decision.

Consisting of one two-line sentence, the beginning of this prose poem stands apart from the central plot. There is no introductory description of the human figure; it is merely seen as a shadow "sous la lucarne." The first negative indication is that the outstretched hands cannot be seen; they are lost in the bright light of the sun. In addition, they help the Christ-like figure to maintain his balance and therefore, buttress an already weakened institution. Up to this point motion has been kept to a minimum. Suddenly an attempt is made to answer Christ: "Une voix d'en haut sortait de derrière un nuage, mais le tonnerre, en roulant, l'a brisée." The identity of the voice is ambiguous. The terms "d'en haut" would seem to suggest God. The immobility of the poem is rapidly changed into one movement silenced swiftly by another. Action is gradually built up; a voice slides out from behind a cloud, thunder rolls and strikes it. The dominant sounds of the verbs of motion are significant: [ɛ] ("sortait") a gradual tone, followed by the [ʁ] of "roulant," a longer continuing tone, and finally [e] in "brisée," the loudest and shortest sound which occurs and suddenly ends. The harshness of the sound [e] in final position further ac-

centuates its abrupt conclusion.

As soon as the voice begins, it is stilled by thunder. The three commas after "nuage," "tonnerre," and "roulant" also add to the feeling of movement by dividing the sentence into fragmented motion. The following line is substantially longer in order to show the gradual decrease in motion. Christ's plea, slowly rising, is stifled, "elle n'est plus qu'un souffle." The softness of the sounds [su] [fl] suggests a quiet disappearance. They descend gently like a sigh which comes to rest among the folds of a dress, the folds suggesting protection and shelter. The prayer will remain hidden until Christ has again the courage to bring it forth.

The poem closes just as it began, with one brief sentence. The terms "on monte" indicate ambiguous movement. They may possibly refer to Christ who perhaps begins to move along the road, "le chemin du ciel," a continuation of the path along the horizon or possibly, the road to death. Another interpretation for the verb monter is that it theoretically serves to identify, in an impersonal manner, the path toward God, yet this route is known to no one, not even Christ: "le chemin que ne révèle aucune plaque indicatrice." Whether the human figure is actually climbing the path or not, the last sentence seems to indicate that God is beyond human understanding and therefore, inaccessible; movement towards Him is impossible.⁴³

⁴³The solitude and despair of the Christ-like figure in the poem "Au Carrefour des routes" brings to mind Alfred de Vigny's "Le Mont des oliviers," in which no response is made to Christ's plea for strength to endure suffering.

L'HOMME ET LA NUIT⁴⁴

Au carrefour on entend l'horloge et les pas du
 passant
 Au carrefour il y a parfois une voiture qui s'écrase
 et reparaît
 la lune sur le cadran
 les aiguilles qui tournent et un large visage souriant
 c'est la nuit
 Le soleil a perdu ses rayons et ce n'est plus la vie
 Ta tête n'est qu'un rond
 Pourtant
 C'est à ce moment que l'on regarde le plus le ciel
 A ce moment on pense aussi à tout ce qui se passe
 derrière les façades des maisons
 Les façades sont des faces
 Il y en a qui rient d'autres qui sont tristes
 et quelques-unes qui deviennent pâles et qui trem-
 blent dont les yeux se ferment de peur pour qu'on
 ne les voie pas
 Il y a des maisons qui sont des têtes
 et qui ont peur de leurs pensées
 C'est alors la ville interminable
 Tout se construit
 dans le calme et le silence
 pendant que tout le monde dort
 Les rayons labourent et les rues se creusent
 Les places se forment
 C'est une force placide au travail
 Et rien de tout cela ne fait de bruit
 Mais quelques hommes passent et c'est
 le mouvement
 Un nouveau souffle
 Quelque chant et tout vibre
 l'air remue
 Ce n'est plus un souterrain où tout est mort
 Je le vois de loin
 Il anime l'atmosphère et fait bouger le mur
 devant lequel il passe
 Rien n'existe que sous l'attention de son
 regard
 L'homme qui passe et que je crains

⁴⁴Written in 1929. Reverdy, "Sources du vent," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 240-241. References are to this poem for all subsequent quotations until otherwise indicated.

l'homme qui s'approche et qui s'éloigne
surtout, quand il s'éloigne
avec des mouvements regles et admirables
utiles et précis
Et quand le jour se leve pour éclairer le monde
c'est que nous avons enfin ouvert les yeux

During the years 1922-1929 there is a noticeable absence of this theme of dilemma at the crossroads. When it does reappear in Sources du vent in 1929, its religious connotations have diminished but the degree of movement it expresses has increased. As a final example of this theme, the poem "L'Homme et la nuit" traces the development of night into day. The term crossroads not only refers to intersecting streets and objects, but also depicts in detail the point at which the temporal motion occurs. This type of change which was used in a peripheral sense in the poem "Carrefour," will now be more closely associated with this particular theme.

The first part of the poem "L'Homme et la nuit" consists of the initial thirteen lines. Early evening slowly becomes night. The location of the poem is specified by the repetition of the terms "au carrefour" at the beginning of the first and third lines. Images of sound introduce the double symbol of the crossroads. The steps of a passer-by are heard while in the background, the clock strikes a nocturnal hour. The lines "parfois une voiture qui s'écrase/et reparait" refer not only to a moving car as it sinks out of sight and reappears on a swerving road, but also to the transition of night into day ("s'écrase/et reparait"). Movement from evening to night is further conveyed by the reflection of the moon on the face of the clock. Time slips by with "les aiguilles qui tournent," and becomes through identification with the clock a character in the poem, "un large visage souriant." The wide face is, of course, an

additional reference to the moon. In medial position to the lines before and after it, the phrase "la lune sur le cadran," stands out distinctly among the first six lines. Besides its irregular position, the brevity of this line emphasizes the arrival of night. Even shorter in length, the phrase "c'est la nuit" varies the long, continuous rhythm of lines one, three, and seven, and summarizes very succinctly what the first six lines have sought to do, namely to present the oncoming of night.

Lines eight through thirteen give additional explanations of this transitional period. As the emphasis upon sound diminishes, that upon shape continues. The earlier succession of round objects, l'horloge, la lune, le cadran, un large visage, is followed by the appearance of a denuded sun having lost its rays.⁴⁵ In the weak light the outlines of a human head seem no more than a faint circle---"ta tête n'est qu'un rond." Evening having become night, all movement seems to stop, "ce n'est plus la vie."

The scene depicted in the poem is far from being uninhabited. Those present at the crossroads hope to learn more about the force which has effected the temporal transition as well as to become acquainted with those people whose homes border the crossroads. Just as in the poem "Voyages trop grands," the traveler seeks to participate in whatever activity he may find along the travelled route. A warning to prepare for the unexpected is signified by the

⁴⁵The line "Le soleil a perdu ses rayons ..." recalls a similar loss in the poem "Carrefour"---"Un rayon sur le bord du verre/Ma main déçue n'attrape rien." See p. 30.

solitary position of the conjunction pourtant:

C'est à ce moment que l'on regarde le plus le ciel
 A ce moment on pense aussi à tout ce qui se passe
 derrière les façades des maisons

The theme of life and movement dominates the second part of the poem which extends from lines fourteen to twenty-eight. Those who are witnesses at the crossroads remain unsuccessful in determining the precise nature of the events which occur behind the residential façades. Where the lines intersect ("la ville interminable"), there are two types of houses, those whose façades are mere faces, and those which appear as heads. The buildings which resemble human faces adopt a superficial exterior, playing an expected role:

Les façades sont des faces
 Il y en a qui rient d'autres qui sont tristes
 et quelques-unes qui deviennent pâles et qui trem-
 blent dont les yeux se ferment de peur pour qu'on
 ne les vois pas

Those structures resembling heads have the ability not only to feel but to think and weigh different concepts. Because of an unexplained fear, they are sometimes reluctant to accept their own conclusions.

Lines nineteen and twenty form one complete thought which Reverdy has divided, placing one line under the other as if to distinguish the houses where the thought process occurs. Night will now start to slip into day. The temporal movement is at first invisible but can be felt in the jagged, z-shaped rhythm Reverdy uses to introduce morning's arrival:

Tout se construit
 dans le calme et le silence
 pendant que tout le monde dort

By frequently varying the distance of lines from the margin, Reverdy renders the lines themselves graphically significant.⁴⁶

The invisible transition in time now becomes manifest. As the light grows stronger, "les rayons labourent," the outlines of the intersection slip into place, "les rues se creusent/les places se forment." The verbs labourer, se creuser, and se former show a determined effort to define lines and their points of intersection. The personified lines assume a human character when described with the terms "C'est une force placide au travail." Calm and controlled, the movement occurring at the crossroads produces no sharp sounds or pauses, but instead flows smoothly and unnoticeably, "Et rien de tout cela ne fait de bruit." Then, beginning with the sharp sound of the conjunction mais, a scene of movement and joy is created by the reintroduction of the human element:

Mais quelques hommes passent et c'est
le mouvement
Un nouveau souffle
Quelque chant et tout vibre
l'air remue

The identity of the men is not disclosed. They are part of

⁴⁶The above comments are made under the assumption that the line arrangement is identical to that of the original manuscript and has not been altered by the publisher. Apollinaire in Calligrammes, written in 1918, (Paris: Gallimard, 1925) uses a more radical form of visual poetry. In such poems as "Paysage," p. 27, "La Cravate et la montre," p. 53, "Il Pleut," p. 64, and "La Colombe poignardée et le jet d'eau," p. 74, the lines of verse are arranged pictorially, outlining the subjects of the poem. Reverdy is more conservative in his use of visual verse, employing it primarily to reinforce rhythm as in "L'Homme et la nuit," or to indicate a change of mood as in "Carrefour."

the anonymous "quelques hommes" as is the passer-by at the very beginning of the poem. Reverdy emphasizes a vocabulary of motion---passer, le mouvement, souffle, chant, vibrer, remuer. The themes of new or reborn life and its softness are suggested in the adjective nouveau and in the noun souffle. The newly created breath will probably have the strength to withstand opposition as will the newly created day whose movement---one might call it fetal---is felt in the verbs vibrer and remuer.

The human element which now evolves from an anonymous group of men to one person designated as "il" or "le" begins to assume more importance in the poem. Maintaining a certain distance from the human figure, the narrator, also anonymous, only sees him as a reflection upon a wall. Even though the wall may actually not separate them, it forms a psychological barrier between the two men:

Je le vois de loin
 Il anime l'atmosphère et fait bouger le mur
 devant lequel il passe

In contrast to previous verbs of motion which connote the first signs of life, the verbs in the above passage suggest a continued and lively movement---animer, bouger, passer. Although the identity of the human figure remains concealed, his presence dominates the next few lines. The immobility of the narrator is juxtaposed with the continuous movements of the passer-by who approaches him and then withdraws. His movements are mechanized---"avec des mouvements réglés et admirables/utiles et précis." The reaction of the poet is

fear, fear of the distance and alienation which the mysterious man seems to symbolize. The aloof human being may be as uncertain of the route as the poet himself, although he does not seem to show it ("utiles et précis"). Nowhere in the poem does he find an indication of which direction to take. The only action occurring is the progression of night into day, "Et quand le jour se lève pour éclairer le monde/C'est que nous avons enfin ouvert les yeux." The intersecting lines may perhaps represent the frontier between reality and dream, for at the end of the poem the mysterious human figure has disappeared. If the crossroads is indeed an intersection of several planes of existence, each seems inaccessible to man. The narrator and those whom he observes have no knowledge of what may lie beyond the point of intersection, and therefore, the flexibility of choice, suggested by this very location, is erased. Only involuntary change occurs, and because there are in actuality no options to weigh, the thought process is suspended.

CHAPTER II

INTERIOR ORIGIN OF MOVEMENT

Sources of sliding have thus far been found at the elementary horizontal line, against outlines of the countryside, and finally at the meeting place of two exterior perpendicular lines. At each of these locations movement does not always freely occur. It is sometimes restricted by the voyager's inertia and lack of initiative and often denied because of his deep-felt insecurity. Yet curiously enough, certain interior locations, enclosed counterparts to these lines of unrestricted space, will be more receptive to the motion of sliding.

The Room

The theme of the room as a poetic motif is a principal interior source of motion which occurs intermittently throughout Reverdy's early poetry. It usually appears in a psychological context as in his first volume Cale sèche where it serves as a vehicle for passage from one sphere of reality to another, and also as a site of confrontation between the two strata of existence, everyday reality and the subconscious. Besides Cale sèche, the early collections La Lucarne ovale and Les Ardoises du toit treat the theme of the room rather consistently. Reverdy, in the latter text

especially, continues to associate this motif with the idea of confrontation. After a transition from one period in time to another, the consequences of this change must be faced and resulting problems resolved.

One of the earliest occurrences of the theme of the room is found in the poem "Bande de souvenirs" where, reminiscent of cubist tradition, a psychological view is superimposed upon a physical view. The room as a paysage intérieur becomes the locus for the theme of sliding or descending into the subconscious in order to define the self's inner being. The first part of the poem explores the source of movement; the last part emphasizes the themes of motion and will be analyzed in a later chapter.

Foreshadowing his religious crisis of the twenties, Reverdy begins the poem "Bande de souvenirs" with a reference to Mary Magdalene. The description found in the first four lines is general, the only details being the adjectives artificiel, vermeil, and the noun porcelaine. These three terms suggest the superficial pageantry of formal religion. As the portrait becomes precise, "Sur piédestal marbre poli/Dans la chapelle au bord des routes," the setting becomes more specific. The location of the chapel along the edges of the road is another example of Reverdy's continued reference to the horizontal line as a means of orientation and structure. The polished marble of the pedestal is associated with the stiff fragility of organized religion. By emphasizing that the statue has been placed upon a pedestal, Reverdy makes it an absolute ideal of perfection, unattainable for those of

BANDE DE SOUVENIRS⁴⁷

Corps artificiel
 portrait vermeil
 Buste de porcelaine
 de sainte Marie Madeleine
 Sur piédestal marbre poli
 Dans la chapelle au bord des routes
 Sa robe en plâtre fait des plis
 aux replis que l'âme redoute
 des saints marcheurs de l'univers que talonnait
 l'ange pervers

La chanson coule
 le temps s'écoule
 toi qui écoutes
 Sors de ton doute

L'âme hardie c'est le temps plus fort
 tort redoutable qui endort

Bordure verte
 la porte ouverte
 entre partout
 n'importe où
 En deux branches le ciel bifurque
 Nuages turbans à la turque
 Dans le fossé des secrets
 cachés sous des regrets
 Pour en éparpiller les plumes
 forge ton envie sur l'enclume
 Dans l'antre y entre qui s'étonne
 Comme il garde ce qu'on lui donne
 Au pont sonore
 existe encore
 l'orbe argentin
 des séraphins

Vague d'eau douce et transparente
 Mousse sous tes pas émouvante
 La pierre glisse
 Sous ton pied nu

⁴⁷Written between 1913-1915. Reverdy, "Cale sèche,"
Main d'oeuvre, pp. 469-472. All references are to this poem
 until otherwise indicated.

S'épanouisse
 l'or reconnu
 En étoffe de baldaquin
 l'odorant sillage des pins

Le clair de lune de travers
 s'en ira vers
 la route d'étoiles à l'envers
 Oiseau de lune miel des abeilles
 au bercement de la corbeille
 transformable en habitation
 Où naît et meurt ton émotion

Fausse est la promesse
 Noire la détresse
 Au verso du mur le
 grand chien qui hurle

Haie de cyprès
 du dernier pré
 repos sommeil
 dans le soleil

La brèche dans le mur
 débordant sur
 le chemin creux
 tout près du calvaire trop vieux

Longue rangée de platanes
 la lueur se fane
 à l'ombre douce
 l'eau dans ma bouche
 Encore d'en haut
 le soleil a bu le ruisseau

Irradiante crête bleue
 Vers les adieux
 Chante au départ
 S'il est trop tard

Continue le chemin
 Ce soir comme demain
 Mouvante lumière
 dans la clairière
 repos de la veillée
 sous la lampe allumée

Ces calmes ornements supposent
 le mystère immense où éclosent
 voix plaintives en mouvement
 les invisibles dans le vent

Par le choc amorti
 sur un carré d'orties

du bloc de pierre
en aiguiere
du bloc de bois
du Christ en croix

Puis brutalement tout s'évade
Mais le navire reste en rade
Aux mille feux du boulevard
Du phare ardent de ton regard

weak convictions.

The setting of the poem changes from a chapel along the road to a place of refuge in the mind. Mary Magdalene's clothing falls loosely into folds, "Sa robe en plâtre fait des plis/aux replis que l'âme redoute." The folding lines of her dress are then retraced by the creases or inner recesses of the mind.⁴⁸ The folds, emphasized by the triple recurrence of the consonants pl ("plâtre," "plis," "replis"), suggest the creases in the gowns of marching saints which the perverse angel, discord or debate, was following.

Suddenly the serious tone of the poem is interrupted:

La chanson coule
le temps s'écoule
toi qui écoutes
Sors de ton doute

⁴⁸The image of the fold or pli is frequently found in Reverdy's poems which precede his most pessimistic volumes, Ferraille and Le Chant des morts. It generally connotes protection, sometimes in only a physical sense as in the poem "Au Carrefour des routes" where Christ's plea descends among the folds of his garment, sometimes in a more intellectual sense, as in the poem "Bande de souvenirs," where the folds (replis) of the soul provide shelter within the inner recesses of the mind for untapped sources of poetic inspiration and individual psychological development.

Reverdy's preoccupation with the image of the pli is probably a result of his admiration for Mallarmé who greatly developed this theme, primarily in an intellectual context. For example, in the "Ouverture" of the Hérodiade, the folds provide a repository for past thoughts and deeds which now lie stagnant (p. 42). Interior shelter is again suggested by folds in the prose work Quant au livre where they refer to an unexplored receptacle of literary genius (p. 370), whose virginity is ultimately violated in order to permit future knowledge to disseminate (p. 381). Mallarmé Oeuvres complètes, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, ed. by Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Auby (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

Introducing motion with the verbs couler and s'écouler, Reverdy uses a traditional metaphor to express the thought that just as a song flows along and time passes quickly, so must his spirit or mind resolve its crisis before time runs out. The unity in length, sound, and rhythm of these four lines makes them appear as one distinct whole. Appearing once at the end of each line, the verbs "coule," "s'écoule," "écoutes," "doute" suggest movement and provide spirited rhythm. However, a grave tone is resumed once more with the longer lines, "L'âme hardie c'est le temps plus fort/tort redoutable qui endort." Addressing the soul directly, Reverdy establishes time as a force to be reckoned with. The soul has gathered all its courage in order to confront the increased strength of time. It is a confrontation which must occur, for by failing to reassess its values and convictions, the soul commits a dangerous wrong which will numb and paralyze the intellectual faculties of the mind.

The motion of temporal sliding in the first quatrain (lines eleven through fourteen) is succeeded in a second quatrain (lines seventeen through twenty) by the movement of passing from one place to another. The terms "bordure verte" could possibly refer to the edge of the grass along the road, or perhaps to the fringe or folds of Mary Magdalene's dress. With the introduction of the noun-adjective sequence "la porte ouverte" comes the impression that the focal point of the poem is located at the edge of a door, an open green door, a means of passing towards freedom. The three possible references for the noun bordure show a progression from the

exterior (outside the chapel) to the interior (inside the chapel), from the world of everyday reality to a paysage intérieur, from the border of Mary Magdalene's dress to the entrance to the mind through a door of freedom. By simultaneously presenting three different contexts of the noun bordure, Reverdy relies again upon cubist technique and distinguishes bordure as an object and location in its own right. The last two lines of the quatrain, "entre partout/n'importe où," emphasize the flexibility and freedom permitted during the passage.

Having slipped through the folds of material to the inner chambers of the mind, the reader discovers that nothing has yet been resolved. There again appears a crossroads, this time an interior crossroads, "En deux branches le ciel bifurque." Reverdy's description of the sky in this paysage intérieur shows a preference for direct juxtaposition of terms: "Nuages turbans à la turque." The conjunction comme which could occur between the nouns nuages and turbans has been avoided. An enigmatic sky offers no clear indication of direction; its clouds appear in exotic unfamiliar wrappings. The next indication as to the actual locus of the crossroads is found in the noun fossé: "Dans le fossé des secrets/cachés sous des regrets." For the first time depth has been implied. The crossroads, then, are located in an interior chamber in the depths of the mind, heretofore unexplored recesses. The past participle cachés again suggests the folds of the dress which have become those of the room, a chamber filled with subconscious secrets and

regrets. The use of assonance ("fossé," "secrets," "cachés") links those words which relate to the interior refuge and its contents. The necessity of making a decision is reiterated with the commands, "forge ton envie sur l'enclume," and the causal infinitive phrase, "Pour en éparpiller les plumes." The feathers connote the traces or remains of the material hidden in the inner chamber.⁴⁹ After the poet has digested this material and decided what to retain or eliminate, the remains will be scattered and he will have at last confronted himself.

Presenting an additional description of this decisive moment, Reverdy uses the noun antre to specify location: "Dans l'antre y entre qui s'étonne/Comme il garde ce qu'on lui donne." The noun antre, connoting a primitive shelter, seems even more appropriate as the source of decision. The primeval quality of the chamber is significant, for when the decision has been made, the poet or actor will in a sense be reborn, purged of predatory memories and doubts. He at first will not recognize himself, "Celui qui s'étonne," for he will have arrived at a layer of identity which he formerly possessed but never saw---"Comme il garde ce qu'on lui donne." This descent into the inner depths of emotional conflict

⁴⁹The feathers constitute in a sense a sacrificial image, suggesting intellectual values which have been abandoned subsequent to the resolution of emotional conflict. Again Reverdy is probably borrowing from Mallarmé who linked the theme of the folds with the image of the bird (plis, plumes, ailles). Struggling to escape the sphere of everyday, mundane existence, the bird attempts to fly (ailles) towards the azur, the sphere of artistic perfection, symbolized by the intellectual sanctuaries within the folds of the ever-

recalls Reverdy's theory of the poet's fall into the abyss of dreams. Like the poet who selects only those grains of gold susceptible to providing further inspiration, the human actor in "Bande de souvenirs" will retain only those emotional fibers receptive to additional growth and development. At the moment of selection or decision, the crossroads within the inner chamber will become an "orbe argentin/des séraphins," a silvery tinsel-like sphere inhabited by celestial beings. The action of sliding across the threshold into this sphere is suggested by the term pont, which as the initial noun in the third quatrain, refers to the point at which all conflict and discord are resolved.⁵⁰

present fan (éventail). As the bird initiates flight, he is often hurt and sacrifices part of himself, his feathers, just as the poet, who struggles to write, sacrifices his own energy and creative spirit. See Mallarmé's treatment of these images in the poems "Les Fenêtres," written in 1863, pp. 32-33, and "Le Démon de l'analogie," written in 1864, pp. 272-273, in Mallarmé Oeuvres complètes.

⁵⁰The point of resolution is a fundamental concept in surrealist doctrine. André Breton states in Le Second Manifeste:

"Tout porte à croire qu'il existe un certain point de l'esprit d'ou la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, cessent d'être perçus contradictoirement. Or c'est en vain qu'on chercherait à l'activité surréaliste un autre mobile que l'espoir de détermination de ce point." André Breton, Manifestes du surréalisme, quoted in Michel Carrouges, André Breton et les Données fondamentales du Surréalisme (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), p. 23.

Le point suprême peut ainsi demeurer pour les surréalistes le lieu idéal et réel de la résolution de toutes les antinomies, le lieu où se rassemblent toutes les énergies divines dont Nietzsche rêvait d'opérer la récupération." Carrouges, p. 33.

TARD DANS LA NUIT⁵¹

La couleur que décompose la nuit
 La table où ils se sont assis
 Le verre en cheminée
 La lampe est un coeur qui se vide
 C'est une autre année
 Une nouvelle ride
 Y aviez-vous déjà pensé
 La fenêtre déverse un carré bleu
 La porte est plus intime
 Une séparation
 Le remords et le crime
 Adieu je tombe
 Dans l'angle doux des bras qui me reçoivent
 Du coin de l'oeil je vois tous ceux qui boivent
 Je n'ose pas bouger
 Ils sont assis
 La table est ronde
 Et ma mémoire aussi
 Je me souviens de tout le monde
 Même de ceux qui sont partis

⁵¹Written in 1918. Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit," Plupart du temps, I, p. 174. All subsequent quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

In addition to representing inner psychological sanctuaries filled with unresolved conflict, the room appears later in Les Ardoises du toit as the source of memory, the point at which the present meets the past. The poem "Tard dans la nuit" presents a circular structure; it begins in the present, returns to the past, only to be confronted again with the tragic present. Creating the first psychological tableau of the poem, Reverdy, up to the eleventh line, depicts the room of the present as connoting separation, nostalgia, and regret. The verb décomposer in the first line sets the serious tone of the poem and accentuates the motion of breaking apart and distorting. Night will divide the color or light of the tableau, fragment the memories and those who took part in them.⁵² The focal point of the past event about to be reconstructed is the table where they sat down. The verb "ils se sont assis" in the passé composé expresses the theme of juxtaposed oppositions, present and past.

In the second part of the poem which begins at the fourth line, the lamp ("le verre en cheminée," "la lampe,") assumes more importance. It is probably positioned on the table around which the characters of the past will soon be seated and may also possibly correspond to light reflected from the fireplace. The lamp is compared, and quite traditionally so, to a heart which empties itself, pumping out

⁵²Here the refraction of light recalls the prism image formed by crystalline particles in the poem "Carrefour." See p. 30.

as much blood as it possibly can. A principal source of light for the room, it will be the receptacle of life. Yet, if it does not refill with its life-giving fluid, it also becomes the symbol of death. The act of emptying itself at frequent intervals suggests the cyclical nature of the theme present/past/present. Lines five and six, "C'est une autre année/Une nouvelle ride," introduce the temporal element. Each emptying of the pump or each flicker of the flames symbolizes another year, another wrinkle. The terms "Une nouvelle ride" are found directly under the terms to which they stand in apposition. Another year has just passed to further separate the present and the memory. Reverdy, directly addressing himself or possibly the reader, emphasizes the passing of this recent year by using the past perfect tense and thereby referring to an action substantially removed in time, "Y aviez-vous déjà pensé." There is no need for punctuation, but a pause for reflection is provided by the indentation of the following line.

The third part, beginning at the eighth line, presents the final two characters of the poem, the window and the door. In addition to the movement provided by the verbs décomposer and se vider of the first and second stanzas respectively, there is now the motion contributed by the verb déverser. Although the window permits light to slip in and out of the room, the door, closer to the poet in terms of psychological distance ("plus intime"), seems to be preferred as an instrument of passage. The direction is ambiguous, yet given the poem as a recollection of past events, the door may serve

as a means to pass from the outside in, from the reflection of the light to the light itself.

A structural profile of the first part of the poem can be found, then, in several significant sets of lines⁵³--- "la table," "la lampe," "la fenêtre," "un carré," and "la porte"---acted upon by verbs with potentially negative connotations---"décomposer," "se vider," "déverser"---in the presence of another noun which scarcely suggests happiness or high spirits---"une nouvelle ride." The poet summarizes the meaning of this succession of terms with the last two lines of the first part of the poem: "Une séparation/Le remords et le crime." Negating the effort of the poet to lessen the distance between his present and past, the lines and the actions they convey only serve to intensify a sense of guilt and isolation. With the exception of lines eight and ten, Reverdy uses rhyme to join the three stanzas into one block of thought at a particular moment. After the first two lines, joined by the assonance [yi] and [Si], each rhyme set is separated by one line. This separation only seems more appropriate in view of the theme of fragmentation.

Yet in spite of the fragmented tableau, the empty room of the present does change into a spirited memory of the past. In the second part of the poem the poet slips into the tableau

⁵³An emphasis upon the linear structure of the poem and its subject is also present in several early poems entitled "Carrés," in particular, the poem "De la reliure..." from *Quelques poèmes*, Plupart du temps, I, p. 66:

"De la reliure de tes
lèvres de la reliure de
tes volets de la reliure

by passing from the lines of the room ("l'angle doux") to the structures of his thought ("dans l'angle doux des bras qui me reçoivent"). The first line of the second part of the poem, "Adieu je tombe," is quite ambiguous. The poet could be falling in the sense of falling to his death or collapsing in the arms of Christ, or on the other hand, he could be descending into his past, dreaming in his mother's arms. The latter interpretation is not confirmed until the adjective doux occurs. At this point the softness of the corner of the room or the angle of the arms in the memory foreshadows the action of the verb recevoir. By using a much longer line to follow the brief opening of the second part, Reverdy rhythmically verifies the descent into the past. It is interesting to note that this movement downward is only referred to once by the verb tomber. The nouns fossé and antre, indicating the materiality of the place, are absent, thereby rendering the descent more psychological than physical.

The previously empty room becomes even more crowded. To emphasize the slipping from present to past, Reverdy repeats in the fourteenth line what he has just described in the thirteenth line: "Du coin de l'oeil je vois tous ceux qui boivent." The terms "du coin de l'oeil" echo the intimacy of the "angle doux." The je corresponds to the me in the preceding line and both appear in contrast to the groups of people belonging to the past---"tous ceux" which is associated

de nos mains. O peut-être plus facile. Sur le balcon de bois elle montait la garde en chemise éclatante."

with the terms "des bras." The verbs "boivent" and "reçoivent" both suggest action and the common rhyme [i'v] further creates the impression of duplication.

The characters of the past are seated at a round table just as the poet has remembered them. Using an irregular linear form for lines sixteen through eighteen, Reverdy implies that there are significant gaps in the thoughts they convey. While trying to reconstruct the tableau with as much detail as possible, the poet suffers a lapse of memory, perhaps occurring over several minutes. The sentence "La table est ronde" is a continuation of the thought contained in the verb "ils se sont assis," but it has occurred some time subsequently and therefore, instead of being placed directly after this line, is inserted below it. In addition, the medial position of line seventeen may also serve to more closely link the idea of the roundness of the table and of the poet's memory. Occurring medially between two lines of description which refer to the characters of the past, the line "Je n'ose pas bouger," contrasts with the immobility of the je and the movements and positions of the ils. Line fifteen could, because of the context, go with either line fourteen or line sixteen. On the other hand, perhaps its function is not to join but to interrupt and separate the descriptive elements. If so, it not only emphasizes the distance between the je and the ils, but also punctuates the description, giving the poet time to reconstruct his memory.

The shape of the table is the last detail which the poet's mind can resurrect and now, its shape will be trans-

ferred to the outline of the memory itself. As the poem reaches full circle, the poet again finds himself in the deserted room of the present, inhabited solely by the je who nostalgically thinks of all those who passed on: "Je me souviens de tout le monde/Même de ceux qui sont partis."

During the approximate period 1919-1928, there is a noticeable hiatus in the theme of the room as an interior source of motion. After Les Ardoises du toit it appears very infrequently and does not reoccur often until 1929 with the publication of Sources du vent. It also constitutes a very important theme in a volume of poetry of 1930, Pierres blanches, but it never reappears thereafter as principal thematic material. In short, the room as a poetic motif is freely explored and developed in Reverdy's early poetry, vanishes, and then reappears just before the extremely pessimistic poetry of his later style begins.⁵⁴

The familiar psychological context of the room as an interior source of motion changes from a place of emotional reconciliation, or of union of past and present, to one which is transposed into a purely physical setting. Earlier in Reverdy's poetry the room displays only general characteristics

⁵⁴ During the years of his religious crisis, Reverdy may have found it difficult to be confronted with this inner place so often associated in his poetry with the reconciliation of beliefs both past and present. Moreover, until the late twenties, at which point his psychological instabilities seem to be resolved, it may have been impossible for him to assume the task of reassessing the significance of memories and the value of their reconstruction. After Pierres blanches and with the onset of Reverdy's deepening pessimism, he again is perhaps too preoccupied with the theme of disintegration and death to critically re-examine his own values.

IL DEVAIT EN EFFET FAIRE BIEN FROID⁵⁵

Il y a moi
 Et toutes les sonneries se mettent en branle à
 la fois dans la maison
 Pourquoi apporte-t-on tant de cloches et de réveils
 De la tapisserie où mon corps s'aplatit de
 profil les mains en forme de plateau deman-
 dant grâce je regarde ma vie d'où je me suis
 retiré
 Les distances sont abolies et pourtant tout reste
 en place
 Il manque seulement un peu d'air
 L'harmonie des lignes suffisait à maintenir
 chaque meuble dans l'épaisseur
 Mais par moments on ne les reconnaissait pas
 Le visiteur est au salon ou devant la porte à
 attendre après avoir sonné
 Et tous ceux qui passent tiennent leur chapeau à la
 main
 Mais à présent je ne peux plus descendre
 La tapisserie tremble
 Il fait trop froid

⁵⁵Written in 1930. Reverdy, "Pierres blanches,"
Main-d'oeuvre, p. 285. All subsequent quotations are from
 this poem unless otherwise indicated.

(the door, the window), but later it reveals a nature much more specific as in the poem "Il devait en effet faire bien froid." In this poem from Pierres blanches the room is more appropriately called a chamber, a funeral chamber. Perhaps the most important feature of the poem's structure is the contrast between the moi or je and the other people visiting the chamber, immobility as opposed to mobility, or death versus life.

Perhaps a foreshadowing of the intense, bitter gloom found in the poetry of Ferraille and of Le Chant des morts, the theme of contrast between life and death is apparent with the first line of the poem. The idiom il y a implies no movement, simply a given position. In opposition to the immobile "moi," the details of the room such as its chimes make themselves known. Set into motion, all the chimes ring at one time. The simultaneity of their movement creates a contrast between the sonorous or mobile as represented by the inter-relating objects and the spatial or immobile as represented by the position of the solitary figure. The diversity of line length, that is, the extremely short first line followed by a substantially longer second line, further accentuates the opposition of noise versus death. Reverdy, dividing the second and third lines into several natural pauses, "Et toutes les sonneries se mettent en branle à/la fois dans la maison," creates a jerky, swinging rhythm resembling the movement of bells. By selecting the inversion "apporte-t-on" instead of the more traditional "est-ce que" form, Reverdy

stresses the unexpectant attitude of the "moi," who wonders why the bells and alarms are present. The term cloches is perhaps used in the sense of a bell ringing at a funeral, symbolizing the end of life, while the noun réveil may refer to a bell which will awaken the dead to their new life. It is not impossible, considering Reverdy's depression during the thirties that the alarm bell is used quite ironically, that is, a bell to awaken one to a new experience, death. The "moi" and his corpse have been awakened to observe their own funeral.

The introduction of the death motif is presented in one long block of prose description, punctuated only by the context:

De la tapisserie où mon corps s'aplatit de
profil les mains en forme de plateau deman-
dant grâce je regarde ma vie d'où je me suis
retiré

Reverdy has again used line to suggest death---"tapisserie," "mon corps s'aplatit," "de profil." The prepositional phrase "de la tapisserie", specifying the point from which the corpse observes, reinforces his immobility. Only his hands raised to appeal for mercy interrupt the horizontal line drawn by his body. Having become a stationary object, he will now look back at his life as a block in time, it too having been reduced to an object. The phrase "je regarde ma vie" emphasizes the polarity "moi"/"je" versus "la vie." The corpse does not talk of dying but instead of slipping away from life, "d'où je me suis retiré." By leaving the past participle retiré as the final term for the last line of the

stanza, the theme of withdrawal from life is further accentuated.

Once more with attention to the physical arrangement of his verse, Reverdy begins the reconstruction of the dead man's life at the left hand margin and then indents the remaining lines included. It is a description based on contradictions. First, lines nine and ten, "Les distances sont abolies et pourtant tout reste/en place," present the oppositions change versus no change. As he looks back upon his former life, the deceased "moi" realizes he is dead and that this previous world is indeed unreal. With the phrase "Les distances sont abolies" appears a feeling of abrupt action. Suddenly death becomes life and those who have been denied participation are now free to participate. The conjunction et used medially between lines nine and ten usually suggests a logical, sequential association. The warning of surprise is delayed but does appear in the term pourtant. Although distances have been dissolved, everything remains just the same. The funeral chamber of death is only replaced by that of life. In life as in death, there is no interaction, only separation. The description is punctuated by a tone of irony and heavy sarcasm, "Il manque seulement un peu d'air." The adverb seulement indicates that many other elements also were missing; a little air would hardly have nourished an entire life.

More oppositions are revealed in the following lines. The positive connotation of the noun l'harmonie, a definite

feeling of accord, is neutralized in line twelve by the negative feeling suggested in the term l'épaisseur, found in line thirteen and referring to indefinite size, sentiment, or character. The noun lignes emphasizes the definitive quality of harmony. If there was harmony or a blending together of the profiles of his friends and possessions, there certainly should have emerged some specific shapes and characters. However, all that the dead man can resurrect is each piece of furniture, each object, each memory of a certain material thickness. Finally the terms "L'harmonie des lignes suffisait à maintenir," are contradictory, for if indeed harmonious lines were sufficient to maintain the reality ("l'épaisseur") of certain objects, then the force of the verb maintenir gives the impression that nothing has changed, that even in life, these memories were thoughts of death. In view of this effort to reconstruct the events of his life, perhaps the term réveils was used to imply a secular awakening or resurrection.

Slipping back into his present state of death, the corpse is as distant from those who have come to mourn him as he has been from those who have appeared in his memories. Line fourteen links his reconstructed life with his newly-created death: "Mais par moments on ne les reconnaissait pas." The pronoun les could refer to the objects of his past ("chaque meuble") or possibly to the visitors who have come to view the body. The position of the mourners is even ambiguous; they are either in the living room or in front of the door. The participial phrase "après avoir sonné"

connects the end of the poem with the ringing of the chimes at the beginning. The people who enter the chamber are represented in very general terms, "le visiteur," or the almost impersonal "tous ceux." Their visit, described in the phrase "tous ceux qui passent," is regarded as a passing through the chamber, implying a quick departure. Besides the verb passer, the only other distinguishing feature is provided by the verb tenir; they hold their hats in their hands, a conventional gesture at such a solemn occasion. These people are not individuals; they merely represent society ritually conducting a prescribed ceremony.

As the poem is about to end, a sense of an immediate present, more recent than just a few seconds ago, is expressed by the adverb à présent. The "moi" at the beginning is now supplemented by the "je" at the end. No longer able to descend into the past, or perhaps as if in a dream---a motion downward towards the door, the corpse is about to yield to death. The final sign of life comes not directly from his body, but instead from the trembling movement of the tapestry, and as the folds slip one into the other, the man dies.⁵⁶ As if to intensify the finality of life and its

⁵⁶The movement of the pleats as they slip together again suggests Mallarmé's image of the closed fan. Instead of a transition from life to death, the closed fan, for Mallarmé, represents poetic genius which has not yet attempted creation (l'épanouissement), a symbol, then, of potential creativity, or poetic élan which, plagued by fear of sterility, has been unsuccessful in self-expression and now lies neglected and stagnant. In a sense, this interpretation is close to Reverdy's use of the image in the poem "Il devait en effet faire bien froid." See "Autre Éventail," and "Quant au livre," Mallarmé Oeuvres complètes, p. 58 and p. 370.

last fragile moments, lines nineteen and twenty are the only lines in the poem connected successively by assimilation [dr] [bl]. The transition from life to death is realized by juxtaposing the fluttering movements of the tapestry folds and the realization of a sudden chill in the air, "Il fait trop froid." The allusion to the drop in temperature links the final line with the title. The corpse is forgotten and only the chill associated with its state of death is left in the room.

The chamber then becomes death itself, represented by the sum of its parts---the chimes, the tapestry, and finally the funereal chill. Since the chill is all that remains, the reader's thoughts return to the title where the impersonal expression il devait reinforces the distance between the "je" and the visitors. The movement occurring within the funeral chamber, the ringing of the chimes, the visitors passing by, the last fluttering of the tapestry, and finally the permeation of cold air, has all been prearranged and man has no choice but to play out the script.

CHAPTER III

INTERIOR-EXTERIOR ORIGIN OF MOVEMENT

The theme of slipping in Reverdy's poetry also occurs in both exterior and interior settings derived from such thematic figures^{as} the wall and associated with linguistic location and an absence of spatial position. Whereas slipping is frequently impeded in settings which are only exterior or interior, it generally will occur with minimal restriction in the above settings with one notable exception, at the wall. Like the crossroads, the wall as a location stands as one of the principal obstacles to the theme of sliding freely from one place to another.

The Wall

Implicit in each setting previously discussed is a lack of communication and of general understanding among men. Besides the thematic figure of the horizontal line, it is perhaps one of the most consistent Reverdian themes, for it is treated in almost every volume of poetry that he wrote. In order to depict this theme of separation and hostility, Reverdy frequently selects the wall as a setting.⁵⁷ Although

⁵⁷That which causes isolation among men, is according to Reverdy, "un mur de glace":

"Mais au premier obstacle sérieux, qui nous oblige à aller au fond de l'âme et de l'être, nous nous apercevons que l'union parfaite et totale entre les

motion is sometimes permitted at the wall, it is usually only minimal and its development is greatly limited. Already haunted in Cale sèche by the figure of the wall, Reverdy writes, "J'étais seul devant le mur sans fin."⁵⁸ Continuing to reoccur often in his poems, the wall as a setting is particularly stressed in the works Les Ardoises du toit (1918), Sources du vent (1929), Flaques de verre (1929), and Pierres blanches (1930).

Determination to find a means through the wall frequently results in disappointment, for often in Reverdy's poetry after one principal barrier has been crossed, others appear in succession to take its place. Freedom of passage to and from is implied by the title "L'Esprit sort," a poem from the work Poèmes en prose which supposedly received its inspiration from time spent at the Bibliothèque Nationale.⁵⁹ However, the free association of ideas suggested in the title

hommes est impossible. Nous nous heurtons à un mur de glace. Il y a un trou noir qui nous paraît être le plus profond de nous-même, et qui pourtant, nous est étranger à nous-même." Reverdy, Le Gant de crin, p. 74.

The terms "mur de glace," suggesting solitude and alienation, are later replaced by a permeating funeral chill in the poem "Il devait en effet faire bien froid." Both for the corpse and for the visitors who have come to bid farewell, life has been a lonely, agonizing death.

⁵⁸The poem "Sujets," from "Cale sèche," Main d'oeuvre, p. 500.

⁵⁹Blaise Cendrars recalls a remark Reverdy made which was later to help identify the setting of this poem:

"Pierre Reverdy me disait que chaque fois qu'il entrerait dans la salle de lecture (de la Bibliothèque Nationale), il avait une sensation d'étouffement et qu'il était pris d'une envie de faire son trou dans

L'ESPRIT SORT⁶⁰

Que de livres! Un temple dont les murs épais étaient bâtis en livres. Et là dedans, où j'étais entré on ne saura comment, je ne sais par où, j'étouffais; les plafonds étaient gris de poussière. Pas un bruit. Et toutes ces idées si grandes ne bougent plus; elles dorment, ou sont mortes. Il fait dans ce triste palais si chaud, si sombre!

De mes ongles j'ai griffé la paroi et, morceau à morceau, j'ai fait un trou dans le mur de droite. C'était une fenêtre et le soleil qui voulait m'aveugler n'a pas pu m'empêcher de regarder dehors.

C'était la rue mais le palais n'était plus là. Je connaissais déjà une autre poussière et d'autres murs qui bordaient le trottoir.

cet amas de livres ... (de) retrouver la lumière." Guiney, p. 119.

⁶⁰Written in 1915. Reverdy, "Poèmes en prose," Flupart du temps, I, pp. 43-44. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

is promptly negated by a description of the physical setting, a library whose walls are reinforced by fixed layers of intellectual material. Intersecting lines forming numerous flat, rectangular surfaces which enclose, appear in the exclamatory phrase, "Que de livres!" Beginning as small versions of restricting lines, the books will multiply until their numbers join to form the partitions of the library: "dont les murs épais étaient bâtis en livres." The noun livre becomes at this point a synonym for physical building material. By using the term temple to refer to the library, Reverdy alludes to the respect due this building as a center for knowledge and wisdom of previous eras. The three adverbial phrases which follow, "Et là dedans, où j'étais entré on ne saura comment, je ne sais par où," reinforce the idea of enclosure, for it all happens there, in that place. In addition, they indicate that whatever mysterious aperture once existed has now vanished. The walls of books have formed a prison. At this point there is no movement; even the air remains stagnant. The enclosure seems to be surrounding the prisoner who starts to suffocate.

The ceilings, too, are restricting partitions, differing from the walls because of their soft thickness of dust instead of the harder layer created by books. The description "gris de poussière" suggests that the ceilings are lined with decay and neglect. The ideas contained in the books represent stagnant knowledge, useless or unused. They merely impose themselves as obstacles, never move, or offer

any relevant rapport with daily life. Their outdated knowledge is content to rot away in the silent, humid tomb: "Et toutes ces idées si grandes ne bougent plus; elles dorment, ou sont mortes." By the end of the first paragraph, it seems apparent that the initial description of the library as a temple is somewhat ironic. In actuality, the library is more like a mausoleum, containing neglected mementos of the past, capable only of causing paralysis instead of intellectual growth.⁶¹

The tone of imposed stagnation throughout the first paragraph changes to one of determined resistance as the prisoner seeks passage through any one of the walls. The phrase "De mes ongles, j'ai griffé la paroi," suggests the desperation which has led him to follow his animal instincts. With the adverbial phrase, "morceau à morceau," Reverdy stresses the slow, gradual passage. The wall is finally penetrated and the prisoner slips through the hole. As he escapes, it is uncertain as to whether he has actually made a hole through the books, or has simply discovered a window. Whichever is the more accurate interpretation, the noun trou only occurs once and thereafter, the opening is referred to as a window. The movement of pushing outward is balanced by

⁶¹Guiney on p. 80 interprets the books as symbols of a literature of the past which Reverdy felt a need to abandon in order to find an art more suited to his artistic needs, a poetry of originality and innovation which would not imitate symbolism, cubism, or futurism, but which would select and discard motifs from a varied background, and then assimilate them in an innovative corpus. While Guiney's interpretation seems logical, is it not equally possible that the dated books refer not only to outmoded literary principles but also to

the effort of the sun's rays to slip inward, "et le soleil qui voulait m'aveugler." However, the former prisoner does manage to reach his objective, to realize a visual possession of what he previously was denied, "de regarder dehors." Yet, upon looking out, he sees that even outside the walls of the building, the barriers do not end, "Je connaissais déjà une autre poussière et d'autres murs qui bordaient le trottoir." The successors to the library walls are the restricting lines of the street, the pavement, and the houses beyond. The verb border gives the impression that all shapes and size of objects are determined by what they border, limit, or define. The road along which these objects are found is without end. As soon as one barrier has been passed, several extensions will emerge to take its place.⁶² The search for innovation and the reassessment of values will be difficult to pursue, for the poet will be confronted by restricting literary and social conventions.

A slightly more positive connotation of the wall is found in the poem "Route" from Les Ardoises du toit. Contrary

those conventional tenets of all phases of life?

⁶² Jean-Pierre Richard in his Onze Etudes sur la poésie moderne (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964) defines the Reverdian wall as "Le mur, c'est bien l'être lui-même, mais l'être refusé, retourné, et devenu non-être." (p. 15) The line which forms the wall, he sees as the "enemy" because "elle enserme une réalité qui se voudrait illimitée." (p. 27)

Also commenting upon the theme of the wall, Georges Poulet states in an article from Pierre Reverdy 1889-1960 (Paris: Mercure de France 1962, p. 230, "Le monde rêve par lui ne se recule nullement dans le lointain. Il est là, peut-être tout près, peut-être à portée de la main, mais derrière un écran qui interdit de le voir ... C'est un mur.")

ROUTE⁶³

Sur le seuil personne
 Ou ton ombre
 Un souvenir qui resterait
 La route passe
 Et les arbres parlent plus près
 Qu'y a-t-il derrière
 Un mur
 des voix
 Les nuages qui s'élevèrent
 Au moment où je passais là
 Et tout le long une barrière
 Où sont ceux qui n'entreront pas

⁶³Written in 1918. Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit,"
Plupart du temps, I, p. 176. Quotations are from this poem
 unless otherwise indicated.

to the act of breaking movement into repeated fragmented efforts, the effect of the wall's existence here is to permit unlimited motion along its edge. However, all attempts to cross the barrier are forbidden because the wall symbolizes a gateway to the ideal or at least an escape from the alienation of everyday existence. The title "Route" is at first the only indication of where the poem actually takes place. A deserted setting is suggested in the indefinite pronoun personne and is again stressed by the absence of a verb. All unnecessary terms have been eliminated. As the human figure walks along the abandoned street, he notices no one and if he does see a trace of life on a threshold, it is probably his own shadow. The terms "ou ton ombre" may reveal an interior monologue. In contrast to the immobile memory of the shadow are the movements of the unnamed narrator as he passes by and the road which perpetually leads nowhere. The only verb of motion up to this point is the term passer, recalling deserted countrysides of Chirico where roads extend endlessly.

It is not until line five that animate elements are introduced: "Et les arbres parlent plus près." Appearing as an impersonal he, the man takes little interest in investigating the houses along the street. The possibility of speech emerges as a means of clarifying the enigmatic isolation of this exterior setting. However, although the trees speak, they are talking "plus près"---closer, perhaps in a group, hence the opposition of il versus the countryside still exists.

The impassivity of the wanderer is abruptly ended as he inquires about the nature of his environment, "Qu'y a-t-il derrière." By using the inversion with its short piercing syllables, Reverdy breaks up the monotony of the countryside. The structure of lines six through eight is flexible and therefore open to several interpretations. Having ended the question in line six with a preposition, Reverdy makes it possible for the nouns mur and voix to be considered as objects of the preposition, as answers to the question, or as an object of the preposition and an answer respectively. In view of the enigmatic setting, the ambiguity is probably deliberate. No matter which interpretation is preferred, it seems logical to state that whatever lies derrière is what might provide the wanderer with a sense of direction as to how to cope with the solitude of his environment. Thus far, it has at least contributed to his individuality by distinguishing his curiosity. Furthermore, it also appears that the nouns mur and voix have a common association even if one assumes that all three interpretations are possible. Symbolizing perhaps an ideal state or paradise, they signify an approach to human interaction ("des voix") which is being denied ("un mur").

As if in response to the question "Qu'y a-t-il derrière," the clouds have lifted. The use of the passé simple in the verb "s'élevèrent" establishes the time of the action at a definite point in the past while the passer-by was approaching the location derrière. The imperfect tense "je passais" expresses a much longer duration than does the action of

slipping upward which probably occurred briefly and then was terminated. The immediate succession of two verbs in a poem where there are only five verbs of action in twelve lines creates the feeling that the movements of passage have reached a climax and subsequently will abate. The presence of the relative pronoun qui in the phrase "les nuages qui s'élevèrent," sharply distinguishes both the countryside and the sky, both of which up until this line revealed no particular identity. Another distinguishing feature of the setting is found in the adverbial phrase "au moment où" which refers to a precise moment in the past.

Finally, when the location derrière is reached, all that can be seen is an extension of le mur, "et tout le long une barrière." Defining the exterior limits of the barrier, the edges of the road will perpetually indicate the frontier of the known but not understood, that is, everyday reality and the mysterious ideal, that which lies beyond le mur and la barrière. Even though nothing is learned of what the wall conceals, along its edge the wanderer discovers "ceux qui n'entreront pas." The indefinite demonstrative pronoun ceux qui forewarns that the identity of this group will probably not be disclosed. They are either those people who are denied access through the wall, like the poet himself, or perhaps a group which is already behind the wall and will not be granted entrance into the everyday world. The former interpretation seems the more probable, since observation behind the other side of the wall would be considerably difficult.

As with the human characters from poems previously analyzed, there seems to be no bond of communication between the wanderer and this group of people. While the group waits, the wanderer actively seeks passage through the wall; he will continue to follow the road, and they will continue to wait. The one quality they have in common is suggested by the noun seuil at the beginning of the poem. They are each on the threshold of one plane of reality, hoping to cross into another.

Although there is little evolution in Reverdy's interpretation of the wall as a symbol of separation and of restricted movement, sometimes smaller surfaces are used as variations of this theme. In the poem "Fausse porte ou portrait"⁶⁴, also from Les Ardoises du toit, Reverdy presents the picture frame and the mirror as locations where movement begins, but is only maintained at a certain level or reflected, instead of being permitted to develop. The motif of a portrait denying true passage into the character of an individual is implied in the title of the poem.

Throughout the first part of the poem, movement is minimal; the poet merely describes his first impressions of the newly finished creation,

Dans la place qui reste là
Entre quatre lignes
Un carré où le blanc se joue
La main qui soutenait ta joue

⁶⁴Written in 1918. Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit," Plupart du temps, I, p. 213. Quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

FAUSSE PORTE OU PORTRAIT

Dans la place qui reste là
Entre quatre lignes
 Un carré où le blanc se joue
La main qui soutenait ta joue
 Lune
Une figure qui s'allume
 Le profil d'un autre
 Mais tes yeux
Je suis la lampe qui me guide
Un doigt sur la paupière humide
 Au milieu
 Les larmes roulent dans cet espace
 Entre quatre lignes
 Une glace

The physical outline of the portrait is revealed by the prepositional phrase "entre quatre lignes" and the noun "un carré."⁶⁵ The verb rester denotes a state of being. The space which comprises the portrait merely IS, as if there is nothing particularly distinctive about the subject presented. Specifically pointing out the lack of a true character portrayal, the phrase "le blanc se joue" suggests a void where the real features are hidden by the blending or slipping together ("se joue") of white brush strokes. The verb se jouer may also be interpreted in the sense of to affect or feign certain characteristics. Reverdy has again avoided the traditional term comme which could be anticipated before the noun "un carré." The combination of the terms "le blanc" and "se joue" attracts attention, for one does not normally associate interaction among blank spaces.

It is not until the last line of the first part of the poem that the first physical detail of the portrait is given. Since lines three and four are connected by the rhyme [u], "se joue," and "ta joue," a similarity in thought might be expected. Instead, Reverdy blends opposing elements. In the same square frame coexist the blank space and a specific detail of the portrait, the hand which the subject always used to place against her cheek.

⁶⁵The term carré in the poem "Fausse porte ou portrait" will not freely permit movement as it did in "Tard dans la nuit"---"la fenêtre déverse un carré bleu." The blue pane in the latter poem facilitates a reconstruction of the past. However, in the former poem, the mirror or portrait suggested by the term carré only allows limited movement inward towards the painted image, only superficial recognition.

The portrait changes in the second part of the poem from a creation which simply exists to one which comes to life:

Lune
 Une figure qui s'allume
 Le profil d'un autre
 Mais tes yeux

Permitting the noun lune to occupy an entire line, Reverdy introduces the motif of light which will dominate this part of the poem. As the rays of the moon pass through the portrait, there is a moment of hope. The features of the illuminated face seem to warm up and suggest a more positive connotation. Unfortunately the viewer sees not the familiar face he once knew, but with disappointment, "le profil d'un autre." The only resemblance is found in the eyes. Acting as a barrier, the frame of the portrait limits motion at its borders and prevents the mind of the viewer from joining the thoughts of the subject painted. Closely associated with the theme of the wall in Les Ardoises du toit is the idea of fermeture, that is, the feeling that man, always an onlooker, is locked out of his environment, a seemingly closed world of which he is never a part. Although Reverdy's interpretation of the wall changes little throughout his poetry, certainly the association between this theme and the sub-theme closure (fermeture) is the closest in Les Ardoises du toit.

The viewer's disappointment in the poem "Fausse porte ou portrait" reaches its peak as he suddenly realizes that the surface of the portrait functions as a mirror, denying him any true perception of the individual, and merely reflecting

artificial features. The succession of terms pertaining to sight continues---"la lampe," "la paupière." With the first line of the last part of the poem, "Je suis la lampe qui me guide," the poet contrasts his self-reliance with the dependence of the portrait. He forms his own beliefs and adheres to his scruples for direction ("la lampe"), but the portrait depends upon exterior stimuli, the reactions of others for its identity.⁶⁶ The poet will reflect upon his own grief, "un doigt sur la paupière humide," and in so doing his eyelid becomes a screen where, as he sees his options played out, he will perceive a clearer view of reality. The eyelid, by definition a limited surface, will permit the transposition of the conflicts of everyday reality upon its mental screen, where no artificial stimuli can influence the decisions to be made.

The adverb "au milieu," another example of line positioning, serves as a bridge between the new understanding achieved by the poet and the denial of passage and hence, of perception brought about by the portrait. This expression could denote the middle of the viewer's face, "la paupière humide," or, and probably more accurately, the eyes of the portrait which the viewer imagines crying as he looks through

⁶⁶ It is also possible that the painting may be a portrait of the poet himself instead of a female acquaintance. Hence, he only superficially understands his own personality and is probably unsure of what he himself is really like. If indeed he is the subject of the portrait, then the line "je suis la lampe qui me guide" implies uncertainty as to whether he is truly independent, and therefore, could be considered a symbol of doubt.

his own tears. Even though his tears, transferred to the artificial face, form agglomerations of balls ("rouler"), they let no trace of the portrait's character pass through to the viewer. Between the four lines of the portrait, he merely sees his own reflections, "une glace," in effect a mirror or wall of glass.

The wall as a source of motion last appears as a principal figure in the work Pierres blanches where, instead of being a barrier, it acts as a passageway through which movement may freely occur. This more positive and indeed exceptional connotation is offered in the poem "Le cercle ténébreux."⁶⁷ Here the wall offers no resistance whatsoever. Its sole purpose is to distinguish the boundaries of one block of time (day) from those of another (night). The principal theme of the poem, the passing of night and the arrival of day, is presented at the beginning by an emphasis on lines---day first appears at the edges of the roofs as the stars slip away behind the horizontal molding of the cornice. The noun bordures, denoting the edge of a surface, suggests that the action is located at the threshold between night and day. Furthermore, the surface of the roof to which it refers will not oppose the change in time. These first two lines establish a clear opposition and hence a sense of balance, day arrives and night departs, "le jour"/"les étoiles;"

⁶⁷Written in 1930. Reverdy, "Pierres blanches," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 287. Quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LE CERCLE TÉNÉBREUX

Le jour venait à peine aux bordures des toits
Les étoiles filaient derrière la corniche
Et du cadre sortait un bras
Une manche
Un instrument de musique muet
 Tout dort
 Il est midi
Un bâillement ovale ouvre le mur
 Dans la pièce à côté
Enfin un murmure sort du fouillis des étoffes et des
fers
Du bois qui entoure la maison
Et la lumière troue le mur deux fois
 Les yeux qui s'ouvrent
La nuit se meurt à cet endroit
Où l'on a trouvé des limites
 Et tout autour est silencieux

"venait"/"filaient."

Having ended the first two lines of the poem with prepositional phrases, Reverdy varies the syntax and uses this structure at the beginning of the third line. The effect is not only variety, but also continuity between the first two lines and the third. Lines three through five express one complete thought,

Et du cadre sortait un bras
 Une manche
 Un instrument de musique muet⁶⁸

Again, as is frequently true in Reverdy's poetry, the architectural line is used to form the physical setting from which the figure slowly emerges, "et du cadre sortait un bras."⁶⁹ The lines of the cornice and house act as a frame filled gradually by fragments. The adjective muet, describing the musical instrument, adds an element of surprise, further explained by the terms "Tout dort." This brief expression informs the reader of the abrupt passage of time, acting as a temporal bridge connecting the arrival of dawn and the approach of noon.

The themes of the wall as a source of movement and the arrival of day are joined by the use of personification.

⁶⁸The superimposition of the window and arm upon the musical instrument reveals a trace of cubist influence. The poems from Reverdy's Soleil du plafond, dedicated to Juan Gris, also show the relation between Reverdy and cubist art. Here the titles alone recall familiar tableaux: Braque and Picasso: "La Pipe," "Le Musicien," "Le Livre," "Papier à musique et chanson," "Guitare," etc. Accompanying the poems are eleven lithographs by Gris which illustrate the cubist passion for intersecting planes and surfaces, as well as superimposed objects.

⁶⁹The term cadre may also refer to the frame of a painting as well as to that of a window.

The noun bâillement can denote a yawn or a large opening, here a gap in time. Therefore, the line "Un bâillement ovale ouvre le mur," suggests that the wall is a human being who, upon awakening, yawns and readies himself for the day's activities. The verb ouvrir emphasizes the feeling of flexibility; the wall is receptive to temporal change. Human activity is introduced, as the poet proceeds from the exterior to the interior of the building. There is no indication that this passage may be anticipated, but merely an abrupt appearance of the prepositional phrase "dans la pièce à côté." In contrast to this vague setting is the following line which specifically identifies the noise it describes, "Enfin, un murmure sort du fouillis des étoffes et des fers." An atmosphere of confusion, expressed by the noun fouillis, depicts the awakened household attempting to put its possessions in order.

The wall has not only been penetrated but sounds are slipping in both directions through its aperture. The wall as a setting symbolizing an exchange of movement is further distinguished by the juxtaposition of the lines, "Et la lumière troue le mur deux fois/Les yeux qui s'ouvrent." Denoting more force than the verb ouvrir, the term trouer suggests that the force of the light has thoroughly penetrated the wall. This forceful action is then directly juxtaposed with its result: the image of the open eyes---an illustration of the type of poetic image Reverdy passes along to the surrealists.⁷⁰ Besides this rather uncommon association, the

⁷⁰Reverdy's theory of the image, presented in his

syntax of the image is also not in the order the reader might anticipate. In the thirteenth line, the most important noun mur is used as the direct object. Yet in the fourteenth line, the key noun les yeux is the subject and carries out the action. The latter arrangement is what the reader might normally expect. By combining these two very different structures, Reverdy increases the element of shock.

Having absorbed the image of the eyes, the reader now understands why the initial opening of the wall was described

journal Nord-Sud, first in the 1917 essay "Sur le cubisme" and then again in the 1918 essay "L'Image," deviated from the traditional view regarding the language of poetry. Instead of using a metaphor based upon a similarity of terms, Reverdy introduced images of disparity:

"L'Image est une création pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison, mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus ou moins éloignées. Plus les rapports des deux réalités rapprochées seront lointains et justes, plus l'image sera forte, plus elle aura de puissance émotive et de réalité poétique." Reverdy, Le Gant de crin, p. 30.

One would not ordinarily associate the two distantly related elements which were juxtaposed, but one could conceivably associate them. According to Admussen in his Ph. D. dissertation "Nord-Sud: 1917-1918," p. 70, Reverdy felt that the power of the poetic expression was not to be found in the image itself, but could be measured in the degree of surprise and joy generated by the juxtaposition.

André Breton, who quotes Reverdy's theory of the image in his "Manifeste du surréalisme (1924)" in Manifestes du surréalisme (Paris: Gallimard, n.d.), p. 31, incorporated it into his theory of the surrealist image. Anna Balakian in her article "The Surrealist Image," The Romanic Review, IV (December, 1953), 276, explains that Breton believed the surrealist image to be an encounter of two realities whose effect was like the light produced by the contact of two electrical conductors:

"The value of the surrealist image, therefore, consists not in an equivalence but in the subtraction of one set of associations from the other. The greater the disparity, the more powerful the light, ... "

as an oval yawn; the oval shape of the mouth corresponds to the oval shape of the eyes. The principal oppositions in the poem, the departure of night, the coming of day; temporal slipping into and out of the opening in the wall, are now supplemented at the end of the poem with the double penetration carried out by the activity of light counterbalanced with the night's inertia and subsequent death: "La nuit se meurt à cet endroit." It is interesting to note that Reverdy uses the terms " ... à cet endroit/Où l'on a trouvé des limites" to refer to the openings in the wall. Usually denoting a denial of passage, the noun limites is in direct contrast to the location, "à cet endroit," at the breaches in the wall where slipping freely occurs. However, the openings really do present a paradox, for although they permit movement of one type, the activity of day, they forbid for a particular time the movements of night and clearly delineate when and where night must end. The wall and its openings then, represent a border at which point one phase of a life cycle becomes another.⁷¹ As implied in the title "Le cercle ténébreux," the emergence of one time sequence necessarily brings about the demise of its counterpart, hence the term ténébreux. The final line of the poem, "Et tout autour est

⁷¹Likewise in the poetry of Marcelin Pleynet, the wall as a setting reveals contradictions. Serving as a screen, it symbolizes the turning pages of a book where words pass freely and coherently:

"Le mur qui passe à droite est percé de portes de
fenêtres
.....
Ainsi dans le discours le mur passe/glisse

LE VENT ET L'ESPRIT⁷²

C'est une étonnante chimère. La tête, plus haut que cet étage, se place entre les deux fils de fer et se cale et se tient; rien ne bouge.

La tête inconnue parle et je ne comprends aucun mot, je n'entends aucun son---bas contre terre. Je suis toujours sur le trottoir d'en face et je regarde; je regarde les mots qu'emporte le vent; les mots qu'il va jeter plus loin. La tête parle et je n'entends rien, le vent disperse tout.

O grand vent, moqueur ou lugubre, j'ai souhaité ta mort. Et je perds mon chapeau que tu m'as pris aussi. Je n'ai plus rien; mais ma haine dure, hélas plus que toi-même.

Sur le mur qui passe"" Marcelin Pleynet, Comme (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965), p. 14.

However, the movement of the words across the page ceases when their meaning is clouded with conventional nuances--- "" ... mot â mot ce qui passe les portes les fenêtres fermées maintenant"" Pleynet, Comme, p. 17.

⁷²Written in 1915. Reverdy, "Poèmes en prose," Plupart du temps, I, pp. 29-30. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

silencieux," gives a connotation of mysterious gloom to the two lines which precede it. As this somber linear theme unwinds, the misfortunes it encompasses must be confronted.

Linguistic Location: Prepositions

Thus far, this analysis has discussed exterior and interior settings where movement originates in Reverdy's poetry. These settings have been defined by their respective shape, size, and function. However, other settings where slipping occurs are created by a different use of line, abstract line, which does not form a particular shape or object. Using prepositional phrases which suggest arrangements of abstract horizontal and vertical lines, Reverdy composes settings which are defined solely by the position in which they occur, in other words by the position denoted by their respective prepositions. For that reason, they will be called examples of linguistic location. This new type of location for slipping is perhaps best illustrated in the earlier works Poèmes en prose and Les Ardoises du toit in which Reverdy often associates setting with several reoccurring prepositional phrases.

The Preposition Entre

By virtue of its semantic content, the preposition entre establishes that objects are contained between or within lines. Several interpretations of this location between are offered in the poems "Le vent et l'esprit," (Poèmes en prose), "Silence," and "Couvre-feu," both from Les Ardoises du toit. As the vision in the prose poem "Le vent et l'esprit"

is presented, a phantasmal head, referred to as "la tête," places itself between two iron supports: "La tête, ... ,se place entre les deux fils de fer et se cale et se tient; rien ne bouge." The motion of slipping into place between, denoted by the verbs se placer and se caler, is counter-balanced by the cessation of this movement, conveyed by the expression se tenir. The last line of the quotation, "rien ne bouge," confirms the fixed location of the head between the two lines of steel. Although interaction with the head is repeatedly attempted by the personnage referred to as "je," the immobility now inherent in the position entre negates any effect the words uttered by the "tête" may have. There is no coherent movement of syllables and therefore, no comprehension---"La tête inconnue parle et je ne comprends aucun mot, je n'entends aucun son."

The Preposition En Face De

Another explanation for the lack of communication is offered in the location of the "je":

..... Je suis toujours sur le trottoir d'en face et je regarde; je regarde les mots qu'emporte le vent, les mots qu'il va jeter plus loin. La tête parle et je n'entends rien, le vent disperse tout.

The prepositional phrase en face de, another linguistic location, refers to an opposition or confrontation of two objects which, here, stand in a straight line, but are separated from one another. The "je" in the phrase "je regarde" is on the sidewalk across from or opposite the "tête" and is attempting to transform the paralysis of the head into pro-

ductive activity. Probably these personages represent the deliberate movements of instinct ("tête") and the thought processes of reason ("je"), contained within the mind, ("l'esprit").

Resisting the attempted collaboration of the "tête" and the "je," the wind symbolizes a negative force in the poem. The range of its destruction is expressed in a gradual progression---emporter, carrying away; the more forceful verb jeter, throwing; and finally in the sense of pulverizing or fragmenting, disperser, scattering or dispersing. The possibility of changing the now stagnant verbal products of the location entre into meaningful sequences is doubly precluded by the fixative effect of the position en face de and the complete mobility of the wind.

A more positive connotation for the linguistic location entre is offered in the poem "Silence."⁷³ As the poem begins, the silence of the narrator is counterbalanced by the sound of men who are supposedly passing behind a surface which he faces. There is, however, one distinct voice: "Entre les murs de la clairière/Une voix qui tinte sur l'eau." This chimelike sound with its more individualistic and personal connotation conveys a feeling of gentleness expressed by the verb tinter. This verb strongly contrasts with the term sifflet which appears at the end of the poem and suggests the insistent sound of the train whistle. The voice is located

⁷³Written in 1918. Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit," Plupart du temps, I, p. 197. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

between the walls of the clearing, a site often connoting freedom and openness. Perhaps Reverdy is suggesting that the boundaries which define the clearing are composed of surfaces resembling the planes of a wall. The presence of water between the boundaries further accentuates the ability of the location entre to effect change. Sound has been produced over the water. To these connotations, those of protection and friendship must be added since this location serves as a receptacle for the voice.

The significance of the location entre is further widened by its use in lines ten through twelve:

Personne ne connaît le nombre
De ceux qui passent
Entre le mur et le jardin

The same position which aided the one distinct voice in an atmosphere of freedom and openness, now seeks to paradoxically define the limits or lines of the route along which numbers of men pass. Their number is unknown as is their identity ("ceux qui"). Since there is no rapport between them and the narrator, the reader is again reminded of the frequent opposition in Reverdy's poetry of the poet, narrator, or traveler confronted by a diffident social group. The sound of the train whistle at the end of the poem implies that they are principally concerned with reaching an unknown destination and have little interest in stopping along the way. In view of this interpretation, the location marked by entre still preserves its ability to encourage movement along the road, but also acquires a more negative connotation in that it provides a route for the uncaring masses.

COUVRE-FEU ⁷⁴

Un coin au bout du monde où l'on est à l'abri
 Les colonnes du soir se tendent
 Et la porte s'ouvre à la nuit
 Une seule lampe qui veille
 Au fond il y a une merveille
 Des têtes qu'on ne connaît pas
 Au mur des plans qui se ressemblent
 Ma figure plus effacée
 Entre nous deux l'air chaud qui tremble
 Un souvenir détérioré
 Entre quatre murs qui craquent
 Personne ne parle
 Le feu s'éteint sous la fumée

⁷⁴Written in 1918. Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit,"
Plupart du temps, I, p. 224. All quotations are from this
 poem unless otherwise indicated.

Further on in the same collection of poetry Reverdy returns to the theme of protection offered by the position entre. At the beginning of the poem "Couvre-feu," an atmosphere of security and warmth is introduced by the supplementary linguistic location au coin de: "Un coin au bout du monde où l'on est à l'abri." A sense of satisfaction for having reached a particular destination is expressed in the terms "au bout du monde." Although the location au coin de contains and in a sense protects, it is not an enclosure. The possibility of light passing freely from the interior to the exterior is conveyed by the lines, "Et la porte s'ouvre à la nuit/Une seule lampe qui veille." The presence of the lamp renders the type of protection offered more precise, a protective vigil.

In this atmosphere of security and ease, fond memories are about to be reconstructed in the visions of "une merveille" and "des têtes qu'on ne connaît pas." It is ironic that the shadows on the wall form likenesses more realistic than does the narrator's memory as it attempts to recall the lines of his face.⁷⁵ The terms "nous deux" either refer to the narrator and his remembrance or the narrator and a specific character out of his past. In either interpretation, the two are protected by the location entre, that is, the lines or waves of warm air between.

⁷⁵Here again as in the poem "Fausse porte ou portrait," p. 80, the physical characteristics of a portrait are better defined by an unknown exterior source rather than by the narrator, more closely associated with the subject of the portrait.

However, this state of protection is indeed temporary, for the fragility of the memory is conveyed by the verb trembler, and then confirmed by the following line, "un souvenir détérioré." The first position of being between the waves of warm air becomes more precise with the location of being between the four walls. Conveying the increased difficulty of this location to realize an exchange of movement, the verb craquer reinforces the theme of a possible cessation of the flow of memories. The sound of the walls being destroyed is followed by a silence, "Personne ne parle." The assurance that the lamp will continue burning is broken when the source of light dissolves into smoke, taking with it the clear outlines within which the memory is contained. As "le feu s'éteint sous la fumée," rupture occurs and the specific entity, light, is pulverized; the lines of entre are intersected and erased by uncertainty and doubt.⁷⁶

The Preposition Autour De

Light again introduces a principal motif in Reverdy's prose poem "Les Poètes."⁷⁷ The circular movement of the poem, occurring at the linguistic location autour de, is reinforced as the light from the round lamp shade encircles the room and those in it. The protection connoted by the

⁷⁶The pulverization and dissolution of light is reminiscent of the prism images in the poems "Carrefour", p. 29, and "Tard dans la nuit," p. 52. In the latter poem especially, there is the same emphasis upon refraction of light and subsequent decomposition, although in "Couvre-feu," the reference to the glass breaking is perhaps more physical.

⁷⁷Written in 1915. Reverdy, "Poèmes en prose," Plupart du temps, I, p. 34. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LES POÈTES

Sa tête s'abritait craintivement sous l'abat-jour de la lampe. Il est vert et ses yeux sont rouges. Il y a un musicien qui ne bouge pas. Il dort; ses mains coupées jouent du violon pour lui faire oublier sa misère.

Un escalier qui ne conduit nulle part grimpe autour de la maison. Il n'y a, d'ailleurs, ni portes ni fenêtres. On voit sur le toit s'agiter des ombres qui se précipitent dans le vide. Elles tombent une à une et ne se tuent pas. Vite par l'escalier elles remontent et recommencent, éternellement charmées par le musicien qui joue toujours du violon avec ses mains qui ne l'écoutent pas.

circular line of autour de is first illustrated in the shelter provided by the lamp shade: "Sa tête s'abritait craintivement sous l'abat-jour de la lampe." Little movement is found throughout the first paragraph although the shade implies that a circular line has been inscribed. The immobility of the two artists is indicative of their dejected state as are more explicitly the adverb craintivement and the noun misère. As if to forget his misery, the musician dreams he is playing his violin even though his hands are separated from the instrument---"ses mains coupées." The lack of artistic activity would seem to indicate a stagnant mind barren of inspiration. An allusion to their unproductivity is found in the lampshade reflecting the artistic voids which they have become.

Movement starts at the beginning of the second paragraph. It appears in the form of a series of half-completed circles, or more precisely, spirals: "Un escalier qui ne conduit nulle part grimpe autour de la maison." Here the verb grimper suggests the act of climbing around in a slow, deliberate manner, similar to the motion of one drawing a clear, precise line. The combination of verb and preposition (grimper + autour de) not only connotes a line encircling the artists, but also one emphasizing their stagnation ("qui ne conduit nulle part"). The lack of openings in the building contributes a feeling of imprisonment or paralysis to the position autour de---"Il n'y a, d'ailleurs ni portes ni fenêtres."

As the circular movement continues around the lamp shade or around the stairway, the spirals are traced by the hasty, abrupt gestures (s'agiter, se précipiter) of the shadows which as soon as they have fallen, again begin the cycle upward: "Elles remontent et recommencent." However, the cyclical motion around, which they connote, remains unfruitful since the shadows have fallen under the same malevolent spell as have the unproductive artists:

..... éternellement charmées
par le musicien qui joue toujours du violon avec
ses mains qui ne l'écotent pas.

Each spiral will continue to pass around its predecessor, retracing the imprisoning climb around a space barren of all artistic stimulation.

The cyclical sterility of the linguistic location autour de is replaced in the poem "Abat-jour"⁷⁸ by the theme of family unity and understanding. The circular line associated with the preposition autour de is once more reproduced in the outline of the lamp shade. Since this object is found in the title, it sets the mood of encirclement and unity which is confirmed in the very first line with the linguistic position autour de.⁷⁹ The family about to be described is seated around the table. The circular line passes from the lamp shade to the preposition autour de to the table. As if to delineate the limits of the circle, the poet reveals that

⁷⁸Written in 1918. Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit," Plupart du temps, I, p. 173. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

⁷⁹The basic motif of the previously discussed poem, "Tard dans la nuit ...", p. 54, light + autour de + table,

ABAT-JOUR

Autour de la table
 Au bord de l'ombre
 Aucun d'eux ne remue beaucoup
 Et quelqu'un parle tout à coup
 Il fait froid dehors
 Mais là c'est le calme
 Et la lumière les unit
 Le feu pétille
 Une étincelle
 Les mains se sont posées
 Plus bleues sur le tapis
 Derrière le rayon une tête qui lit
 Un souffle qui s'échappe à peine
 Tout s'endort
 Le silence traîne
 Mais il faut encore rester
 La vitre reproduit le tableau
 La famille
 De loin toutes les lèvres ont l'air d'être ferventes et de
 prier

is repeated in this poem.

it is located "au bord de l'ombre"---at the edge of the shadow. Here, one linguistic location, autour de, is defined by another, au bord de. Moreover, the interchangeability of lines one and two is also shown by the position of the second line just slightly under and almost entirely to the left of line one.

The family tableau is composed of several oppositions. The silence of the group in the line "Aucun d'eux ne remue beaucoup" is broken by an abrupt remark of one of the members, "Et quelqu'un parle tout à coup." Another opposition occurs in the comparison of the warm calm inside the circle and the low temperature outside the building --- "Il fait froid dehors/Mais là c'est le calme." The circular movement is continued by the firelight --- "Et la lumière les unit." A more animated setting is created as one type of action, the crackling of the sparks, supplements another, the inscription of the circle. The trust and understanding of the family members is seen in the description of their hands, "Les mains se sont posées/Plus bleues sur le tapis." The verb "se sont posées" connotes security and calm; while the blue hues of the hands may suggest reflected firelight, itself a symbol of permeating unity, or perhaps the cold penetrating. Their activities ("... une tête qui lit") remain outlined by the ever-encircling light ("Derrière le rayon ...").

The limited movement of the family group slowly diminishes and the final impression of the scene is one of silence:

Un souffle qui s'échappe à peine
 Tout s'endort
 Le silence traîne

The last two lines especially contain a note of finality, but suprisingly enough the poem has not ended. The conjunction mais of the following line seems to acknowledge that a possible ending has indeed been reached, but will not be accepted. There will be more: "Mais il faut encore rester."

The final portion of the circular location autour de is realized in a linear theme which has progressed from the lamp shade to the preposition itself (autour de), to the table, and then to the firelight. It now completes the circle with the noun vitre. All of the positions on the circle are reflected in the window pane --- "La vitre reproduit le tableau." Yet, there are two problems which confront the reader and cause him to question the authenticity of the scene. The first is found in the metaphor of the window pane which is compared to a mirror --- glass which reflects or reproduces indirectly instead of producing directly. In addition, rarely do human figures in Reverdy's poetry interact in a setting of understanding and calm. The verb of the last line, "ont l'air d'être," would seem to increase the element of doubt. Ironically, the setting of unity and understanding which Reverdy depicts may perhaps be only an idealized tableau of family life.

Absence of Spatial Position

Instead of originating at defined settings, the sliding motion sometimes occurs without a definite location which

TOUJOURS GÊNE⁸⁰

Qui m'a révélé l'endroit précis. Le ciel où les deux murs se joignent. L'angle où l'on est à l'abri?

Par-dessus, le vent emporte la terre qui se déplace. Quelques nids sont tombés et l'on entend des cris qui viennent des fenêtres. C'est là qu'on attend. C'est de là qu'on regarde et qu'on nous surprend. L'affreuse tête qui se balance sur le toit en ricanant!

Ni le mur ni les arbres ne sont assez grands.

Et déjà vous commencez à rougir plus que moi-même. Allons-nous-en.

⁸⁰Written in 1916. Reverdy, "La Lucarne ovale," Plupart du temps, I, p. 88. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

lacks shape, size, function, and linguistic position. Such settings illustrate the theme of an absence of spatial position, the final category of the discussion pertaining to sources of movement. This theme is presented in Reverdy's poetry in one of two ways: it either occurs in a poem where the setting is dissolving and then gradually disappears, or where it has already been destroyed; hence a poem which has no setting whatsoever. The former version of the theme is found especially in Reverdy's earlier poetry, as in La Lucarne ovale, while the latter is more closely associated with the extreme pessimism of his later works such as Le Chant des morts.

Although several settings are suggested, there is no definite location for the motion of slipping in the poem "Toujours gêné" from the collection La Lucarne ovale. The desire for orientation is announced in the very first line of this prose poem: "Qui m'a révélé l'endroit précis." Having used the declarative form instead of the interrogative, Reverdy further negates the possibility of an "endroit précis" and implies to the reader that the answer is "personne." Does the poem take place in a wide expanse --- "le ciel" --- or more specifically, at an angle formed by the intersecting surfaces of the sky: "Le ciel où les deux/murs se joignent. L'angle où l'on est à l'abri?" The repeated use of the adverbial clauses beginning with où more closely relates the two sentences in which they occur, reinforcing the impression that together they comprise a possible identification of setting. The use of the terms se joindre, angle, and

abri is ironic since the unity and interaction which they signify have not created a coherent setting.

The indications of possible settings that do exist can not even be explored because the destructive forces of nature will cause havoc and disorder. The focal point of the action in the second paragraph is contained in the adverb par-dessus, probably referring to the sky, but here again, the actual place is uncertain. The earth at this point starts to slip about (se déplacer), carried away by the wind. The security which did exist amid the uncertainty is now being destroyed --- "Quelques nids sont tombés."

Throughout the first part of the poem the only characters are the me in the phrase "m'a révélé" and the poet himself. However, as soon as the earth tremors begin, the human element is extended to include a group of people at another locus,

..... et l'on entend des cris qui
viennent des fenêtres. C'est là qu'on attend. C'est
de là qu'on regarde et qu'on nous surprend.

The hostility of the location "des fenêtres," its synonyms "là" and "de là," as well as its inhabitants, the impersonal pronoun on, is revealed in the following line, "L'affreuse/tête qui se balance sur le toit en ricanant!" There is no remote suggestion of bridging the distance between the poet and the "on." The lack of direct interaction expressed by the verbs attendre, regarder, and surprendre is emphasized by the repetition of "qu'on" --- "qu'on attend," "qu'on regarde," and "qu'on nous surprend." The presence of the hideous sneering head widens the gap in location and attitude be-

tween the poet and the group. The repetition of the rhyme [ã:] and the similar rhyme[ã] unifies the grotesque vision. The only positive element is the introduction of the pronoun nous, additional human support for the poet as he endures this nightmare. There seems to be no object in the poem which can withstand the sliding earth and general disorder: "Ni le mur ni les arbres ne sont assez grands." The size of the wall and trees is insufficient as is their ability to provide adequate protection and a stable setting.

Since the already nebulous setting which surrounds the poet and his companion is in the process of dissolving, they resolve to leave. The last two lines are addressed to the unknown friend, "Et déjà vous commencez à rougir plus que moi-/même. Allons-nous-en." The necessity of a quick departure is reinforced in the adverb déjà. The pronoun vous refers to someone who is embarrassed, ashamed, blushing --- the exact meaning of the verb rougir is unclear. Whatever the precise emotion experienced, the poet and his friend feel that they can never become a part of this environment because there is nothing to become a part of. They will always be restricted and therefore, always frustrated --- "toujours gêné." The compulsion to move onward, "Allons-nous-en," recalls the only remaining possibility afforded the poet in the poem "Passant" --- "Allons toujours ailleurs."⁸¹ The one certainty which Reverdy repeats again and again in his poetry is eternal movement along the route, a continuous

⁸¹See p. 18.

sliding towards nowhere:

Quand la lampe n'est pas en-
core éteinte, quand le feu com-
mence à pâlir et que le soleil
se cache, il y a quand même⁸²
dans la rue des gens qui passent.

In another poem from La Lucarne ovale, "Le sang
troublé,"⁸³ violent movement has already begun the destruc-
tion of whatever surroundings formerly existed. The immediate
setting is described as a black hole shaped by the twisting
of the wind as it lashes out ("se ruer"). The movements of
the wind inside the abyss form a circular path or whirlwind,
"Tout tourne en rond." Somewhere in the background, a window
pane is displaced from its frame --- "La fenêtre s'éloigne
de la glace du fond." The common rhyme [3] joins the theme of
displacement and separation in these last two lines.

The incoherence of the setting is further emphasized
by a combination of rather incongruous elements. To the
images of the whirlwind and the window parts it displaces,
Reverdy, in the fourth line, adds a bottle of wine. The
objects of the poem have been forcefully disengaged from their
settings. Moreover, there seems to be no link between the
poet or wanderer and this chaos. They, too, are unable to
find an appropriate niche in this "paysage sans cadre," a
sketch of a countryside with no particular setting.

⁸²Reverdy, "Quand la lampe n'est pas ... ," from "La
Lucarne ovale," Plupart du temps, I, p. 89.

⁸³Written in 1916. Reverdy, Ibid., 85. All quota-
tions are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LE SANG TROUBLÉ

Un trou noir où le vent se rue
Tout tourne en rond
La fenêtre s'éloigne de la glace du fond
---Le vin n'y est pour rien
C'est un paysage sans cadre

Les numéros qui sont dans ma tête commencent à
tourner
Et l'allée s'allonge
L'ombre du mur d'en face s'allonge
Jusqu'au plafond

On entend venir quelqu'un qui ne se montre pas
On entend parler
On entend rire et on entend pleurer
Une ombre passe

Les mots qu'on dit derrière le volet sont une menace

The disorder around the poet begins to affect him psychologically. Imitating the circular twists of the wind, the numbers in his head create their own whirlwind. As he continues to hallucinate, the theme of extension preoccupies him. The path continues endlessly --- "Et l'allée s'allonge." The shadow on the wall stretches itself up to the ceiling: "L'ombre du mur d'en face s'allonge/Jusqu'au plafond." The noun plafond again indicates restricted movement. The meeting point of the extended path, probably a horizontal line, and the lengthened vertical shadow reintroduces the figure of the crossroads. It is a crossroads of indecision which can reveal no relationship between the poet and his world; it can only limit his potential.

The predominance of the impersonal pronoun on in the third stanza creates the impression that perhaps the poet is not fully conscious of what is happening around him, or if he is, he has little interest, since he can not participate. The repetitious formula defined by "on + verb + infinitive" emphasizes the feeling of distance between the person speaking and the action reported:

On entend venir
 On entend parler
 On entend rire et on entend pleurer

Another indication of human presence is found in the element quelqu'un, but it is rendered impersonally by the indefinite pronoun. In addition, the hope for companionship implied is soon negated by the relative clause, "qui ne se montre pas." The shadow which passes by at the end of the stanza may correspond to this unknown person. However, when the shadow

slips out of the scene, it precludes any possibility that might have existed for interaction with the poet.

The mood of alienation prevalent throughout the poem is summarized in the final line, "Les mots qu'on dit derrière le volet sont une menace." Human presence is always heard but never directly experienced. The phrase "Les mots qu'on dit" corresponds to the indirect observations of "On entend venir," etc. The restrictions imposed upon human interaction by the **figures** of the wall and mirror are recreated in the location "derrière le volet." The unknown words can only be interpreted as threats in view of the confusion of the setting and finally its complete rupture.

As depressing as the two poems "Toujours gêné" and "Le sang troublé" appear, they do not reach the depths of gloom and despair reflected in the poem "Le sens du vide"⁸⁴ from one of Reverdy's last collections of poetry Le Chant des morts. As indicated in the title, the tone of the poem is dominated by the image of the void created by a previous obliteration of setting. The terms "lignes" and "formes inouïes" are the only indications as to where the poem takes place. However, the lines which perhaps used to form a locus, ("Ces lignes à franchir") are unreadable ("que je ne peux pas lire"). It will be impossible for the poet to cross them. The "unheard of" forms which might have created a sense of direction are meaningless --- "qui ne veulent rien dire." Both the semantic

⁸⁴Written in 1948. Reverdy, "Le Chant des morts," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 419. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LE SENS OU VIDE

Ces lignes à franchir que je ne peux pas lire
Ces formes inouïes qui ne veulent rien dire
Que la mort
La mort étant le plus juste prix
Le poids du corps dans la balance
Et l'étrange circuit de la distance
Au bout des fils qui se rejoignent dans le port
Départ demain vers d'autres houles vaines
Retour certain au foyer sans chaleur
Une peine jamais éteinte sous la cendre
Ni braise ni charbon ni flamme
On ne pense à rien de réel
Pas plus de terre que de ciel
Pas plus d'écho que de silence
Encore moins la flèche d'un regard
Déliés dénoués rompus
Noeuds de l'espoir

content and the grammatical structure of the first two lines are interchangeable --- demonstrative adjective + noun + negative relative clause. Even the rhyme [i'r] is repeated. The meaning of both lines is not complete until the third line which offers the exception to their negations --- "que la mort." All that is left from the violent destruction found in other previously discussed poems is a series of unusable lines and forms which symbolize only death.

Since the void has become the sole place of habitation, what option could be more attractive than a death in which the lifeless weight of the body would offer a stronger sense of reality than was ever before available: "la mort étant le plus juste prix/le poids du corps dans la balance." The act of dying is further characterized as a voyage or bizarre movement along a line, possibly circular ("l'étrange circuit") bridging an unknown distance to the extreme limits of certain points ("au bout des fils") which, sliding together, join at a port. That death is associated with this port is implied in the common rhyme [ɔ'r].

Is the poet, then, suggesting that death provides broader perspectives and more orientation than life? The reader might be tempted to think so were it not for the following lines:

Départ demain vers d'autres houles vaines
 Retour certain au foyer sans chaleur
 Une peine jamais éteinte sous la cendre
 Ni braise ni charbon ni flamme

The possibility of departing towards other swells of the sea, other sources of energy to realize man's potential, seems

quite positive until the adjective vaines. In addition to being unsuccessful, the undertaking involves a counter-movement, backward, a return to a cold, lonely house. The certainty of the return may indicate a cycle, départ/retour/
départ/retour, always terminating without success. There will never be any positive aspects of death; never any warmth or source of energy. The repetition of the negative ni before three nouns deepens the gloom. Besides the certain impossibility of escape suggested in the cycle départ/retour, the only other certainty will be an inextinguishable pain which will persist in a slowly smoldering fire, gradually torturing the dead in their failure to define setting and become part of it. By never becoming embers or flame, it will never completely still the suffering.

The poem ends with a total abandonment of hope. The void that has become death does not offer anything more concrete or real than did life --- "On ne pense à rien de réel." This last line could also refer to the line above it, signifying that nothing as positive as the sources of life's energy, embers, charcoal, or flame, could be a part of this void. The precise meaning of "rien de réel" is further explained in the following lines:

Pas plus de terre que de ciel
Pas plus d'écho que de silence
Encore moins la flèche d'un regard

One is to give no direction to his thoughts; he must not contemplate earth more than sky, nor echoes more than silence, nor even the possibility of a quick glance. If each opposi-

tion is considered equally, one noun will neutralize the other until the context has been effaced. Displacement and rupture are complete in this void of death. Every object or person has slipped away from every other or has become undone --- "Déliés dénoués rompus/Noeuds de l'espoir." All hope for reconstructing the setting has now been destroyed.

PART II. TYPES OF MOVEMENT

Movement, represented specifically by the action of slipping, has been examined thus far in relation to its origins, some of which have permitted smooth and gradual passage, while others have greatly restricted any motion whatsoever. Part II of this study will attempt to discuss the poems of Reverdy in which a particular type of slipping, rather than its setting, is emphasized.

Instead of a descriptive analysis of the entire poem, discussion will be limited to only those relevant sections of the poem which concern the different aspects of slipping: deviation, orientation/absence of orientation, immobility in mobility, and movement aborted or denied.

Chapter IV. Deviation

- Overflow, Inundation
- Division, Fragmentation

Chapter V. Orientation/Absence of Orientation

- Self-definition and Development
- The Ephemeral Text
- Hiatus In Poetic Inspiration

Chapter VI. The Voyage, A Neutral State: Immobility in Mobility

- A Race Through Time
- A Forced March
- A Journey to Sea

Chapter VII. Movement Aborted or Denied

Partial Slipping
Absence of Motion

CHAPTER IV

DEVIATION

The themes of rupture and separation, previously found in distorted or dissolving settings, reappear in poems which emphasize the action of slipping as opposed to its origin or lack thereof. These two aspects of destruction will become elements of a more comprehensive concept of turmoil, a concept which will be called deviation. The action of slipping or turning away from an accepted standard (i.e. to deviate) is used by Reverdy in a negative sense, that is, in order to depict personal, psychological disorders, as well as world upheaval and holocaust. The above themes of dissolution are most prevalent in Reverdy's work beginning with the year 1929 (Flaques de verre) up to the period 1944-1948 (Le Chant des morts), a time during which Reverdy passed from depression to extreme pessimism. There are three basic types of movement which constitute the theme of deviation: the action of slipping or flowing away; dividing or fragmenting; and finally, sliding faster and faster, whirling, spinning.

Overflow, Inundation; Division, Fragmentation

Results perhaps of religious doubt and scepticism, and bitterness because of failure to achieve meaningful rela-

tionships with his fellow men, Reverdy's later poems abound with scenes of people and streets being swept away or entirely obliterated. In a letter addressed to Emma Stojkovic-Mazzariol in 1948, Reverdy explains his vision of a world shattered and crumbling:

On a l'impression que ce monde fracassé s'éboule lentement sur vous seul et que c'est particulièrement vous qu'il écrase. De plus, aucune occasion de se détendre un moment et d'oublier pour laisser libre cours aux élans optimistes que pourrait malgré tout retrouver par moments notre nature. De partout surgit la menace et toute parole d'espoir ne semble plus recéler que mensonge et bêtise.⁸⁵

Sorrow for the disintegration of his own personal universe created a poetry of turmoil, "Je crois qu'on n'a jamais vu, dans mes poèmes, que la terre n'a jamais été solide sous mes pieds---elle chavire, je la sens chavirer, sombrer, s'effondrer en moi-même."⁸⁶ The destructive action of objects being overturned and sunk or at least disappearing from view is frequently caused by two types of slipping. First, as an emphasis upon the motion of flowing, flood waters surge through dams and barriers, effacing everything in their way; blood chaotically beats through arteries, seeking to purge the body of its sins. Usually accompanying this deviant liquid state, is Reverdy's preoccupation with unrecognizable fragments of objects, many of which are in the process of disintegration.

⁸⁵ Emma Stojkovic-Mazzariol, "En marge d'une correspondance," Pierre Reverdy 1889-1960, pp. 87-88.

⁸⁶ Pierre Reverdy, "Lettre à Jean Rousselot, du 16 mai 1951," Hommage à Pierre Reverdy, ed. by Luc Decaunes, quoted in Robert W. Greene, "Pierre Reverdy, Poet of Nausea," PMLA, I (January, 1970), 48.

PROJETS 87

Où iront-ils chercher tout ce qu'il y a
 de grave derrière leurs têtes
 Le ciel plisse son front
 Prépare une tempête
 Les autres sont là pour la fête
 Et les astres tendent des fils
 De maison à maison
 Les ondes des clochers ébranlent la cloison
 Tout est triste plus loin
 Et même leurs chansons
 Les hommes fatigués s'étirent
 Au jour les lumières pâlisent
 Et sur le trottoir mouillé glissent
 Tous leurs désirs éparpillés
 Qui restent morts dans la coulisse
 De l'ombre épaisse où ils sont nés

87 Reverdy, "Les Ardoises du toit," Plupart du temps,
 I, p. 232. All quotations are from this poem unless other-
 wise indicated. Written in 1918.

Themes of deviation begin earlier in Reverdy's poetry than the period outlined by the works Flaques de verre and Le Chant des morts. However, the types of slipping which occur are much less violent. An example of an earlier version of the deviation motif is found in the poem "Projets" from the collection of poems Les Ardoises du toit. With the exception of the indication that a storm is rising ("Le ciel plisse son front/Prépare une tempête"), movement is minimal throughout the opening lines of the poem. Suddenly, the relative immobility of the scene is broken by the forceful action of the verb ébranler. Waves of sound, coming from the steeples, shake the partition or web formed by the stars. An end to nocturnal calm and rest announces the arrival of dawn.

A sliding motion is introduced through contrast. As day advances, lights, vestiges of night, grow dim and begin to slip away. The feeling of withdrawal is intensified by the adjective mouillé and the verb glisser. The sidewalks, wet from the night's rain, serve as waterways along which men's dreams and aspirations slip fruitlessly away. The past participle éparpillés, a term implying forced separation, suggests that such hopes have already been partially displaced. Now, because of the storm, complete dispersion ensues. Their ruin is confirmed in the last two lines of the poem, "Qui restent morts dans la coulisse/De l'ombre épaisse où ils sont nés." Since there seems to be no possibility for the realization of human dreams, the title of the poem,

"Projects," appears ironical. Future hopes and plans, as soon as they have been created, will be destroyed.⁸⁸ All one can do is to wait for the cycle to begin anew.

"Un tas de gens,"⁸⁹ a poem from Sources du vent, and written after "Projets," presents a different aspect of overflow. It is blood this time and not water which, uncontrolled, pours out. This unchecked passage is the result not of flooding, but of fragmentation. As in "Projets," the theme of slipping again begins at the end of the poem with the verb crever. As the pressure at the interior of the sun increases, the solar disk bursts, displacing its elements which slide about haphazardly in space. The action of tearing or fragmenting is reinforced by the terms "Le sang coule." Flowing freely, the blood evokes several interpretations. Throughout most of the poem, there is little movement, and whatever motion there is, gradually diminishes until it has entirely disappeared:

⁸⁸The end of the poem "Projets" recalls the first stanza of a sonnet by Mallarmé, "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui." The hopes and plans in Reverdy's poem, no sooner born than destroyed, correspond to the swan's attempts to escape, unsuccessful flights out of sterility, stillborn poems or dreams:

"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!"
 Stéphane Mallarmé, "Plusieurs Sonnets,"
Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, p. 67.

⁸⁹Written in 1929. Reverdy, "Sources du vent," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 160-161. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

UN TAS DE GENS

Tremblantes les minutes brillent au bout des
branches
Le paon noir de la nuit plein d'orgueil fait la roue
Les étoiles tournent et regardent
L'heure qui pousse son troupeau
Mais on cherche ceux qui gardent
Et d'où vient ce bruit de grelots
Tout passe devant la fenêtre
Les ombres des vivants qui se sont arrêtées
Quand le soir descend sur les feuilles
Comme un presse-papier
Mais les autres marchent toujours
Dans le silence plus épais
Aucune lumière ne perce
Un homme s'est perdu
Le chemin de traverse
ne mène nulle part
Là ce n'est qu'un trou noir
A travers la barrière une tête qui rit
Et c'est dans la poussière que s'est éteint le bruit
Nuage
Clair-obscur
Cesse de respirer
Tous les oiseaux sont morts
Le soleil s'est crevé
Le sang coule
Dans l'eau où ses yeux se noyaient

Nuage
 Clair-obscur Cesse de respirer
 Tous les oiseaux sont morts

As the sun explodes, interrupting the previous scene of immobility, the close of day is confirmed; a dark fluid (le sang) fills in the hiatus between the advance of night and the retreat of day. Establishing complete control, the darkness of night, symbolized by the blood, threatens an unknown observer whose tears ("où ses yeux se noyaient") foreshadow the themes of solitude and death, suggested by the change in time. However, another possible interpretation may be indicated by the solar explosion. Its inherent movement may mark the end of nocturnal immobility, a theme already explored in the poem "Projets." The color of the solar fragments and of the blood suggests, perhaps, the arrival of dawn, which may be attempting to cleanse the eyes of the unknown observer, purging them of their malevolent predators.

As Reverdy's expression of the deviant state evolves, he abandons the thematic structure of the two previous poems. Instead of a lack of movement which, in the last stanza, is transformed into deviant motion, Reverdy devotes entire poems or at least major portions of poems to themes of destructive action. An additional development will be seen in Reverdy's vocabulary which, becoming more violent, specifically names various aspects of upheaval. The entire poem "Messager de la tyrannie,"⁹⁰ written after "Projets" and "Un tas de

⁹⁰Written in 1929. Pierre Reverdy, Flaques de verre

MESSAGER DE LA TYRANNIE

Il crache des étincelles sur la nuit, de la cendre, de l'amour, des éclairs, des ailes cassées, de la haine, des étoiles et des pièces d'or qui s'éloignent. Il crache les soupirs du remords sur la nuit. Il prend l'homme au souffle du silence à bras-le-corps et le renverse. Il lui enfonce le silence dans la gorge. Et, soit dans les villes fermentées, les villes rouges où dort à chaque carrefour un puits profond, où les passants laissent des traînées lumineuses dans l'ombre; soit dans les campagnes mal meublées de vagues habitants; soit dans les déserts sans espoir où n'entrera jamais personne, il sème le désir dans l'air et les esprits. Les hommes sont jetés à la mer d'un seul somme. A chaque porte entrebâillée, à chaque vitre où la lueur frissonne on peut écouter ce qu'il dit, on peut entendre battre les coups sourds de l'angoisse.

Tout est serré dans cette main qui jamais ne pardonne. Tout est dit et tout est arrêté au même compte. Un jour tu fermeras ton oeil à la lumière de la nuit. Toutes ces lampes dans le soir. Tous ces chemins perdus qui tournaient dans l'aurore. Tous ces feux détachés des bois du firmament. Et tous les rêves morts qui palpitent encore. Tout sera recouvert par les feuilles de plomb, par les rires cuivrés des jours que le temps couve. Puis le feu éternel brulera ton passé, ton passé qu'une main sacrilège déchire. Alors les corbeaux insensés dépecent le ciel gris. Les feuillets noirs sautés s'écornent dans le livre; le livre où les accords de ton temps sont inscrits. Il ne reste plus rien que la salive noire, ruisselant sur la nuit, et la haine, l'amour, l'or, le désir de l'or, la liberté sans ailes, la morsure contre les chaînes. Et, dans le blanc de l'oeil, du coeur, au verso de la vérité la force, la force qui pèse et qui tue, toute la force.

gens," describes the violent actions of an insensate God or Supreme Being, continuously referred to by the personal pronoun il. At the beginning and end of this prose poem Reverdy emphasizes the action of dividing and flowing, whereas at the interior of the poem, the theme of deviation is presented by each action separately, first by flowing and then by fragmentation.

Destructive slipping is introduced at the beginning of the poem, as the God or unknown force spits forth fragmented matter ("étincelles") which flows over the world of men. The dispersed matter contains elements having several connotations: "des éclairs" and "des étoiles" could be either positive or negative, "de l'amour" and "des pièces d'or" are most probably positive, while "de la cendre," "des ailes cassées," "de la haine," and "les soupirs du remords" are surely negative. The fragments of ashes and broken wings most probably suggest the respective connotations of death and unsuccessful attempts to escape the chaos. Even though there are some elements of this flow which may seem positive, a succession of movements immediately following which describes the reactions of the God to men, includes terms of extreme destruction and disintegration: "renverser," "enfoncez," "villes fermentées," "les déserts sans espoir," "les coups sourds de l'angoisse." In view of the suffering to which the God forces submission, the elements appearing as positive are dispersed into the flow only to be overcome by the negative particles.

After this deluge of wrath has been released, any former sources of hope and redemption will be obliterated. Using the two types of slipping separately, Reverdy first discusses the passing or flowing away of dreams: "Tous ces chemins perdus qui tournaient dans l'aurore." Previously slipping away just before dawn with the implication that they would reappear, dreams provided an alternative to the present, but they are now lost. Lamps shining in the dark were also sources of hope, but they, too, have been snuffed out by the flow. The movement of division and fragmentation will extinguish another possible source of hope. Routes leading to the fires of the firmament have been dispersed and dissolved, and the fires themselves have been smothered. In the meantime an entire human past will be torn and fragmented. There seems to be no hope for an end to this destruction, for it is performed by a "main sacrilège" whose desire for defilement is insatiable. The violence and inhumanity suggested by the verb déchirer is reinforced by the more specific animality of the term dépecer. The ravens are pilaging and dismembering human fragments.

As the poem ends, the theme of fragmentation is again joined to the motif of overflow and inundation. An unknown person, possibly the vengeful god, leafs through the pages of a book. The past participle sautés may suggest that as he quickly passes through the book, he disregards many uncut pages which slip by together. The identification of the book is never explicit, but it is probably a human history which has recorded the agreements or conventions ("les accords")

which regulate men's lives. The adjective noirs, describing the pages, may refer to the actual destruction of the book, or may allude to its content, a history of despair and suffering. Since it probably is a book prescribing limitation and control of force, it too, must be destroyed. Its ruin is predicted in the verb s'écorner and then confirmed in the expression "il ne reste plus rien que la salive noire." Turning through the book, the god will first break the corners of its pages, and then fragment each regulation or limitation. What was once a recorded account of moderation, whether observed or not observed, has been changed into a black liquid --- "une salive noire," again an allusion to the motion of flowing. These terms reinforce the association between the god and the destruction of the book; he has chewed and torn it apart. Its fragments have been liquified and now flow like a river, suggested by the present participle ruisselant into the stream of wrath where the end of the poem joins the beginning.

After Flagues de verre the themes of destructive slipping change, the motion expressed describing the psychological reaction of one man as opposed to the physical ruin of the universe. Both more personal and intimate, the poetry of Ferraille records by use of the pronoun je the poet's own psychological devastation. Such a personal confession of gloom and bitterness is found in the poem "Déroute"⁹¹ which, like many poems from Ferraille, emphasizes a deviant

⁹¹Written in 1937. Reverdy, "Ferraille," Main-d'oeuvre,

DÉROUTE

Je ne préface pas la ligne
La ligne du verre à la main

Au-dessous de la bouche saigne
Le cercle trop fermé sous les accents de l'oeil

Avec les éclairs des épines
Et les gouttes de sang tiède dans les cheveux
Dans les branches cassées où siffle la résine
Et les doigts contre la poitrine arrêtée

Le coeur disque signal ouvert des routes qui bifur-
quent traînée de ma douleur secrète sous les voutes
de l'inconnu de l'inédit qui garde ses chansons

Le doute des voyages dans les greniers des anciens
mondes sans permis

Mais tu arrêteras trop tôt la fatigue de ton vagabon-
dage spatial

Le temps qui trime
Contre les grèves sans merci de l'air et du mensonge
matinal
Le mystère à peine annoncé sur les dents aiguës des
collines
La figure gantée de sel
Quand le rôle perdu sèche dans la coulisse
La vie mal agencée dans les ornières dures des nom-
bres embrouillés et des lumières louches qui
gercent le pavé

Tic tac paisible de la poussière
Angle perdu des fonds malsains
La bouche tordue des injures
Et les dos mal plaqués qui fondent vers le ciel

C'est un mélange de mort et de lumières
Où les pétales sans odeur
Claquent contre les murs où somnole la fièvre
Et les fronts lugubres des penseurs

La nuit sous les arcs et les révoltes
Sous les ruines de la faim
Traîner le poids luisant sur la chaussée trop haute
Ma haine et mon tourment
Rien que le sol à la hauteur de ma famine
Rien que la pluie aux limites de mon amour
Tout ce que j'aime est pris et dans le foyer vide
les crimes avortés dans les calanques grises
demeurent impunis

Tout cet or sans vertu qui traîne dans les anses
Toutes ces forces mal saisies dans les étaux

Et puis la liberté qui flotte sur la ville où les heures
sont arrêtées

Je descends lourd épais
Sans espoir et sans ailes
Le long de l'avenue où glisse la rumeur
Perdu dans le brouillard l'illusion des comètes
la mémoire lavée par l'eau de la défaite
les linges de la peur

liquid state. Although the motion of flowing does not appear until the last stanza, its effects are continuously experienced throughout the poem. Allusions to death are found in the lines, "Et les doigts contre la poitrine arrêtée," and "où les heures sont arrêtées," while unhappiness and personal torment appear in the terms "ma douleur secrète," "le doute des voyages," "La vie mal agencée dans les ornières des nombres embrouillés," "La bouche tordue des injures," "Et les fronts lugubres des penseurs," "les révoltes sous les ruines de la faim," "ma haine et mon tourment," "sans espoir et sans ailes." Despite all of these adverse conditions, perhaps the poet would elect to fight, were it not for a force beyond his control, a counterpart to the vengeful il in the poem "Messager de la tyrannie": "Le temps qui trime/Contre les grèves sans merci ... "

Although perhaps the theme of man's struggle against time is a poetic cliché, Reverdy's view of this motif is original. His conception of time changes from the more conventional reference "le temps," that is, time as a character, to its representation as an onrush of water which, flowing across the memory, erases it. The effacement of memory is foreshadowed by the motion of distant murmurs which eerily slip onward as the narrator barely advances --- "Je descends lourd épais." His only remains left by the destructive slipping of temporal waters are the "linges de la peur." His spirit has been broken, his mind and memory obliterated. Only physical possessions remain as witnesses to his psychological ruination, alluded to in the term déroute, and

physical defeat, confirmed in the nouns peur and défaite.

In contrast to the irreversible pessimism of "Déroute" is another poem from Ferraille, "Les battements du coeur,"⁹² in which Reverdy attempts, through the theme of movement, a more objective point of view regarding human existence, examining both the injurious effects of the past and the consoling promises of the future. To the terms of despair, "avenir implacable sur les arêtes de la tombe," "mon tourment," and "des signes noirs sur les routes sans fin," respond expressions of hope and solace, "la joie ouvre ses branches d'or . . .," and "L'amour épanoui depuis les premiers murmures du jour . . ." Balance between despair and optimism is derived from a metaphor at the beginning of the poem which is based upon the motion of slipping.

Creating a double comparison, Reverdy notes the resemblance between a human body in poor health to a machine in disrepair. He hopes that the body, perhaps his own, will be restored to full life by the motion of blood pulsating as it flows through arteries, suggested by the noun rainure. The heart beats, initially "trop léger," become stronger as the blood ("la houle") forces itself through the body. To the previously used nautical terms rainure and houle, Reverdy adds the noun vagues to create the second comparison. It occurs when the blood, pausing as it builds up its strength, is likened to the sea which also regulates the passage of its waves. By using the term houle, denoting the surge or swell of the waves as they slip together, to describe the

⁹²Written in 1937. Reverdy, "Ferraille," Main-d'oeuvre,

LES BATTEMENTS DU COEUR

On remettra peut-être enfin la mécanique en marche sous les palmes
 Sur la claire cimaise où l'ombre tourne mal
 A l'aube des parties décidées loin du port
 Quand les idées sans lest prennent le large
 Dans l'immense rainure où s'évacue la soif
 Où le sang trop léger reconstitue ses vagues
 Quand la houle pousse à grands coups d'épaule sur
 le bord
 Le chant des matelots haletant la cadence

On pourrait à la rigueur compter les mots
 Aligner tous les traits cassés de ces visages
 Au front du ciel les rides trop creusées par les efforts
 Et les douleurs durement adaptées à la forme des
 hommes
 Il faut voir ces statues de liège sur les flots
 Ces formes déguisées qui s'accablent dans l'ombre
 Quand l'esprit clairvoyant dans l'éclair d'un défaut
 Aperçoit l'avenir implacable sur les arêtes de la
 tombe

Qui penserait à revenir alors par un autre chemin
 Qui oserait gravir les marches du calvaire
 Une ligne de trop décline mon tourment
 Avec un regard plus perfide on perd le coeur de
 l'adversaire
 Plus une larme dans le mien
 Plus un geste précis sur l'écran troublé du mystère
 Rien que des signes noirs sur les routes sans fin
 Et tout le temps perdu dans les fausses carrières

Mais parfois la joie ouvre ses branches d'or au soleil
 caressant
 L'amour épanoui depuis les premiers murmures de
 jour se dépouille de ses pétales
 Contre l'orgueil meurtri par la rudesse de tes mains
 Les bras serrant plus fort ton cou
 A chaque soubresaut de mon terrible caractère
 Ces bras qui seront désormais la rugueuse ceinture
 de tes reins
 Dont tu ne pourras te défaire
 La force sans repit qui tressera nos liens
 Sous le mal que tu peux me faire

passage of blood, Reverdy implies that this movement through the arteries is similar to a voyage out to sea, a voyage hopefully of rebirth and rejuvenation. The cadence of the sailors' gasping voices suggests that the rhythm of the heart beats is irregular and perhaps desperate. Yet, although the exact result of this attempt at rebirth is never indicated, the motion of flowing in this poem occurs in a very positive context, perhaps one of the most positive among the poems of Ferraille.

That the poem "Les battements du coeur" is indeed a brief moment of exception to Reverdian gloom is proved by those poems which succeed it, most of which are dominated by the specter time. Death continuously haunts Reverdy, especially in Ferraille where its threat is frequently disguised as temporal passage. Whether in the form of blood or water, Reverdy constantly represents time as a liquid, a technique already discussed in the poem "Déroute." Perhaps the most noticeable change in his treatment of this theme of deviation is that the tone of his poems varies greatly from personal depression as in "Déroute" to bitterness, torment, and deprivation, illustrated in the poem "Le temps et moi."⁹³ The continuous passage of time expressed conventionally in the movement of a clock striking the hour is repeated more originally in the slow but constant trickling or flowing of a glimmer of light. Moreover, the terms "goutte à goutte,"

⁹³Written in 1937. Reverdy, "Ferraille," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 376-377. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LE TEMPS ET MOI

Dans le sous-sol le plus secret de ma détresse
 Où le vice a reçu la trempe de la mort
 Je redonne le ton au disque
 Le refrain à la vie
 Un terme à mon remords

Dans le cercle sans horizon où se lamente la nature
 Si la chaleur qui passe du sang à ton esprit
 Tu pouvais suivre la mesure
 En te hatant sans bruit au tournant de la peur
 Tout ce qu'on m'a repris des roues de la poitrine
 Cette montre qui sonne l'heure sans arrêt
 Et l'amère lueur qui coulait goutte à goutte
 Entre la main et l'oeil
 Le chemin de la peau
 La débâcle au bruit sec de la glace légère qui se brise
 au réveil

Je vais plus loin la main tendue au mouvement
 inconscient de la pendule
 Une curiosité perçante au fond du coeur
 Et pour toi dans la tempe le bruit sourd qui ondule
 Des fièvres du péché à l'haleine des fleurs

Va-et-vient lumineux
 Ressac de la fatigue
 Goutte à goutte le temps creuse ta pierre nue
 Poitrine ravivée par l'acier des minutes
 Et la main dans le dos qui pousse à l'inconnu

responding to the expression "sans arrêt," assure a continuous reoccurrence of temporal sliding. The glimmer of light may refer to drops of hope which slowly slide away, or perhaps to faint glimpses of dawn which appear and then seem to vanish. Whatever the interpretation, the adjective amère emphasizes the pessimism of the one receiving the source of light. His anxiety and frustration, implied in the phrase "amère lueur," are later confirmed in the fragmentation of the glass, "la glace légère qui se brise/au réveil," the final barrier between himself and the reality of death. The context of the noun débâcle is not only physical in the sense of the broken glass but also psychological. As the poet awakens, the fragmentation of his dream world occurs as well as his own mental breakdown.

Death, heretofore generally implied in the movement of temporal flow, assumes a more specific character at the end of the poem. The image of drops sliding together and trickling ("goutte à goutte le temps ... ") does reappear, but it is the result of this entire movement and not the action of each drop which embodies the theme of deviation. The motif of time overcoming the resistance of the poet is compared to an undertow formed by the ocean which, regulating the sliding of its waves, begins the erosion of the shore line. The phrase va-et-vient, preparing the reader for the more forceful noun ressac, facilitates the transition from the trickling movement of the drops to the larger, more encompassing motion of the waves as they slide together. Also used to link earlier parts of the poem with the end, the adjective

lumineux may perhaps both refer to the phrase "amère lueur" as well as to the white crests of the waves. The relentless torment and conquest of the poet which started with the terms "ressac de la fatigue" reoccurs with the verb creuser. As the drops descend, they symbolize a temporal process gradually carving out the poet's epitaph, an act reminiscent of the erosion of the shore line. Death becomes much more personal and therefore, more tragic in this third and final metaphor. To the terms va-et-vient, ressac, creuser, all connoting the formation of hollows or grooves, Reverdy adds the past participle ravinée. Drops of time slip away and fall upon the chest of the poet, slowly killing him. With each drop his chest is further penetrated until death itself appears, "la main dans le dos," at which time the poet's resistance ceases.

Reverdy's more personal and intimate view of the self contesting the forces of fate diminishes somewhat in his last major collection, Le Chant des morts. Externalizing the anguish and torment of Ferraille, he seeks to identify his own crises with those of mankind. Appropriately the emphasis upon the term je yields to a preoccupation with the pronoun nous. Reverdy returns to scenes of universal disintegration where the motion of overflow and division join again to express themes of deviation. In contrast to earlier versions of these themes, as for example in Flaques de verre, Reverdy's approach in Le Chant des morts is more subjective, for instead of assuming the role of a detached observer as in the

Il a la tête pleine d'or⁹⁴
 Les pieds dilatés dans le sable

Il ne faut pas désespérer des racines de l'homme
 Aux muscles de caoutchouc
 Il ne faut pas jeter la hampe qui visse la terre au
 drapeau
 Ni broyer le coeur de la lampe
 La source de sang qui s'évente
 Quand la blessure au ventre
 Écoule son trésor aux franges du ruisseau

Il n'y a pas de cheminée dans le chemin de fer de la
 nuit blanche
 La nuit glacée dans le sous-sol de l'hôpital
 La terre est aplatie comme une nappe d'ombre
 Un cadavre de cendre qui s'imbibe de sang

C'est le désastre du réveil d'une traînée de nombres
 Des êtres fabuleux qui ont l'oeil au nombril

C'est dans les moisissures d'un soleil au col d'été
 Que le long fleuve des jours noirs a pris sa source
 Et sous la pluie a versé des regards sans appui
 L'orgueil défilé jeté dans les rigoles
 Un tapis sans couleur de mousse desséchée
 Dans la gorge brûlée de soif
 Les pas plus durs plus sourds et plus légers
 battent le rythme de la honte

Les pendules meurent de froid dans le chenal
 Et la faim de loup dans l'oreille
 Nous battons la campagne au coup
 Nous en avons la gorge pleine
 Les routes les sillons sont de marbre et de fer
 Les haies de la douleur bordent des champs de haine
 Et puis nous n'avons plus de raison d'avoir peur
 Il n'y a plus de place que pour l'espoir
 Dans le désert de la misère

Quand le couvre-feu du mépris abaisse toutes les
 paupières
 Nous avons respiré longtemps
 Les chants conservés dans la gorge

⁹⁴Written between 1944-1948. Reverdy, "Le Chant des
 morts," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 401-403. All quotations are from
 this poem unless otherwise indicated.

Dans la marée basse ou montante de la nuit
 Quand l'angoisse était à mer pleine
 Le silence étale à plein bord
 Entre les fentes de l'oubli
 Nous n'étions pas les seuls esclaves à la chaîne

Trop tard la peur casse les membres
 Le vent entasse nos soucis
 Trop tard il faut toujours descendre
 marche à marche dans l'infini

L'ouate du cauchemar bouche toutes les portes
 Et pèse plus lourd sur les toits
 Dans les rues de la ville morte
 Comme la crasse entre les doigts

Le son des pas comptés dans le labyrinthe des tombes
 Ces maisons sans orgueil tombeaux pétrifiés
 diffusent le venin des songes
 Et l'homme revenu pourchassé vers l'écueil
 sur les rives du fleuve immonde
 Épaules de nuit dans la vase
 Ravins de la lune de sel
 Le coeur brûle son gaz
 L'esprit s'écrase
 Un parapet de chair se dresse au cul-de-sac

Et puis la femme fraîche et pesante au corps nu
 qui passe son temps à sourire
 Dans la trame à rebours des gestes retenus
 Le narcotique des saisons
 Le parfum de la pourriture
 Sous les rais de la porte
 Entre les rideaux noirs
 Dans la panoplie du remords
 Les lèvres boursouflées du matin qui s'éveille
 Dans la poitrine secouée d'un dur recul
 Le dégoût de ne plus rien faire

Miracles du sommeil
 Les mains liées dans les ornières
 Les pieds au ciel

poem "Messager de la tyrannie," he becomes completely absorbed into the chaos of his environment.

Reverdy's treatment of death, the ultimate effect of deviation, evolves from one which emphasizes the impersonal, absolute force of time to a preference for a more human embodiment, a morbid creature which commits specific, gruesome acts. In the poem "Il a la tête pleine d'or" a human body which has been opened at the stomach has been left to slowly decay and disintegrate. Reverdy augments the morbidity of the description first, by using the verb s'éventer which accentuates the actual decomposition, and then by ironically describing that which flows out of the wound as "trésor." The blood passes out with no interruption. Having reached its destination, disclosed in the prepositional phrase "aux franges du ruisseau," it joins a larger, more powerful source of flow and thereby reinforces the idea of continuous passage towards death.

The image of the torn, fragmented human body reappears several lines later, but this time instead of the indefinite phrase "source de sang," it is more specifically referred to as "un cadavre de cendre." The stomach wound is now hidden by a pool of blood⁹⁵ and the verb s'imbiber suggests that

⁹⁵A similar gruesome image of death appears in a poem by Baudelaire, "La Cloche fêlée," in which the poet imagines himself near death, lying in a pool of blood: "'Au bord d'un lac de sang, sous un grand tas de morts, / Et qui meurt, sans bouger, dans d'immenses efforts.'" Charles Baudelaire, "La Cloche fêlée," Les Fleurs du mal (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 85. Baudelaire's description, in comparison with that of Reverdy, is morbid but reveals no preoccupation with physical decomposition. Again unlike Reverdy, minimal movement occurs

whatever recognizable remains exist, are engulfed in this fluid. To a vocabulary connoting physical decomposition, Reverdy adds terms of psychological horror which transform the poem into a nightmare: "la nuit blanche," "la nuit glacée," "dans le sous-sol." From the two lines just following the image of the cadaver, the reader receives further confirmation of the poet's ghastly vision, "C'est le désastre du réveil d'une traînée de nombres/Des êtres fabuleux qui ont l'oeil au nombril." Given the dates of composition for Le Chant des morts, 1944-1948, it seems probable that Reverdy is alluding to the Second World War. For a soldier, surviving the night's battle only creates an additional problem --- choosing among the phantoms of one's dreams, "L'ouate du cauchemar bouche toutes les portes/Et pèse plus lourd sur les toits," or the horrors of reality, "Trop tard la peur casse les membres/Le vent entasse nos soucis."

Although the image of the cadaver sinking in blood does not reappear for the remainder of the poem, its presence is indirectly felt as Reverdy returns to an emphasis upon the movement of blood flowing forth. Recalling the introductory image of deviation in the poem "Un tas de gens" where blood passing from a wound is compared to the flow of a river, Reverdy refers to the length of human suffering and the ultimate result in terms of the passage of a lethal fluid. In the line, "Que le long fleuve des jours noirs a pris sa source," the adjective noirs brings to mind the wounds sus-

in the death scene where a pool of blood suggests a previous outpouring.

tained and the blood itself. The terms "le long fleuve" express the duration of time involved, the noun fleuve denoting greater proportions than the term ruisseau, used at the beginning of the poem. Instead of a vocabulary based upon terms of psychological horror, Reverdy refers to this aspect of slipping with expressions connoting decay and deterioration: "les moisissures d'un soleil," "L'orgueil déficelé jeté dans les rigoles," "Un tapis sans couleur de mousse desséchée," "la gorge brûlée de soif," "le rythme de la honte." Reflecting upon the significance of the future, the poet senses only a long period of suffering, the termination of which is unfortunately marked by the adjective noirs.

In contrast to the ever-present threat of future death, the final image of deviant slipping in this poem is presented against a background of terms suggesting past deaths and yet, not precluding those about to occur: "le Labyrinthe des tombes," and "tombeaux pétrifiés." The movement of slipping or flowing is no longer that of a river of blood, but rather, a diffusion of venom, secreted by the tombs of the dead. The phrase "le venin des songes," reflecting malicious intent, suggests that the phantoms of their nightmares, spite and hatred, may be permitted to slip into the present and poison the living. The flow of their venomous fluid creates a "fleuve immonde" which permeates all spheres of human activity, threatening humanity by either the force of its undertow ("l'écueil") or by its pollution ("Épaules

de nuit dans la vase."). The adjective immonde may indeed signify that the foul stream encircling the living is actually the mythological river Styx and therefore, at this point in the poem life is transformed into death. Instead of a cadaver slowly sinking in a pool of blood, mankind is represented by the human spirit gradually dissolving in the decomposing waters of the Styx: "L'esprit s'écrase/Un parapet de chair se dresse au cul-de-sac." Since there is no solution to man's dilemma, death remains the only choice: "Les mains liées dans les ornières/Les pieds au ciel."

As the universe continues to disintegrate, it begins to slip at a faster rate of speed. In the poem "Le fil de feu"⁹⁶ it spins towards its fatal objective, "La terre file à son déclin," as if directed by a mysterious exterior force. With a tone of disillusionment, recalling the bitterness of Ferraille, Reverdy comments upon the uncontrollable vile fluids which are inundating the earth, "Une boue d'illusions déborde le trottoir." The phrase "Une boue d'illusions" recalls the unclean river of the dead in the previous poem. It refers to the unrealized hopes which, now destroyed, overflow the sidewalk and bring to mind the lines of the previously discussed poem "Projets":

Et sur le trottoir mouillé glissent
Tous leurs désirs éparpillés
Qui restent morts dans la coulisse⁹⁷

⁹⁶Written between 1944-1948. Reverdy, "Le Chant des morts," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 414. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

⁹⁷See p. 121.

LE FIL DE FEU

La terre file à son déclin
La terre est pleine de poussière
Des lumières bleues du matin
Aux étincelles du cratère
A la prune chaude qui dévide son dard
Aux paupières fardées de rêves qui s'effondrent
Une boue d'illusions déborde le trottoir
Dans la détresse des mains
La parole vide qui pend
Le vase creux où macère le cœur
Tout mon sang comme du vinaigre
Sur la corde à noeuds du malheur
J'avais pris toutes mes mesures
Et je dors maintenant jusqu'au nouveau signal
Dans le tunnel coupé de fausses ouvertures
A la nuit lourde pleine de cruautés
De lâches douleurs qui m'attendent

The tone of disillusionment has been appropriately prepared by an emphasis upon slipping as a result of fragmentation. Dreams are collapsing and sliding away in the undertow of vile waters. The poet seems to be alone in his acceptance of this chaotic reality, for even his fellow observers, represented by the noun paupières,⁹⁸ have disguised themselves with false hopes as if to avoid facing the disintegration of their world. Reverdy, however, reacts to each aspect of upheaval with only cynicism and bitterness, most strongly expressed in the poem's final image of dissolution: "Tout mon sang comme du vinaigre." The poet's blood, the one fluid whose passage he can to some extent control, will no longer reflect illusory hopes, but will instead sharpen his awareness of life's false promises: "Et je dors ... /Dans le tunnel coupé de fausses ouvertures."

The increased rate of movement at which the earth slides or spins, alluded to in the introductory line of the poem "Le fil de feu," prefigures the poet's tendency to accentuate the rapidity of flow and fragmentation at the end of Le Chant des morts. The poem "Paysage noir"⁹⁹ presents a tableau of war in which civilians and soldiers, caught in disarray, seek to flee in order to avoid slaughter. The speed of flight or

⁹⁸The terms paupières and yeux do not always bear a negative connotation in Reverdy's work. In the poem "Le cercle ténébreux," p. 85, the substantive eyes signifies limits or boundaries, e.g. night terminating, day beginning, and the theme of passage, the transition between night and day, sequential order, darkness followed by light.

⁹⁹Written between 1944-1948. Reverdy, "Le Chant des morts," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 444. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

PAYSAGE NOIR

L'ouragan se déchaine à vif dans les tubes de la
tonnelle
Il fait à peine moins froid qu'hier
Des grappes de plomb chargent l'air
La façade est criblée de petite vérole
Il n'y a plus de lumière au timbre de ta voix
La mort est à tout bout de champ
Sous les cicatrices toujours rouvertes des étoiles
Les champs tournent la peau au feu
Tous les échos meurtris au coude des ruelles
Chaque visage a sa flamme de sang
Chaque corps déplacé souffle son monticule
La meute va son train les rênes débraillées
Dans la déroute sans rainures
Les pas plus durs les portes verrouillées
Pans de mer qui s'écroulent
Sous l'épaisseur des chambres cuirassées
S'amoncelle le niveau d'or de la fortune
Un coup de plus trop tard sur le plateau
Un coup d'aile de main d'épaule
Coup de soleil au fil de l'eau
Un cou de femme nu dans un collier d'épines

slipping progressively increases in the lines, "La meute va son train les rênes débraillées/Dans la dérouté sans rainures." Beginning with the expression "aller son train," the action of escaping augments as the adjective débraillées suggests that either the crowd has hastily fled without securing their possessions or that as they flee, enemy fire destroys and pulverizes whatever they may be carrying. With either interpretation a sense of increased disorder is produced together with the feeling that their belongings are being swiftly swept away, scattered like mere fragments. In addition, their retreat is described as one "sans rainures," that is, without the prescribed procedures, or conventional tactics. intensifying the confusion of the tableau, this prepositional phrase conveys the chaotic gestures of the crowd as it roams about, prey to hysterical fear.

Again using the motion of flow to reinforce that of fragmentation, Reverdy presents another image of deviant slipping in the line "Pans de mer qui s'écroulent." The disorder of the tableau and the rapidity of its dissolution have increased to the point where it seems that walls of water are collapsing upon those in flight, who under the force of the current, slip away helplessly to their death. Emphasizing the rapid rate of disintegration, Reverdy in the last four lines of the poem repeats the sound [ku], suggesting a series of abrupt motions. The final image of deviation occurs in the last line. There, Reverdy continues to emphasize the same sound but now uses it to ironically refer to the bare neck of a woman. A necklace of thorns, itself

symbolizing the passage of blood, is the only distinguishing feature of this human fragment flowing through the confusion.

However, the rapid occurrence of such relentless destruction is not altogether an element of surprise. At the beginning of the poem increasingly violent motion is foreshadowed in the image of the wind as it funnels through the semi-circular arch, slipping faster and faster into a spiral: "L'ouragan se déchaîne à vif dans les tubes de la/tonnelle." To the disintegration produced by the themes of overflow and fragmentation, Reverdy now joins the violence of the whirlwind, the third and final motif of deviation.

Spirals, The Whirlwind

In contrast to the combined movement of flowing and dividing, the destructive slipping produced by the spiral or whirlwind usually occurs alone. There are, however, several exceptions to this solitary action as illustrated by the poem "Paysage noir." Before the period when the theme of deviation is most prevalent in Reverdy's work, 1929-1948, early occurrences of wind forces spiraling and spinning are frequently used to relive the past, to resurrect memories long since forgotten. In the poem "Coeur de plomb"¹⁰⁰ from La Lucarne ovale the poet recalls a time in the past when someone whom he addresses as "toi" was close to death. The introductory image of the whirlwind in the third line, "Un tourbillon de neige entoure la maison," conveys the impression

¹⁰⁰Written in 1916. Reverdy, "La Lucarne ovale," Plupart du temps, I, pp. 143-144. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

COEUR DE PLOMB

Je ne veux plus rien voir
Tous les trains sont passés
Un tourbillon de neige entoure la maison
Qui tombe
Dans un fossé

C'était chez toi
L'hiver mettait ta vie en péril

Où sont tes mains glacées

Le poêle est éteint
La vitre est brisée
Nous restions assis
Sans rien dire
Et l'ombre nous enveloppait
En face une femme chantait
Plus bas une lampe brillait
Les cris venaient de loin et les yeux s'éteignaient
Il y avait dans la cour une vie trop triste qui mourait
Mais la terre a tourné depuis
La fenêtre d'en bas est montée
La maison tout d'un coup s'est renversée
C'est une automobile qui passe
Je vois des gens qui rient dans la glace
Plus loin c'est un homme sérieux
Une femme sauvage est au milieu
C'est celle de mon meilleur ami
Toi tu t'éloignes et tu souris
Regarde encore
Ce buste qui s'éclaire au fond du corridor

that the house is surrounded with snow, and therefore, separated from the living. The fourth and fifth lines of the poem, "Qui tombe/Dans un fossé," suggest that as the whirlwind circles the house, it also in a sense buries the structure and those in it. The image of the broken window pane in line ten may represent the force of the wind as it passes through the room, or, and most probably, it may refer to the motif of isolation in death, reinforced by the lines, "Nous restions assis/Sans rien dire." The violent action of the wind as it spirals contrasts with the complete absence of movement of those inside the house; for a time immobility exists in mobility.

No longer able to remember details of the incident, the poet rejoins the present and now begins to associate the force of the wind with a change in time: "Mais la terre a tourné depuis." The spiraling motion of the whirlwind is reflected in the verb tourner; it no longer is a spinning funnel of death, but instead a spiraling force which institutes change. The exact type of change to which Reverdy is alluding is disclosed in the lines, "La fenêtre d'en bas est montée/La maison tout d'un coup s'est renversée." The complete reversal of immobility in death to mobility in life is conveyed in the progression "en bas" to "montée" and in the verb se renverser, suggesting that the house in which death occurred is now inverted or that it has been overturned and is now fallen. Both interpretations support the idea that the past and the present are in complete opposition and that

the whirlwind is an agent of total change. The poet, now conscious of the time lapse, realizes that his memory is only a fragment of a former life, created by the association between the unknown "toi" and the bust at the end of the corridor.¹⁰¹

In addition to temporal change, the whirlwind as an aspect of deviation may represent a continuous replacement of one tableau by another as in a poem from Cravates de chanvre, "La tête rouge."¹⁰² The poem begins with a succession of three subjects: the swells of the sea, a jockey on a tilbury, and a pine forest. The lines introducing all three subjects (lines one through four, eight, and fourteen)

¹⁰¹Rimbaud in the poem "Mystique" on p. 150 of "Les Illuminations," Poésies complètes, treats the motif of complete change in the context of a spiraled sea shell where movement channelled through the passages of the shell changes from turbulence to rhythmic serenity. The violent spiraling suggestive of a whirlwind is felt in the phrase "la rumeur tournante et bondissante . . ." and the resulting destruction produced by this force is disclosed in the following prose description:

"Des près de flammes bondissent jusqu'au sommet du mamelon. A gauche le terreau de l'arête est piétiné par tous les homicides et toutes les batailles, et tous les bruits désastreux filent leur courbe."

In opposition to this passage is a later one where Rimbaud describes the calm and peace into which the previous violence and immoderate movement have been transformed, molded by the force of the shell's spirals:

"La douceur fleurie des étoiles et du ciel et du reste descend en face du talus, comme un panier, . . . contre notre face, et fait l'abîme fleurant et bleu là-dessous."

¹⁰²Written in 1922. Reverdy, "Cravates de chanvre," Plupart du temps, II, pp. 123-125. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LA TÊTE ROUGE

Là-haut
 Le creux marin
 Au bord des hémisphères
 La houle passe en bloc par-dessus les tréteaux
 Les racines du monde

pendent
 par delà la terre
 les jambes du jockey au bord du tilbury
 Les côtés de la route changent
 les franges du ciel remuent
 Et le vent se replie derrière la forêt
 les monticules
 à la ligne des dunes où roule le soleil
 Les pins dans les barreaux de fer
 renferment les bêtes immobiles
 la peau des roches
 à travers les ondes des coups de tonnerre
 de l'orage
 Il ne manque plus rien si l'horizon frémit

Mais derrière
 Il y a sur le mur l'affiche ensanglantée
 les lambeaux de carton que la pluie fait bouger
 le soir
 aux yeux du passant qui remonte par la plus
 longue rue
 Rue déserte encombrée de maisons qui se
 déplacent
 Les arbres prisonniers s'entendent à voix basse
 Chaque vitrine a son secret
 Dans la nuit
 Sous le ciel et une voie d'étoiles
 Des gémissements
 Des oscillations inquiétantes de la terre qui
 change son mouvement
 L'homme qui monte sans rien voir que son pas
 devant

Les bruits dans les gradins du port
 et les bruits des enseignes
 Toutes les voix
 Tous les tumultes
 Les formes blanches des étages qui se plaignent
 Tout luit

L'eau a lavé la pierre
 Des mots glissent des toits
 Un bruit sourd des lumières
 Entre les deux troupeaux des trottoirs les portes
 pleines qu'on pousse et qui ne s'ouvrent pas
 Le langage étranger dans la tête du matelot qui va
 La mémoire du poète en avant qui dicte
 Et les livres dont les noms et les mots reviennent
 constamment

Nuages Tour Eiffel les noms du Dictionnaire
 Et les mots étrangers et ceux de son pays
 Ou seront-ils passés

Et l'ombre de l'ami mort l'an dernier toujours
 présente derrière sa table et dans ses promenades
 et même pour signer
 Cette réclame
 Ce mouvement dans l'être qui agite son chapeau
 au bout du même bras
 Et cette face rouge
 La même qui guidait le marin qui allait
 la tête émerveillée des noms du Dictionnaire
 des mots de la légende et de l'astrologie
 Le temps passe sous l'aile
 La caresse de l'air
 Le portrait que je laisse
 Et tous les mots violents que je n'aurai pas dits

begin at the left margin, giving emphasis to each new scene. The whirlwind itself does not appear as "le tourbillon" or as "l'ouragan," but simply as "le vent"; its spiral motion is never directly referred to, only its effect, seen in the instability of the poem's central point. A short paragraph, inserted at the middle of the introduction, reconfirms the wind's power to realize a shift in focus or orientation:

Les côtés de la route changent
 les franges du ciel remuent
 Et le vent se replie derrière la forêt
 les monticules
 à la ligne des dunes où roule le soleil

The sliding or shifting motion denoted by the verbs changer, remuer, and se replier is directed later on in the poem to several aspects of an entire tableau, rather than just to the focal point. The attention of the reader is centered upon a street scene where the movement of sliding objects is now more intense than that of the introductory tableaux. The terms "l'affiche ensanglantée" in line twenty and "les lambeaux de carton" in line twenty-one foreshadow the negative aspects of the following lines:

Rue déserte encombrée de maisons qui se
 déplacent

 Des oscillations inquiétantes de la terre qui
 change son mouvement

As the more specific terms "des oscillations inquiétantes" succeed a verb of general motion, se déplacer, the extent of the slide is not only intensified but also becomes more and more unpredictable:

Toutes les voix
 Tous les tumultes

.....

Des mots glissent des toits

Objects, people, and the fragments of their conversation shift about with no particular orientation. Whether the physical and psychological instability of the scene arises from hallucinations or merely reflects a stream of consciousness, a series of actual past or present impressions haunting the poet, Reverdy seems to be reiterating the principal theme of the crossroads, that man is a voyager forever in search of his destination or objective. At the end of the poem, Reverdy returns to a succession of subjects as at the beginning; the minds of the poet and seaman are recorded as objects, places, and events of the past slide one into the other: names of books and selected passages, the Eiffel Tower, words from a foreign language, the death of a friend.

Throughout Reverdy's later work where he seems less preoccupied with the reconstruction of the past, the deviant movement of the whirlwind occurs with increased variety. In a prose poem of 1929 from Flaques de verre, "La tête pleine de beauté,"¹⁰³ the whirlwind serves as a vehicle for self-analysis. Here as the poet attempts to examine the contradictory elements of his psyche, the inner recesses of his mind ("l'abîme" and "les crevasses tendres du coeur") become a playground where opposing thoughts bring together numerous potential views for a particular concept: "... les tourbillons roulants entraînent les bouillons/de mon sang dans les vases,

¹⁰³Written in 1929. Reverdy, Flaques de verre, pp. 134-135. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LA TÊTE PLEINE DE BEAUTÉ

Dans l'abîme doré, rouge, glacé, doré, l'abîme où gîte la douleur, les tourbillons roulants entraînent les bouillons de mon sang dans les vases, dans les retours de flammes de mon tronc. La tristesse moirée s'engloutit dans les crevasses tendres du cœur. Il y a des accidents obscurs et compliqués, impossibles à dire. Et il y a pourtant l'esprit de l'ordre, l'esprit régulier, l'esprit commun à tous les désespoirs qui interroge. O toi qui traînes sur la vie, entre les buissons fleuris et pleins d'épines de la vie, parmi les feuilles mortes, les reliefs de triomphes, les appels sans secours, les balayures mordorées, la poudre sèche des espoirs, les braises noircies de la gloire, et les coups de révolte, toi, qui ne voudrais plus désormais aboutir nulle part. Toi, source intarissable de sang. Toi, désastre intense de lueurs qu'aucun jet de source, qu'aucun glacier rafraîchissant ne tentera jamais d'éteindre de sa sève. Toi, lumière. Toi, sinuosité de l'amour enseveli qui se dérobe. Toi, parure des ciels cloués sur les poutres de l'infini. Plafond des idées contradictoires. Vertigineuse pesée des forces ennemies. Chemins mêlés dans le fracas des chevelures. Toi, douceur et haine --- horizon ébreché, ligne pure de l'indifférence et de l'oubli. Toi, ce matin, tout seul dans l'ordre, le calme et la révolution universelle. Toi, clou de diamant. Toi, pureté, pivot éblouissant du flux et du reflux de ma pensée dans les lignes du monde.

dans les retours de flammes de/mon tronc." For a more physical interpretation, the term tourbillon may also represent the heart, a central force whose pumping motion assures the flow of blood throughout the receptacles of the body. The substantive bouillons contributes to the regularity and speed of circulation, thereby connecting the theme of the whirlwind to that of flow.

Further describing the effect produced by the whirlwind, Reverdy uses terms in opposition. He realizes that the unnamed "toi" ("O toi qui traînes sur la vie") has always been at one extreme or another: "entre les buissons fleuris et pleins d'épines de la vie." Towards the end of the poem he finds himself along a "Plafond des idées contradictoires." The chaotic slipping of thought, caused by the whirlwind, is paralleled in the phrase "Chemins mêlés dans le fracas des/chevelures." Human nature is, then, paradoxical, at the same time "douceur et haine." Reverdy's pessimism, increasingly noticeable at the time Flaques de verre was published, is easily perceived mid-way through the poem as the unnamed narrator confesses he is losing interest in attaining his objective, that is, understanding his psychological contradictions: "toi, qui ne voudrais plus désormais/aboutir nulle part." Unable to withstand the instability of his psyche, he weakens and is overwhelmed by the immoderate motion of the whirlwind. Again as in previous poems, there will be no guidance from an exterior force, "---horizon ébréché, ligne/pure de l'indifférence et de

l'oubli." Whether man seeks to understand himself or his environment, either attempt will be in vain; he is forever destined to stand between two enigmatic extremes, " ... pivot éblouissant du/flux et du reflux de ma pensée dans les lignes du monde."

In addition to his failure to comprehend and adjust to inner instability, there are other psychological weaknesses to which Reverdy alludes in his poetry but which he never explains. Together they continuously serve as sources of frustration and eventual bitterness, progressively becoming the bases of fears bordering upon paranoia. Much of Reverdy's pessimism derives from feelings of persecution, the traces of which begin to appear more frequently in Flaques de verre and then manifest themselves quite overtly in Le Chant des morts. In a line from the previously discussed poem, "La tête pleine de beauté," Reverdy suggests that his attempts at self-analysis have been thwarted by an exterior force over which he has no control: "Vertigineuse/pesée des forces ennemies." Linking the image of the whirlwind and the theme of persecution, the adjective vertigineuse narrows the association between Reverdy's fear of pursuit ("forces ennemies") and the speed at which spirals travel.

The negative rotation of the spiral gives further evidence of Reverdy's fear of oppression in one of his last poems, "Lettre morte,"¹⁰⁴ from Le Chant des morts. Suspicion of his environment is conveyed in the first two lines, as he

¹⁰⁴Written between 1944-1948. Reverdy, "Le Chant des morts," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 435. All quotations are from this

LETTRE MORTE

Il faut que je plane en sourdine
Au milieu des yeux aux aguets
Entre les plantes délicates
Les mains avides qui prennent tout en mal
Et la part qui revient à chacun
Jamais au même
Jamais seul
Vieille statue animée sans piédestal
A tous les tournants de la terre
A tous les vertiges du vent
Une colonne de velours dans la clairière
Ou les branches sont des limailles de soleil
Le roulement des cataractes sous la mousse
Les avalanches de désirs démantelés
Dans un tourbillon de rires
De menaces
Pour reprendre ton vol
Coeur dur désemparé

cautiously moves "en sourdine," believing that he is being watched and perhaps followed---"Au milieu des yeux aux aguets." The fourth line of the poem, "Les mains avides qui prennent tout en mal," further identifies the eyes with wrongful acts or at least hostile reactions.

Further along in the poem, the forces of opposition which the poet encounters are characterized as aspects of the natural environment. The poet imagines himself to be an object d'art, a "vieille statue animée sans piédestal," still expressive of vitality yet viewed as an anachronism and no longer appreciated. It is possible that this symbol of artistic creativity has never been respected, and that throughout its existence, it has been forced to sustain the hostile, uncontrollable funnels of the whirlwind, "les tournants de la terre," "les vertiges du vent." The whirlwind, although still a source of antagonism to the poet, becomes more personalized in the expression, "Dans un tourbillon de rires/De menaces." The phrase "Le roulement des cataractes" foreshadows the substantive avalanches, both intensifying the context of sound and speed conveyed in the spinning movement of the spiral where the poet's aspirations and dreams are ridiculed and then dispersed. Although he has withstood punishment from the whirlwind, the poet is left with only bitterness and a sense of futility: "Coeur dur désespéré." In a preface to the collection Plupart du temps, I, II, Hubert Juin paraphrases Reverdy, "Vivre quand même, bien qu'on n'ait pas pu s'insérer dans la vie"¹⁰⁵---although

¹⁰⁵I, p. 10.

the date of this quotation is most likely prior to that of the publication of Le Chant des morts, especially in view of the minimal pessimism, Reverdy concedes even at this point, that one must be satisfied to simply live; searching for an answer to life's contradictions and idiosyncracies would only be futile, gaining a foothold against the turmoil they create would be impossible.

CHAPTER V

ORIENTATION/ABSENCE OF ORIENTATION

Closely related to the disquieting movement of a world spinning out of control, deviating from a standard of order and logic, is the artist's concern that he may not be able to sufficiently regulate his unbridled creative impulses, or that he may fail to grasp their true meaning, thereby rendering communication impossible. Another source of insecurity for the artist is the ephemeral nature of the poetic inspiration itself. Extremely fragile, its appearance often marks the beginning of its demise. Reverdy, throughout his poetry, wavers in his attitude toward the motif of literary creation. In his more optimistic poems, constructive aspects of movement appear as the poet intuitively senses which direction or mode of approach to pursue towards literary creation, while in his more pessimistic moments, the poet flounders helplessly, unsure as to how to arrive at true poetic meaning. Reverdy's vacillation in regard to vocation will, in this study, comprise the counter themes of orientation/absence of orientation. Those poems in which Reverdy is oriented toward constructive movement will emphasize his development as a poet; whereas, other poems in which there is an absence of literary orientation will depict a poet plagued by the fear that his works will be meaningless.

Orientation: Self-definition and Development

When asked by a representative of Minotaure what was the most important encounter of his life, Reverdy replied,

La seule, capitale et trop évidemment nécessaire, dont l'importance s'aggrave au fur et à mesure de sa persistance dans le temps---celle que j'ai cru faire de moi-même, avec qui je n'en aurai fini jamais.¹⁰⁶

Poetry, then, is self-definition and development. Immersed in the thoughts which will dictate his poem, the poet passes freely into and out of the inner depths of his psyche, only to return to the objects of everyday existence. The product of this cyclical movement and of the confrontation of the two spheres which it necessitates, is the poem, actually a fragment of the poet himself, defined and developed by the auspicious moment of adjustment and compromise.

The theme of creative slipping, in a poem entitled "Tous les rivages"¹⁰⁷ from Pierres blanches, presents two surfaces of meaning: literally, a description of a landscape as it unfolds before the poet, and figuratively, the creation of a poem. A sliding movement begins at the hand of the poet through which various aspects of the countryside are recorded as they pass from his mind to assume their places in the natural surroundings. To the once empty country scene depicted by the terms "L'espace plein et blanc," Reverdy adds the details, "L'eau tremble," and "L'oiseau sur le chemin."

¹⁰⁶"La Rencontre capitale de votre vie," Minotaure, quoted in Hubert Juin's preface to Plupart du temps, I, p. 25.

¹⁰⁷Written in 1930. Reverdy, "Pierres blanches," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 263. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

TOUS LES RIVAGES

L'espace plein et blanc soutient le ciel qui penche
L'eau tremble au moindre bruit
 L'oiseau sur le chemin
La cage dans la chambre
 Et la main qui écrit
Derrière le rideau
 Un visage
Et l'ombre d'un nuage
Au milieu du terrain
La prairie s'étend jusqu'à la limite des arbres
 Du passage
 Et de la rivière
Où elle détient

However, the term espace may also refer to the page upon which the poet will write, "blanc" because it is now blank, and "plein" in the sense of the entire surface of the paper. The prepositional phrase "Derrière le rideau" discloses the location of the poet himself ("visage"). Although the substantive rideau may refer to a curtain in the room, it also suggests the page of the poem behind which stands the poet, or in a sense, a screen upon which the words of the poem are projected. Other physical details of the landscape are offered in the lines,

La prairie s'étend jusqu'à la limite des arbres
 Du passage
 Et de la rivière

However, again the extension of the meadow to a certain point may also figuratively suggest the movement of lines of poetry sliding across the page, yet being halted at the outer limits by the very last words ("arbres"), which recall the title of the poem, the banks or boundaries of the margins---"Du passage/Et de la rivière."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Marcelin Pleyne many years later will further develop the possibilities of parallelism in the poetic motif of linear construction. In a more sophisticated context, Pleyne will bring together the poet's view of his construction of the poetic line, the poetic object's reaction, and the reader's interpretation of the interrelationship of the poet and the poetic object:

"J'invente peut-être
 plus simplement c'est le poème qui les croise
 et ils consentent

(je ne sais pas)

le couple n'est pas seul sur cette bouche unie un regard
 l'accompagne aussi simplement que persuasive la ligne les
 unit d'un parallélisme insensé" Comme, p. 20.

It is not simply the creation of the poem which guides the poet towards self-definition and analysis, but also the critical moments of psychological crisis which precede poetic composition, a time during which the poet must examine and adjust to his doubts and insecurity. In a later poem from Ferraille, "Reflux,"¹⁰⁹ Reverdy refuses immobility and disorientation, directly confronting his indecision and fear of the blank page, reminiscent of artistic sterility in the tradition of Mallarmé¹¹⁰,

..... je sors,
je me prépare, je suis plus pâle et plus tremblant
que cette page où aucun mot du sort n'était encore
inscrit.

Although fearful of physical, moral, and literary degenera-

I am not attempting to suggest that Reverdy has influenced Pleyne, but merely that certain isolated aspects of Reverdy's poetry bring to mind several characteristics of Pleyne's theme of convergence. Reverdy, very infrequently, refers to the page as a surface along which passage occurs, the passage of words and ideas, which by their very movement construct a certain landscape, both physical and poetic. Reverdy, again like Pleyne, alludes to the screen ("écran") as a substitute for the page, where the elements of poetic construction pass. However, aside from these few similarities, the two poets are quite different. Pleyne, unlike Reverdy, is concerned with the structure of the constituent elements of the poem, and considers the act of writing an object in and of itself:

"Comme j'écris (ici) sur cette page aux lignes
inégaies justifiant la prose (la poésie)
les mots désignent des mots et se renvoient les uns aux
autres ce que vous entendez
Le livre certes pourrait se signaler par la présence
d'une femme ou d'un paysage illustrant cette situation
inouïe ou justifiant un regard le poème d'une ligne a
l'autre ne va jamais plus loin (elle est endormie) et la
page se reconnaît moins blanche déjà sans l'écriture"
Comme, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹Written in 1937. Reverdy, "Ferraille," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 342-343. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹⁰The theme of artistic sterility appears only occasion-

REFLUX

Quand le sourire éclatant des façades déchire le décor fragile du matin; quand l'horizon est encore plein du sommeil qui s'attarde, les rêves murmurant dans les ruisseaux des haies; quand la nuit rassemble ses haillons pendus aux basses branches, je sors, je me prépare, je suis pâle et plus tremblant que cette page où aucun mot du sort n'était encore inscrit. Toute la distance de vous à moi---de la vie qui tressaille à la surface de ma main au sourire mortel de l'amour sur sa fin---chancelle, déchirée. La distance parcourue d'une seule traite sans arrêt, dans les jours sans clarté et les nuits sans sommeil. Et, ce soir, je voudrais, d'un effort surhumain, secouer toute cette épaisseur de rouille---cette rouille affamée qui déforme mon coeur et me ronge les mains. Pourquoi rester si longtemps enseveli sous les décombres des jours et de la nuit, la poussière des ombres. Et pourquoi tant d'amour et pourquoi tant de haine. Un sang léger bouillonne à grandes vagues dans des vases de prix. Il court dans les fleuves du corps, donnant à la santé toutes les illusions de la victoire. Mais le voyageur exténué, ébloui, hypnotisé par les lueurs fascinantes des phares, dort debout, il ne résiste plus aux passes magnétiques de la mort. Ce soir je voudrais dépenser tout l'or de ma mémoire, déposer mes

ally in Reverdy's work, and then for the most part in his later poetry where he fears the disintegration of his literary talents in the face of death. He is in this regard unlike Mallarmé whose poetry abounds with agonizing moments of void and lack of inspiration:

"... et plus las sept fois du pacte dur
De creuser par veillée une fosse nouvelle
Dans le terrain avare et froid de ma cervelle
Fossoyeur sans pitié pour la stérilité,"
"Las de l'amer repos," Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, p. 35.

"O nuits! ni la clarté déserte de ma lampe
Sur le vide de papier que la blancheur défend"
"Brise Marine," Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes,
p. 38.

Images of cold and fixation threaten the vitality of the artist's inspiration:

bagages trop lourds. Il n'y a plus devant mes yeux que le ciel nu, les murs de la prison qui enserrait ma tête, les pavés de la rue. Il faut remonter du plus bas de la mine, de la terre épaissie par l'humus du malheur, reprendre l'air dans les recoins les plus obscurs de la poitrine, pousser vers les hauteurs---où la glace étincelle de tous les feux croisés de l'incendie---où la neige ruisselle, le caractère dur, dans les tempêtes sans tendresse de l'égoïsme et les décisions tranchantes de l'esprit.

"Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
Par l'espace infligé à l'oiseau qui le nie,
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris."
"Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui,"
Mallarmé, Œuvres complètes, pp. 67-68.

tion ("cette rouille affamée qui déforme/mon coeur et me ronge les mains."), the poet is reluctant to forsake his literary orientation:

..... Et, ce soir, je
voudrais, d'un effort surhumain, secouer toute cette
épaisseur de rouille---
..... Pourquoi rester si
longtemps enseveli sous les décombres des jours et de
la nuit, la poussière des ombres. Et pourquoi tant
d'amour et pourquoi tant de haine.

The poem, a form of creative movement, then becomes an alternative to death, perhaps physical as well as artistic. The poet, formerly a man of passive nature acted upon by corrosive psychological instabilities, now becomes the actor who directs the movement of creation. Poetic composition, as viewed by the poet in this particular poem, is closely associated with the motion of flowing, or more specifically, with the circulation of blood as it slips through the veins and receptacles of the body. Even though the movement of flowing throughout Reverdy's work usually refers to the theme of deviation instead of orientation, it is occasionally found in a more positive context:

..... Un sang léger bouillonne à
grandes vagues dans des vases de prix. Il court dans les
fleuves du corps, donnant à la santé toutes les illusions
de la victoire.

The increased force of the blood as it passes through the recesses of the mind ("des vases de prix"), gathering the threads of inspiration, is suggested in the verb bouillonner. Here, it refers to the amount of energy expended and its transition into actual poetic creation.¹¹¹ The phrase

¹¹¹The related term bouillon appears in an earlier

"fleuves du corps" implies that the movement of the blood has gathered material for inspiration from all parts of the body, mental as well as physical.

However, as sincere as the poet's commitment is to literary orientation and creative movement, he fully realizes in the expression "toutes les illusions/de la victoire" that he may not succeed. Recalling a traditional poetic formula, Reverdy imagines himself a voyager who, before dying, would like to free himself of his psychological burdens: "Ce soir/ je voudrais dépenser l'or de ma mémoire, déposer mes/ bagages trop lourds." Perhaps the achievement of literary expression ("l'or de ma mémoire") may remove the weight of death's threats, for although the poet is finite, he in a sense realizes his own rebirth through the poem. Recalling the themes of descent and ascent of Rimbaud and Mallarmé, Reverdy seeks the purest poetic inspiration in order that his rebirth be complete:

..... Il faut remonter du
plus bas de la mine de la terre épaissie par
l'humus du malheur, reprendre l'air dans les recoins
les plus obscurs de la poitrine, pousser vers les
hauteurs---¹¹²

discussion concerning the theme of deviation. In the poem "La tête pleine de beauté," of Flaques de verre, my p. 157, this substantive implies many possibilities of development for a particular thought. Since it is used in conjunction with the image of the whirlwind, its context becomes negative, suggesting a chaotic convergence of these theoretic potentials, contributing to psychological instability. See pp. 156-159.

¹¹²The cyclical theme of descent/ascent recalls the close association between poetry and the voyage, a motif developed by several nineteenth century French poets. Baudelaire, indifferent as to whether the voyage was upward or downward, sought only le nouveau, in the hope of reviving

By slipping into the depths of the mind ("du/plus bas de la mine," "les recoins/les plus obscurs"), past the layers of socially imposed verbal connotations and customs ("l'humus du malheur"), the poet hopes to discover the basic meaning of words and expressions so that with a vocabulary untainted by society he may ascend intellectual heights, rising above

his poetic inspiration: "'Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?/Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!'" Baudelaire, "Le Voyage," Les Fleurs du mal, p. 153.

For Mallarmé, the theme of the fall represents loss of self, i.e. the poet as an individual is destroyed, yet he achieves rebirth as the essence of poetry itself. Mallarmé's Igitur in the work of that name, descends into the tomb, nullifying his entire existence but at the same time, recreating himself as part of the realization of the Infinite, the Absolute, "le château de la pureté." Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, p. 443. James R. Lawler in The Language of French Symbolism, characterizes this renaissance as the creation of "a pure sign, the essence of things." (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 19.

Rimbaud, unlike Baudelaire and Mallarmé, is preoccupied with the aspect of descent. Far from Mallarmé's realm of ideality, Rimbaud's destination is hell where the soul will undergo an exploration of the depths of its subconscious, the most violent experience of this French poetic tradition. Rimbaud's intent is to forcefully strip the self of its acquired social facades and to reveal its primitive nudity. Divested of earthly limitations, all forms of emotions are permitted, through disorder and immoderation, to reach their ultimate point. (For further description see Arthur Rimbaud, "Lettre à Paul Demeny, 15 mai 1871," Rimbaud Poésies complètes, p. 220). Through this experience which Rimbaud in the same letter calls "un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens," the objective, "l'inconnu," would be attained and the creative soul would come to know itself. (See Anna Balakian's discussion of Rimbaud's descent into hell in The Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York: New York University Press, 1947), pp. 78-89.

Reverdy, who frequently alludes to the theme of descent and ascent in his poetry, recognizes the legacy of both Mallarmé and Rimbaud,

"Du reste, il y a toujours eu, dans tous les arts, une double tentation à la bifurcation des pentes: la pente à gravir vers la hauteur sans air, l'esprit et la lumière (type Mallarmé) et la pente à descendre

the world of the quotidian into that of the purest realm of poetic inspiration.¹¹³ It is through art that the transformation of the finite into the infinite may be realized.

Possibly as a result of the realization of constructive movement in understanding and controlling the conflicts of the creative self, Reverdy now passes beyond the realm of the individual to study the rapport between the artist and his environment, seeking to discover whatever positive movement occurs within the world of nature. For Reverdy, as has been shown at some length, the natural environment usually stands in opposition to the theme of artistic orientation, contributing instead to aspects of deviation and upheaval. However, in a few isolated poems, most of which are in Sources du vent, various elements of the natural surroundings seem to be directed toward order and harmony as if guided by some exterior force.

dans le gouffre obscur du sang, des sensations et de la chair (type Rimbaud)."" Reverdy, En Vrac, p. 28.

¹¹³As early as Self-defense (Paris: Imprimerie Littéraire, 1919), Reverdy's contention that, ""Un élément ne devient pur que dégagé du sentiment qui lui confère sa situation dans la vie. Il faut le dépouiller de ce sentiment ... "" is reminiscent of a line from Mallarmé's "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe,": ""donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu."" Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, p. 70.

The desire to arrive at the basic meaning of words and expressions will be further studied by Francis Ponge who will discover a parallelism between the physical and verbal worlds. According to this poet, various meanings of words derive from connotations which are arbitrary, utilitarian, and banal, imposed by a society which has betrayed the natural and primitive properties of the words themselves. Therefore, any attempt at communication, either oral or written, can only fail. Ponge's solution to this dilemma would be the disfigurement of language, removing every arbitrary

Movement in the poem "La bête prise,"¹¹⁴ from Sources du vent, evolves from closure, the end of day and approach of evening, to aperture, the arrival of dawn. Throughout most of the poem, the oncoming of night is presented in a negative context: disorder and fear are suggested as the flags unwind and slip out of control in the wind, the light from the stars is extinguished, passers-by and animals, fearful, slip away in flight. As he discloses each of these events, Reverdy reinforces the pessimistic tone at the beginning of the poem by enumeration: definite article, noun, past participle or adjective---"Les drapeaux déroulés .../ Les étoiles éteintes .../Les traces de pas .../Les fuites entraînées/Les bêtes peureuses." The use of enumeration continues as six prepositional phrases beginning with sur identify further indications of misery: images of restriction and imprisonment---"les mains prises," "la tête du paysan incliné," "le sillon cicatrisé." The peasant is a central symbol for limited movement. Although his plow has moved easily through the earth, the track it has left is only a rut which chains him to his present position in life, allowing

and utilitarian meaning. By restoring true semantic density to the word, the physical density of the referent would also be realized at the same time. From this type of oral exercise there would result semantic creation---true meaning. For Ponge, perhaps the most important result is the very act of creating, of becoming which he terms "l'acte de verbalisation." Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'Homme et les choses" (Paris: Seghers, 1947) and Philippe Sollers, Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1970).

¹¹⁴Written in 1929. Reverdy, "Sources du vent," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 185-186. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LA BÊTE PRISE

Les drapeaux déroulés par le vent
 Les étoiles éteintes sous la mousse
 Les traces de pas des passants
 Les fuites entraînées
 Les bêtes peureuses
 Et les cris les lueurs de sang dans la campagne rousse
 L'automne chassé par l'été
 Sur la piste des neiges desséchées
 Sur le tapis du ciel secoué
 les mains prises
 Sur la tête du paysan incliné
 Sur le sillon cicatrisé l'hiver dernier
 Sur la lucarne du pavillon
 Et sur le balcon de la lune
 Toutes les armes
 les bretelles
 les cuivres
 Et les menaces avortées
 La fatigue du temps aux genouillères grises
 Une croix d'un bout du cimetière au fond de l'horizon
 Un chemin détourné perdu dans les épines
 Un oeil qui guette aux fentes du volet
 Une voix qui chante sans ailes
 Et sous les plis trop lourds du nuage emporté
 La voile toute neuve
 Le soleil
 L'étincelle

no further passage than the solitary cross at the end of a cemetery road. Introducing the themes of death and solitude, the cross appears in an enumerated sequence of four lines, each beginning with the indefinite article followed by a noun with a qualifying phrase.

Up until the last four lines of the poem, the tone is most pessimistic, emphasizing the turbulence and misery of man's lot, with death as the only solution. The repeated use of enumeration, suggesting an orderly sequence of expression, is the only element of the poem which implies indirectly an abrupt change of tone. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to avoid surprise as the negative image of the voice singing without wings and therefore, without means of movement, is succeeded by the positive image of a new sail, an immediate source of movement exposed by the departure of the cloud which previously concealed it under folds.¹¹⁵ The placement of the last three lines each under the other,

La voile toute neuve
 Le soleil
 L'étincelle

further suggests that the sail symbolizes constructive motion, that is, a passage toward day. As it appears from under the cloud, perhaps only a corner can be seen---"L'étincelle," a spark of sunlight, a very small portion of the optimism and

¹¹⁵The image of the folds is used here in a physical sense to symbolize protection. It serves the same function in the poem "Au Carrefour des routes," p. 33. Elsewhere, for example in the poems "Bande de souvenirs," and "Il devait en effet faire bien froid," pp. 46-48 and p. 61 respectively, Reverdy uses the same image in a more intellectual sense. See my discussion in footnotes 48 (p. 49), 49 (pp. 52-53), and 56 (p. 66).

hope it foresees. The progression from night to day occurs smoothly, with disorder transformed into order, the entire cycle realized as if it were programmed to slide along a track.

Absence of Orientation: The Ephemeral Text

Although the presence/absence motif of literary orientation occurs throughout Reverdy's poetry, the latter aspect of the opposition appears much more frequently in his last poems, again an indication of the psychological crises which at the same time shape the pessimistic motif of deviation. However, even as early in Reverdy's work as La Lucarne ovale, there are several poems in which the poet, given no guidance as he composes, creates a poem which slips off the page while being written and subsequently perishes. The theme of aimless passage is treated as an object in the poem "Les corps ridicules des esprits."¹¹⁶ At the conclusion of the poem, the text itself becomes the object, that is, eternal passage.

The protagonist of the poem, around which movement is centered, is a procession of people, probably a funeral cortege whose participants are ghostly visions of the dead. The prepositional phrase "dans le vide" suggests that the tableau has no temporal limitations and that its participants are ageless phantoms. Their nudity obscures any further identity and the only remaining clue as to those who march is that there is a halo encircling the head of the first person in line, possibly a departed spirit.

¹¹⁶Written in 1916. Reverdy, "La Lucarne ovale,"

LES CORPS RIDICULES DES ESPRITS

Un cortège de gens plus ou moins honorables. Quelques-uns sourient dans le vide avec sérénité. Ils sont nus. Une auréole à la tête des premiers qui ont su prendre la place. Les plus petits en queue.

On passe entre les arbres qui s'inclinent. Les esprits qui se sont réfugiés derrière les étoiles regardent. La curiosité vient de partout. La route s'illumine.

Dans le silence digne, si quelqu'un chante c'est une douce voix qui monte et personne ne rit. La chanson est connue de tous.

On passe devant la maison d'un poète qui n'est pas là. La pluie qui tombait sur son piano, à travers le toit, l'a chassé.

Bientôt, c'est un boulevard bordé de cafés où la foule s'ennuie. Tout le monde se lève. Le cortège a grossi.

Enfin par l'avenue qui monte la file des gens s'éloigne, les derniers paraissent les plus grands. Les premiers ont déjà disparu.

Derrière un monument d'une époque oubliée le soleil se lève en rayons séparés et l'ombre des passants lentement s'efface. Les rideaux sont tirés.

The cortege itself symbolizes the theme of passage, eternal passage, lacking an ultimate destination and pursuing a given itinerary which might just as well be any other arbitrary itinerary. Reverdy's method in the presentation of this theme is to emphasize the linear nature of first, the moving object referred to as "cortège" or as "queue," and then, of its location, "entre les arbres," "la route," "un boulevard bordé de cafés," "l'avenue," "la file." The progression of the linear object is further indicated by verbs denoting smooth, quick passage along a line: "on passe," "la route s'illumine," "l'avenue qui monte."

Perhaps what emphasizes the theme of linear movement most, is the gradual disappearance of the procession which begins with the terms "la file des gens s'éloigne." The feeling of distance is greatly increased---"les derniers paraissent les plus grands," "Les premiers ont déjà disparu." The cortege, now only a shadow, vanishes---"l'ombre des passants lentement s'efface." The poem assumes the identity of the moving object, for like the procession, it, too, slips abruptly off the page, "Les rideaux sont tirés." The text eludes the poet's grasp and perishes. Analogously, landmarks and signs vanish from the itinerary that is human life, leaving existence a perpetual, purposeless slipping towards nowhere, carried out both anonymously---"quelques-uns," "ils," "des premiers," "les plus petits," "des gens," "les derniers," and impersonally, "on passe," with full cognizance that at any time life itself or the potential to resolve human conflicts may be terminated with no warning. The fall

of the curtains serves as yet another symbol of the wall,¹¹⁷ a metaphysical obstacle which perpetually haunts Reverdy.

Hiatus In Poetic Inspiration

Later in Reverdy's poetry, in the volumes Pierres blanches and Ferraille, it is the fear that he will not effectively communicate the significance of his poetic inspiration which preoccupies the artist. Death again permeates the atmosphere of the poem "Sans respirer"¹¹⁸ in which there is no communication among those who appear in the tableau: "Les mots faiblissent de partout/Et les lèvres frémissent." An absence of a logical explanation is implied in the line, "On ne sait pas pourquoi." There are only further symptoms, the most important of which is indicated in the verb glisser; at the wall the words deviate from their intended course. Since they are not able to penetrate the barrier, these verbal components of a creative whole slide chaotically about and disoriented, slip between the poet's fingers.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷Here, as elsewhere in Reverdy's poetry, the wall as a symbol indicates both a cessation of movement---the text disappears, leaving only a void---and the theme of rupture and isolation---the poet is separated from his text. See my discussion of the wall as a symbol, pp. 69-91.

¹¹⁸Written in 1930. Reverdy, "Pierres blanches," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 291. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹⁹Again the wall emphasizes the theme of rupture, breaking the poet's train of thought and destroying the text at its inception. See my discussion of the wall, pp. 69-91, and footnote 117, p. 180.

SANS RESPIRER

La jambe à droite
 L'ombre du mort
Le marbre
 La table qui s'est inclinée
La nuit recouvre tout de son tapis troué
Le silence a de la peine à vaincre le bruit
Les mots faiblissent de partout
Et les lèvres frémissent
On ne sait pas pourquoi
Contre le mur des paroles qui glissent
Entre les doigts
 Le vent
 Le souffle
 Et les soupirs
Partout entre les arbres tout ce qu'on voit courir

Although it is possible that the verbal elements may be recaptured, Reverdy indicates by enumeration that they will haphazardly drift away, dispersed by three negative forces: "Le vent/Le souffle/Et les soupirs." By placing the three substantives under the term doigts, Reverdy reinforces the implication that they, like the fingers which fail to seize the evasive words, suggest weakness and in the case of "le vent," certain hostility. With the exception of this last force, the possibility of human error is implied. The terms souffle and soupirs may refer generally to life itself, but certainly do not exclude poor judgment. Words in this poem have brought no successful communication, only dispersal and chaotic passage---"tout ce qu'on voit courir." However, perhaps it is the artist himself who lacks skill in combining his verbal components or who may not even understand their true meaning. Instead of unity, words, like the cadaver at the beginning of the poem, only perpetuate isolation and engulfment.

One of the most perplexing problems in literary creation is learning the basic, primitive meaning of verbal elements before the artist combines them according to the dictates of his genius. Reverdy, as has been shown, sometimes discusses this problem by means of the theme of orientation, a journey down into the depths of the mind where ideas and concepts bear fewer layers of superficial connotations, arbitrarily imposed by society. However, in another poem from Pierres blanches, "Toutes les têtes," Reverdy presents a

TOUTES LES TÊTES¹²⁰

Les troupes du quartier en route
 Sur les mêmes airs que demain
 Entre les talus brisés et les ornières
 L'air en dérouté
 Les mains tendues
 Les plaies du monde s'ouvrent
 La terre se déchire
 Sous l'eau
 Entre les pierres grises
 Le sens plus clair des mots
 L'écriteau au chemin qui bifurque
 Le côté droit
 Et l'autre sous la main
 Pour diriger ses pas à tort
 Coûte que coûte
 Mais le monde s'endort
 Le bruit du pas unique
 Et que l'on n'entend pas
 Cependant la panique
 Du passant qui s'en va
 Tout le long de la ville qui ferme ses remparts

¹²⁰Written in 1930. Reverdy, "Pierres blanches,"
Main-d'oeuvre, p. 320. All quotations are from this poem
 unless otherwise indicated.

completely disoriented tableau in which the participants, through their ignorance, are unaware that the terms they use lack semantic density. Instead of resolving the problem of inaccurate language, they are content to struggle with the resulting confusion and turmoil.

Movement in the poem is initially depicted as chaotic and conventional; the troops are forever fleeing along the same road and in the same manner---"Sur les mêmes airs que demain." Their flight will not take them to a better refuge, for they do not seek a new direction, but instead slip in disarray entre, into a linguistic location connoting entrapment, enclosure within worn grooves and designated natural barriers---"Entre les talus brisés et les ornières."¹²¹ As they flee, they only aggravate the turmoil of their surroundings, increasing the destructive movement which augments the confusion and disorientation---"Les plaies du monde s'ouvrent/La terre se déchire."

Occurring simultaneously beneath this turmoil is a constructive action which would restore meaning to their words, making their communication more effective: "Sous l'eau/Entre les pierres grises/Le sens plus clair des mots." Hidden in the water, the surface of the stones, symbols of words themselves, has been cleansed and partially freed of the dark stains of centuries of conventional references assigned by a careless and verbally unanalytic public. As

¹²¹ Entre is also a symbol of enclosure in the poem "Le vent et l'esprit," p. 90. See my discussion of the linguistic location entre, pp. 91-98.

the former, socially imposed meanings wash away, the words themselves remain in a transitory state, prepared to pass into new verbal combinations enhanced by their authentic denotations. The poet, as if to signal to those who adhere to tradition, points out, "L'écriteau au chemin qui bifurque." However, his warning which perhaps would have informed them of the verbal cleansing process goes unheeded:

Mais le monde s'endort

.....

Tout le long de la ville qui ferme ses remparts

It is not only the artist who may fall prey to established conventions, as Ponge himself will confirm years later, for even when the poet realizes his error, he may not be able to convince a pragmatic public that their well-tried verbal formulas only result in upheaval and fragmentation.

CHAPTER VI

THE VOYAGE, A NEUTRAL STATE:

IMMOBILITY IN MOBILITY

Movement in Reverdy's poetry, as analyzed thus far, concerns action toward a given objective, whether negative as for example in the motifs of deviation and an absence of orientation, or positive as in the theme of literary orientation. However, there are many of Reverdy's poems in which a neutral state is maintained throughout the poem, that is, action occurs but then is reversed, producing a zero count and rendering the movement completely ineffective.

The neutral state as a thematic motif most frequently appears in Reverdy's poetry in conjunction with the theme of the voyage. All poetry perhaps is to be considered a voyage, and depending on the particular literary school, it may be a journey to record the intimacies of the conscious, subjective self as with the Romanticists, or later on as with the surrealists, an attempt to discover the unexplored subconscious. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the French pre-symbolists, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, wove countless poems around imagined journeys to sea, into the azur, or down into hell. Reverdy's familiarity with the themes of these three poets can be shown by various allusions

to their poetry, some having already been noted,¹²² others to be indicated when relevant. Throughout Reverdy's work the voyage generally bears a negative connotation, and with the exception of a few poems, symbolizes the human endeavor to escape the Pascalian notion that life has been reduced to the status of jetsam, matter haphazardly tossed into a meaningless world, in Sartre's philosophy that which is purely contingent, that which might never have been created.¹²³ Reverdy's poems devoted to the theme of the voyage and its resultant neutral state are found consistently throughout his poetry and can be categorized into several basic sub-themes: the voyage as a race through time, as a forced march, and finally, as a journey to sea.

A Race Through Time

Passage through the stages of human life is suddenly accelerated in the poem "Le patineur céleste"¹²⁴ from the 1915 collection Poèmes en prose. Human life is transformed into a swift journey with no time for reflection or analysis as a sidewalk abruptly becomes a skating rink where a race is taking place. The narration of the event is based upon

¹²²See my discussion p. 10, 21, 49, pp. 52-53, p. 66, 123, pp. 141-142, p. 152, pp. 167-169, 171-173.

¹²³Man, according to Reverdy, is, "une épave, il ne peut que suivre un courant qui l'entraîne il ne sait où." Gabriel Bounoure, "Pierre Reverdy et sa crise religieuse de 1925-1927," Pierre Reverdy 1889-1960, p. 213.

¹²⁴Written in 1915. Reverdy, "Poèmes," Plupart du temps, I, p. 37. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

LE PATINEUR CÉLESTE

On a transformé le trottoir en vélodrome. Il n'y a qu'un seul coureur. Alors pourquoi court-il si vite?

On ne voit pas ses mains et le guidon remplace les pédales. Il monte.

On a peur de le voir tomber et qu'une lourde voiture l'écrase; mais au coin de la rue une glace absorbe son image qui tourne. Il est sauvé.

a double superimposition. The skater, identified by the title of the poem, is paradoxically seen by the narrator as a cyclist: "On ne voit pas ses mains et le guidon remplace les pédales." The description of the skater's movements, gliding one into the other, brings to mind the futurist tableau by Marcel Duchamp, The Nude Descending the Staircase. It is easy to imagine several pedal positions, each superimposed upon the other in quick succession, as in the abrupt, fragmented descent of Duchamp's figure. Another possible interpretation is that the position and movements of the hands and feet form one unified action, revealing only a blurred image of the wheel as it spins around faster and faster.

Yet, in spite of the rapid spinning, the movement of the skater does not progress, but instead is changed into fixated motion. As he passes in front of the mirror, the movement of his limbs is captured visually and in a sense he is paralyzed. The image registered by the mirror can not be altered unless the skater passes again. He finds himself at a crossroads where immobility and mobility intersect. The movement of the skater is negated, for although he may have reached his highest speed, the recorded fragment of the race reduces him to permanence, to mobile fixation.

The simultaneous existence of mobility and immobility originates in the imagination of a voyager in the poem "P.O. Midi,"¹²⁵ written approximately one year after "Le patineur

¹²⁵Written in 1916. Reverdy, "Quelques poèmes,"

P.O. MIDI

On passe comme des boeufs
 Sur le quai les lumières s'allongent et les yeux
 Le wagon tourne sur la roue du milieu

Les chevelures se dressent dans la nuit
 Les mots qui passent font du bruit

Je voudrais m'arrêter pour regarder dehors
 Au fond il y a un homme tranquille qui s'endort
 Je voudrais voir dedans
 Le train qui nous emporte est immobile dans le vent

On entend

On entend crier
 C'est un oiseau de nuit
 La montagne avale tout
 Tous ceux qui ont peur sont debout
 Les autres dorment
 On descend l'autre côté du monde
 On glisse dans un trou qui n'a pas de fond
 On est content de s'en aller
 Le ciel se fond

Et un petit clocher se dresse au bord de la mer

Plupart du temps, I, pp. 61-62. The title "P.O. Midi" refers to the old railroad line Paris, Orléans, Midi. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

céleste," and appearing in the volume Quelques poèmes. The traveler, riding in a train laden with troops, is perhaps hypnotized by the intense speed. The train is slipping by the countryside so rapidly that he can not reorient himself by glancing outside. As he attempts to concentrate on objects inside the train, he realizes that there seems to be no logic or sense to this journey. The line "Je voudrais voir dedans" may refer to looking within himself, or inside the train car, or perhaps into the mind of the passenger who calmly sleeps through the trip. Whichever the interpretation, the voyager can not grasp the reality of the situation because of its absurdity. It is just as if he is not directly experiencing the journey; all movement ceases: "Le train qui nous emporte est immobile dans le vent."¹²⁶

Reverdy, having described the impressions of the voyager inside, now reveals those of an observer outside who notes the speed of the train---"La montagne avale tout." As its rapid passage becomes a slipping downward---"On descend l'autre côté du monde/On glisse dans un trou qui n'a pas de fond"---the train begins to disappear from sight and again, its movement might just as well have never occurred. The train as an image of mobility exists only in the fragments of the observer's mind, for with the dissolution of the sky and perhaps the entire setting, "Le ciel se fond," all physical

¹²⁶This voyage recalls an earlier poem, "Voyages trop grands," p. 24, in which the simultaneity of the exterior setting (linear and circular) also gives the impression that in spite of the intense speed of the train, the traveler has not moved. Also common to both poems is an emphasis upon a senseless journey.

traces of the rapid journey are destroyed, as well as the poem. In the midst of this collapsed setting, the poet abruptly departs, leaving his reader with a seemingly unrelated image of a bell tower rising in the distance.

A less fragmented view of the neutral state is presented in the poem "La réalité immobile,"¹²⁷ from La Lucarne ovale, also composed in the year 1916. Here, it is a remembrance of times past which transforms mobility into immobility:

Maintenant quelle voix m'appelle
 Quelle douce voix appelle

 Pendant qu'on m'appelle

Recalling the past, the poet reconstructs a tableau in which many people are journeying toward a house, perhaps his house:

De tous les champs par tous les chemins
 Les gens arrivent
 En habits noirs
 En habits gris
 Et d'autres en bras de chemise
 Une voiture emplit la route de poussière
 La maison est bientôt pleine d'étrangers

Using a series of oppositions as a framework for the poem, Reverdy prepares the reader for the principal contrast of mobility/immobility. The action of the verb emplir is neutralized by that which it accumulates, poussière, nothingness. The positive connotation of the adjective pleine is reversed by the substantive étrangers. Both the street and house, while literally full, are figuratively empty. Later, although the clock in the house stops, the visitors awaken; yet no one moves. Time, in effect, no longer exists;

¹²⁷Written in 1916. Reverdy, "La Lucarne ovale," Plupart du temps, I, pp. 86-87. All quotations are from this

LA RÉALITÉ IMMOBILE

Le soleil rôdait encore autour de la maison
 Quand on ouvrit la fenêtre

Les ivrognes sont toujours là
 Mais la chanson qui montait à la nuit a cessé

Maintenant quelle voix m'appelle
 Quelle douce voix appelle derrière le mur de droite
 En riant
 Les hommes sont là
 Endormis
 Et ce n'est pas la même bouche qui chante
 Une femme au loin pousse un cri
 Sur le bord du balcon ses doigts dépassent
 Ils sont fins et pointus
 Et ce sont ces doigts que je regarde
 Pendant qu'on m'appelle
 De tous les champs par tous les chemins
 Les gens arrivent
 En habits noirs
 Et d'autres en bras de chemise
 Une voiture emplit la route de poussière
 La maison est bientôt pleine d'étrangers

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

C'est une vieille photographie sans cadre

dusk, previously introduced as a moment favorable to memory---
 "Le soleil rôdait encore autour de la maison"---will never
 again occur---"Il n'y aura plus de nuit." The movement of
 people and objects slipping forward abruptly ceases, yet
 paradoxically continues, for the gestures are recorded,
 "C'est une vieille photographie sans cadre." The prepositional
 phrase "sans cadre," although referring to the physical
 absence of a frame, also reinforces the absurdity of the
 captured setting and even implies that there is no setting---
 every principal movement has been negated or reversed; there
 can be no reconstruction of the past if the present becomes
 a fixated neutral state.

A Forced March

Even when the limits of time and speed are not imposed
 upon the traveler's itinerary, its linear structure remains
 circular. The Reverdian voyage paradoxically recounts the
 adventures of one who has not moved: "Le voyage, les départs
 et le calme. On arrivera, on repartira éternellement sur les
 routes toujours les mêmes malgré leur nombre."¹²⁸ For both
 the artist and his fellow men, the voyage is a forced journey
 without end. Undertaken in desperation, the voyage repre-
 sents to the poet a final opportunity to look within himself
 in order to resolve the conflicts of his poetic genius and
 regain his literary orientation. For his followers, the
 journey symbolizes a possible recourse against the meaning-

¹²⁸Reverdy, "Salle d'attente," Plupart du temps, I,
 pp. 35-36.

lessness of their lives---world upheaval, the hostility of their fellow men and of their fragmented surroundings.

One of Reverdy's first poems to explore the theme of man as an eternal voyager is "Départ"¹²⁹ from Cale sèche, its title alone recalling the journeys of Baudelaire and Rimbaud. As the poet slips back into his past---"j'ai laissé aller mon âme"---he realizes that the dark moments predominate:

J'ai oublié au moins la moitié de ma vie
Je me souviens du reste comme d'un cauchemar
A peine une lumière brille
Tout est noir

However, even though the traveler is desperate, "Alors plus rien depuis qui me soutienne," he does not capitulate. As a final attempt to analyze the misery of his life, the poet will undertake a journey through the mind: "La saison revient je pars pour toujours." The following line, "Il faut se préparer au dernier sacrifice," suggests that if the voyage is unsuccessful, it will at least terminate the poet's earthly existence.

When the poet does try to escape from the confines of his unfortunate present, movement is reversed and like Icarus, he falls helplessly back to his fixed terrestrial condition:

Avec de lourdes chaînes autour des bras
j'ai tenté une autre évasion
J'ai été rejeté par terre
Me reste-t-il encore une illusion

¹²⁹Written between 1913-1915. Reverdy, "Cale sèche," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 504-506. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

DÉPART

L'été nous a laissés tous morts derrière lui
 Assis dans l'ombre fraîche aux lignes de la pierre
 Nous buvions à pleine gorge son ennui
 Et le soir s'amassaient les essaims de lumières
 dont bourdonnait ma nuit
 C'était le temps où j'ai laissé aller mon âme sans y
 penser
 Dans une rue où sonnait le couchant j'ai essayé de
 vivre
 En regardant couler les heures les plus chaudes
 On venait souvent dans la maison d'en face
 J'y voyais entrer un homme toujours ivre
 Sa mine basse inspirait confiance
 On ne savait pas du tout à qui on avait affaire
 L'air du bal de jadis empoisonnait encore mon coeur
 Je pensais à vos jupes serrées à vos corsages
 Aux chapeaux rabattus qui cachaient vos visages
 Avec vos airs d'indifférence
 Vous avez abîmé ma belle certitude

Maintenant ce n'est plus au temps qu'un souvenir
 Une grande chambre pleine de visages qui passent
 et tournent tournent encore
 ça va bientôt finir
 Je compte dans mon coeur les ombres qui s'effacent

J'ai oublié au moins la moitié de ma vie
 Je me souviens du reste comme d'un cauchemar
 A peine une lumière brille
 Tout est noir
 La tête bien aimée qui me sourie
 Parfois pour apaiser mon désespoir
 Mais pourrais-tu faire fuir toutes les grimaces
 de ceux qui m'ont blessé sans le savoir

Dans la foule de joie qui dévale
 J'ai recherché mon être éparpillé
 Je t'ai vu j'ai ma haine et je connais toutes tes faces
 Un jour je t'ouvrirai mes bras

J'attends depuis toujours que mon bonheur revienne
 J'ai perdu ma joie dans cette aventure
 Alors plus rien depuis qui me soutienne
 Pourtant je vais à pied et ma fatigue dure
 Ma vie pourra finir j'aurai donné ma peine
 et les autres pourront venir
 La saison revient je pars pour toujours
 Il faut se préparer au dernier sacrifice
 Oublie ta jeunesse un peu chaque jour
 Aujourd'hui demain ton arbre s'effeuille

Les forces du monde étaient à ton service
 Et tout est arrivé sans que tu le veuilles

Avec de lourdes chaînes autour des bras
 j'ai tenté une autre évasion
 J'ai été rejeté par terre
 Me reste-t-il encore une illusion
 Mais je ne saurais plus qu'en faire

Je suis sorti de ma demeure
 Un mauvais jour pour les départs
 Triste et n'aimant pas qu'on pleure
 J'ai dû me tenir à l'écart

Une main inconnue s'est tendue vers la mienne
 Après avoir clos les persiennes
 J'ai quitté cette chambre où vivait mon portrait
 Par toi qui m'as guidé j'ai reconquis ma place
 Marchons la nuit nous pousse avec tous nos regrets
 Devant nous tout l'espace

Mais je ne saurais plus qu'en faire

Reverdy throughout his life was obsessed by the image of the chains. Years later in Le Livre de mon bord, he comments, "Les chaînes de l'homme ne sont pas de fer, mais de glu, et quand on croit s'en être dégagé d'un côté, on s'y est empoissé davantage d'un autre."¹³⁰ The voyage as an attempt to find freedom, both artistic and metaphysical, is an illusion; the only reality is self-deception.

Yet, the poet collects the remnants of his hope to try just once more, discovering that at last he is not alone, that someone referred to as "toi" offers guidance, perhaps an exterior force such as God, but more likely a portion of the poet's self which has severed the ties with conventional reality:

Une main inconnue s'est tendue vers la mienne

 J'ai quitté cette chambre où vivait mon portrait
 Par toi qui m'as guidé j'ai reconquis ma place

Although up until this point the voyage has always ended just where it began, the last two lines of the poem imply that a change is possible, that progression along the route may be realized, "Marchons la nuit nous pousse avec tous nos regrets/ Devant nous tout l'espace." Unwilling to commit himself, the poet insists on total ambiguity, yet the phrase "tout l'espace" does help to reinforce the theoretical existence of a sphere in the mind, free from all preconceptions and metaphysical paradoxes where the artist's psyche can simply

¹³⁰Quoted in Jean-Pierre Richard, Onze Études sur la poésie moderne, p. 13.

BE and BECOME, slipping easily from one given state to another.¹³¹ Even though the ending of this poem offers some element of hope, elsewhere in the same collection of poems, Reverdy advises caution to the traveler who, certain of his course, learns ultimately that he has deceived himself:

.....
 au suprême port où relâche
 le pilote angoissé qui voit
 se dérober la flamme devant lui
 La lumière monte en silence et l'homme crie
 Plus sur d'avoir trouvé¹³²

As has been briefly pointed out before, the theme of the voyage as a necessary journey through the mind is hardly, for Reverdy, an indication of originality, but rather of further proof of his admiration for the work of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. The voyage of the pre-symbolists was to be free of the limitations of time and space, and so, as Rimbaud recounts the adventures of "Le Bateau Ivre," he actually has not moved; the landscapes occur within his mind. Divested of the conventional forms of earthly existence---time, sound, touch---Rimbaud divorces himself from exterior reality and relies upon the stimuli of his creative interior.¹³³ He constructs his own itinerary, needing no mechanical aid whatsoever,

¹³¹The line "Devant nous tout l'espace" will reappear years later in a poem from La Balle au bond, "Le temps passe," in which the impermanence that space symbolizes is the traveler's only positive sign---"Il ne trouvait jamais d'autre abri que l'espace." Main-d'oeuvre, p. 58.

¹³²Reverdy, "Mon coeur de verre," Cale sèche, pp. 490-491.

¹³³Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism, pp. 88-89.

L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin

 Me lava, dispersant gouvernail et grappin¹³⁴

Mallarmé interprets the poetic journey as "descendre l'escalier humain;" Laforgue calls it "une descente en Moi." Their interpretations of the theme of the voyage can be traced back to Baudelaire who, before them, had glorified the voyage as a realization of mobility in immobility;¹³⁵

Nous voulons voyager sans vapeur et sans voiles
 Faites, pour egayer l'ennui de nos prisons
 Passer sur nos esprits, tendres comme une toile,
 Vos souvenirs avec leurs cadres d'horizons¹³⁶

The voyagers worshipped the imagination as opposed to the dictates of exterior reality:

Mais les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là seuls qui partent
 Pour partir;
 Et, sans savoir pourquoi, disent toujours: Allons!¹³⁷

In spite of his overwhelming debt to the pre-symbolists, Reverdy in later poems begins to contribute more original elements to the theme of the voyage. The poem "Une apparence médiocre"¹³⁸ recounts the train journey of a man who has undertaken a seemingly meaningless trip and who feels alien from his fellow men as well as from his surroundings. In

¹³⁴Rimbaud, "Le Bateau Ivre," Poésies complètes, pp. 72-74.

¹³⁵Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism, pp. 100-102.

¹³⁶Baudelaire, "Le Voyage," Les Fleurs du mal, p. 150.

¹³⁷Ibid., 149.

¹³⁸Written in 1915. Reverdy, "Poèmes en prose," Plupart du temps, I, pp. 39-40. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

UNE APPARENCE MÉDIOCRE

Le train siffle et repart dans la fumée qui se fond au ciel bas.

C'est un long convoi de larmes et sur chaque quai où l'on se sépare de nouveaux bras agitent des mouchoirs. Mais celui-là est seul et ses lunettes se ternissent des larmes des autres ou de la pluie qui fouette la vitre ou il colle son nez. Il n'a quitté personne et nul ne l'attendra à la gare où il va descendre.

D'ailleurs il ne raconte pas ses voyages, il ne sait pas décrire les pays qu'il a vus. Il n'a rien vu peut-être et quand on le regarde, de peur qu'on l'interroge, il baisse les yeux ou les lève vers le ciel où d'autres nuages se fondent. A l'arrivée, sans expression de joie ou d'impatience, il part, seul dans la nuit, et, sous les becs de gaz qui l'éclairent par intervalles, on le voit disparaître, sa petite valise à la main. Il est seul, on le croit seul. Pourtant quelque chose le suit ou peut-être quelqu'un dans la forme étrange de son ombre.

short, the voyager finds himself "de trop," as will Roquentin in Sartre's La Nausée. Although the poem was written in 1915 as part of the Poèmes en prose, it anticipates the existentialist climate which developed much later in the thirties.

Movement begins as the train moves away from the station. The tragic tone of the poem is set by the poet's description of the succession of cars, "un long convoi de larmes," a never ending voyage of unhappiness. Typical of Reverdy is the emphasis upon the linear dimension of objects ("convoi") as the source of movement. The station is the focal point through which all routes pass; those who are meeting people proceed toward those who are being met. Yet one person is completely isolated from the reunions which occur around him, and to make his identity more obscure and impersonal, Reverdy refers to him as "celui-là": "Mais celui-là est seul ... Il n'a quitté personne et nul ne l'attendra à la gare où il va descendre." Since the voyager has no one to whom he can relate, everything he has seen on his trip has perhaps never occurred or might just as well not have happened. Given the absence of physical confirmation, motion is reversed: "Il n'a rien vu peut-être ... " This line is reminiscent of the poem "P.O. Midi" in which the train is simultaneously speeding and standing still, "Le train qui nous emporte est immobile dans le vent."

Upon arriving, the unknown voyager moves evasively away into the darkness. The double confirmation of his solitude emphasizes his loneliness, factually, then intuitively: "Il est seul, on le croit seul." The absurdity of the traveler's

life, together with his solitude, "lui" versus "les autres," recall a previous poem "Voyages trop grands" in which the voyager also finds he can not adjust to the meaninglessness of human existence: "De son rôle, qu'il jouait avec le plus grand sérieux, il lui manquait la signification." Yet the principal difference between the two voyagers is that the one in "Une apparence médiocre" is not truly alone, but followed by his shadow, symbolizing perhaps his fragmented identity, rent by the upheaval of his environment. Seeing himself as perhaps two people, the traveler, unable to communicate with anyone else, can at least interact with another aspect of his own personality. In spite of this more positive element, the voyager is a man locked within himself, and since there is no verbal exchange concerning his gestures and movements, they seem to have never even been attempted.

Also written in an existential vein is the poem "Les vides du printemps,"¹³⁹ illustrative of another aspect of Reverdy's evolution as a poet. The substantive vides refers to the void, a principal image in the theme of the voyage which sometimes appears under the terms abîme or trou as in this particular poem. Here, the void which haunts the traveler, constantly impeding his progress, ultimately deceives him and leads him back to the very point from which he began.

¹³⁹Written in 1916. Reverdy, "La Lucarne ovale," Plupart du temps, I, pp. 79-80. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

LES VIDES DU PRINTEMPS

En passant une seule fois devant ce trou j'ai penché
 mon front
 Qui est là
 Quel chemin est venu finir à cet endroit
 Quelle vie arrêtée
 Que je ne connais pas

Au coin les arbres tremblent
 Le vent timide passe
 L'eau se ride sans bruit
 Et quelqu'un vient le long du mur
 On le poursuit

J'ai couru comme un fou et je me suis perdu
 Les rues désertes tournent
 Les maisons sont fermées
 Je ne peux plus sortir
 Et personne pourtant ne m'avait enfermé

J'ai passé des ponts et des couloirs
 Sur les quais la poussière m'aveugla
 Plus loin le silence trop grand me fit peur

Et bientôt je cherchais à qui je pourrais demander
 mon chemin

On riait
 Mais personne ne voulait comprendre mon malheur

Peu à peu je m'habituais ainsi à marcher seul
 Sans savoir où j'allais

Ne voulant pas savoir
 Et quand je me trompais
 Un chemin plus nouveau devant moi s'éclairait

Puis le trou s'est rouvert
 Toujours le même
 Toujours aussi transparent
 Et toujours aussi clair

Autrefois j'avais regardé ce miroir vide et n'y avais
 rien vu
 Du visage oublié à présent reconnu

As the traveler passes along upon his journey, he is confronted by the void which he interprets as a symbol of death, a tomb, or at least the termination of all movement:

En passant une seule fois devant ce trou j'ai penché
 mon front
 Qui est là
 Quel chemin est venu finir à cet endroit
 Quelle vie arrêtée
 Que je ne connais pas

The repetition of the consonant k and the related combinations [kə] and [kɛl] unites the six lines, thereby reinforcing their negative tone. The movements of the natural surroundings contrast with the immobility of the traveler---

Au coin les arbres tremblent
 Le vent timide passe
 L'eau se ride sans bruit

An anonymous personnage slips surreptitiously towards the traveler---"Et quelqu'un vient le long du mur"---the indefinite pronoun quelqu'un, giving no specific identification, suggests a sinister presence. In addition, the wall, serving both as a source of movement from which the person passes, and as an eventual barrier, accentuates the polarity mobility/immobility.

The movement of the entire tableau is abruptly increased as the motif of flight is introduced. An ambiguous character or group, referred to by the impersonal pronoun on, initiates pursuit of the unknown "quelqu'un." The traveler, frightened by both the void and the mysterious hostilities, attempts to slip away from the absurdities of reality. In contrast to the previous use of impersonal pronouns are the numerous occurrences of the first person singular. They appear throughout the entire flight of the narrator, implying

a more subjective and therefore, more real experience. The intensified movement connoted in the expression "J'ai couru" is then reinforced by the verb tourment. The motion of the streets slipping and turning chaotically together brings to mind the image of the spiral, a principal motif in the theme of deviation.

Again as illustrated earlier in the poem by an unknown "quelqu'un" and "on," there is an absence of interaction with the environment---"Les maisons sont fermées." Reverdy's love of contrast will not be restrained: "Je ne peux plus sortir/Et personne pourtant ne m'avait enfermé." The paradoxes continue. Just as the voyager is immobile---haunted by the void---yet mobile---continuing along in flight, so now he is locked within himself, having no one with whom he may relate---yet actually not imprisoned. The polarity "enfermé"/"pas enfermé" persists for several lines:

J'ai passé des ponts et des couloirs

Et bientôt je cherchais à qui je pourrais demander
 mon chemin

On riait
 Mais personne ne voulait comprendre mon malheur

Again as in the poem "Une apparence médiocre," man is a solitary figure---"Peu à peu je m'habituais à marcher seul/Sans savoir où j'allais."

The voyager who stumbles along by trial and error, completely unguided, is the same man as the wanderer who stands at the crossroads, perplexed by the indifference of his environment. Yet perhaps the voyager is the more tragic

figure, for just when he believes that closure will become aperture---"Un chemin plus nouveau devant moi s'éclairait"--- his hope is destroyed and the potential for motion is denied--- "Puis le trou s'est rouvert." The voyager has been deceived. Whatever movement occurred, if any really did occur, has been reversed and he finds himself staring into the same abyss¹⁴⁰ ("Toujours le même/Toujours aussi transparent") from which he initially fled. There is, however, one small difference. Upon gazing into the void before beginning his flight, he recognized nothing; now the void, serving as a mirror, reflects his own image, confirming his involuntary role in this unfortunate cyclical itinerary. Years later in Flaques de verre, this same voyager, now an old man, will refuse all recognition for having survived the idiosyncracies of existence, cynically implying that what he has gained has not been worth the effort:

¹⁴⁰Reverdy's allusions to the abyss or pit again recall the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud. For Baudelaire, the "gouffre" as he prefers to call it, symbolizes a refuge for the natural inclination toward evil and abnormal sexual pleasures and the resultant punishments:

"Un damné descendant sans lampe
 Au bord d'un gouffre dont l'odeur
 Trahit l'humide profondeur
 D'éternels escaliers sans rampe.

.....
 Où tremble une étoile livide,

Un phare ironique, infernal
 Flambeau des grâces sataniques

.....
 ---La conscience dans le Mal!"
 "L'Irremédiable," Les Fleurs du mal, pp. 93-94.

Mais l'oubli, le dessin mal établi de son séjour
d'étranger sans passeport. Une parole aux hommes de
son temps aux sources du mépris. Merci. Je ne veux
pas de cette gloire.¹⁴¹

Closely associated with the theme of the forced march in Reverdy's earlier poetry is an emphasis upon spatial dimension. Such sub-themes as the distance, motion, and weight of space sometimes contribute to the theme of alienation and appear as agents of unfavorable change. In the previously quoted line from the poem "Les vides du printemps"---
"Un chemin plus nouveau devant moi s'éclairait/Puis le trou s'est rouvert"---it is the transformation of horizontal distance ("chemin") into vertical distance ("trou") which creates the void. Horizontal distance again slips evasively away from the poet in an earlier poem, "Sujets," from Cale sèche as he seeks to explore a world of nightmares, "Parmi les présages funestes/Le néant reculait d'où je venais de

Yet Baudelaire also considers the "gouffre" a possible source of the Inconnu, a whole new series of experiences and sensations which will rejuvenate poetry: "'Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?/Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!'" "Le Voyage," Les Fleurs du mal, pp. 153.

Reverdy borrows from both of Baudelaire's interpretations, although using a slightly different vocabulary. To the term gouffre he adds trou, vide, or abîme, construing them all as indicative of death or some form of deviant behavior as in the above poem. Of the four terms, only abîme is sometimes given a positive connotation in his poetry, as in the poem "Reflux" of Ferraille. There it suggests the recesses (in the same sense as the folds) deep within the artist's mind from which he gathers his creative strength, pp. 168-169. Reverdy, while occasionally referring to Rimbaud's descent into hell, never depicts the journey downward as violently or as fantaisically as Rimbaud in his "'dérèglement de tous les sens.'" Reverdy was too preoccupied with the turmoil and deviation in the everyday world.

¹⁴¹Reverdy, "L'Âme en péril," Flaques de verre, pp. 110-111.

naître.¹⁴²

During the years spanned by the two collections La Guitare endormie and Sources du vent, space is more often represented by the theme of weight, symbolizing a metaphysical burden which the narrator must bear. The setting of the poem "Esprit présent"¹⁴³ as well as the traveler's means of escape are destroyed, crushed by the downward motion of an unidentified mass. The positive movement of the boat toward those whom it will rescue ("On attend le navire qui vient vers nous dans l'avenir"), is negated by the gradual descent of the sky, "Le ciel appuie sur chaque tête/Le bout du mât s'accroche à l'aile du nuage." Although not sudden, the effect of the downward slipping is ruinous,

Le monde est ventre à terre
Et tout pèse trop lourd
Sur les épaules et sur les bras

The expression "tout pèse" contrasts sharply with the verbs of gradated motion, appuie and s'accroche, indicating that the pressure has reached an intolerable point. Throughout Reverdy's poetry the indefinite pronoun tout like the unknown "quelqu'un" is never identified, but is continuously associated with a spatial context.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴²Reverdy, Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 499-501.

¹⁴³Written in 1919. Reverdy, "La Guitare endormie," Plupart du temps, II, pp. 57-58. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁴⁴An example from "Siècle" of Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 128-130:

""Et je tiens ma chaîne
Il faut trop tirer
puisque tout m'entraîne""

In the development of the theme of the neutral state, Reverdy's creative impulses contribute another dimension, the formal manifestation of which would be later known as surrealism. There are several poems from Les Ardoises du toit and La Guitare endormie which reflect concepts fundamental to the then embryonic surrealist climate.¹⁴⁵ A poem from the latter work is perhaps one of the best examples, "Le magasin monumental."¹⁴⁶ The voyage begins, as does much of the movement in Reverdy's work, at the crossroads, here the point at which waking ("veille") becomes sleeping ("sommeil"), or in later surrealist terms, the transformation of conscience into subconscient. The reader may anticipate from the initial line, "Les ailes sont chargées," that the poet will slip upwards as do the bird images of Mallarmé or those of the surrealists. However, Reverdy has in a sense created a false beginning, for it is the poet's despair which takes flight. The voyage into the subconscious is to be a journey downward, "Mes mains ont laissé descendre lentement/Le rideau sans plis de ma mémoire," the image of the slipping curtains suggesting the poet's eyelids closing. The phrase "sans plis,"

¹⁴⁵While there is evidence that surrealism influenced Reverdy (the polarity "veille"/"sommeil"), he, in turn, left his mark upon the surrealists who admit to having borrowed his theory of the image. See my discussion of this theory, footnote 70, pp. 87-88.

¹⁴⁶Written in 1919. Reverdy, "La Guitare endormie," Plupart du temps, II, pp. 45-46. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

LE MAGASIN MONUMENTAL

Les ailes sont chargées
 Le désespoir s'envole
 Mes mains ont laissé descendre lentement
 Le rideau sans plis de ma mémoire
 Mais l'intermède du jour bruyant se joue toujours
 sous la coupole
 Dans l'air gris bleu c'est une femme qui descend
 La vierge du vitrail
 La mère avec l'enfant
 Non car ce n'est ici qu'une maison de modes
 De modes démodées qui perdent le courant
 Les multiples balcons encerclent l'air du temps
 Tout change dans l'escalier tournant de l'atmosphère
 quand le soleil s'arrête au méridien
 Sur la pointe dorée qui attend le tonnerre
 La chaleur trouble la lumière
 L'escalier s'arrondit
 C'est une découpe
 Il y a la branche d'arbre
 Et la ligne du bras
 Les rides de chaque figure
 Le front dissimulé sous un chapeau trop plat
 Quand le troupeau du soir transforme son allure
 Vers le parapet du suicide
 Vers la nuit
 Qui descend les marches du fleuve en contre-bas

again referring to Reverdy's obsession with the protection afforded by inner sanctuaries of the mind,¹⁴⁷ implies here that such sources of refuge are being fully explored during the trek into the subconscious.

Still not yet asleep, the poet straddles the two states of "veille" and "sommeil"---"Mais l'intermède du jour bruyant se joue toujours ..." The term intermède is defined in the next few lines by a succession of visions sliding across a screen created by the eyelids ("écran") where their respective sources, conscious and subconscious, intermingle. The image of the descending woman is associated both with the actual surroundings, "... ce n'est ici qu'une maison de modes," and with an imagined religious scene, "La vierge du vitrail/La mère avec l'enfant." Images of the spiral appear in the form of balconies which fit concentrically one within the other and finally into a spiral staircase. Although the spiral occurs frequently in Reverdy's poetry as part of the theme of deviation, here it is used somewhat differently, tracing the itinerary of the artist's mind from the conscious down to the subconscious. The shape of the spiral suggests the fantastical meandering of the mind as opposed to logic and reason and is emphasized in the line, "Les multiples balcons encerclent l'air du temps/Tout change dans l'escalier tournant de l'atmosphère ..."

¹⁴⁷The substantive plis is again used in an intellectual sense, indicating a repository for unrealized intellectual potential; see my discussion---footnote 48, p. 49; footnote 49, pp. 52-53; footnote 56, p. 66.

The transformation of the psychological tableau is not yet complete. The circular lines of the balconies which were transformed into the spiral now assume human outlines; the stairway becomes a person:

L'escalier s'arrondit
 C'est une découpure
 Il y a la branche d'arbre
 Et la ligne du bras
 Les rides de chaque figure
 Le front dissimulé sous un chapeau trop plat

This new vision may refer to the image of the descending woman at the beginning of the poem. Its appearance signals the end of the journey into the subconscious, for all the images of transition between the two states of "veille" and "sommeil" occur when time stands still---"quand le soleil s'arrête au méridien." However, when the temporal cycle resumes, the visions begin to slip away into darkness, here a symbol for the extreme boundary of the dream: "Quand le troupeau du soir transforme son allure/Vers le parapet du suicide." Their second descent, this time "Vers la nuit," recalls the image of the curtains slipping downward at the beginning of the poem, yet here the curtains imply an end to "sommeil," a return to "veille."

The tendency in Reverdy's earlier poetry to develop new dimensions in the theme of the voyage as a compulsory journey yields in his later work to a preoccupation with one principal sub-theme---the association of the voyage with death. Man, forced to journey in order to resolve the enigmas of his existence, realizes that he can travel no further and that he is no closer to understanding himself and his environment

than when he set out:

Aux gouffres du malheur je ne peux plus descendre

 Et je n'ai plus de place au monde que j'ai fui¹⁴⁸

Death perhaps offers the only solution: "...alors que tout homme naît fatalement esclave et prisonnier de la société, et que de cet esclavage et de cette prison, la mort seule peut le libérer."¹⁴⁹ Reverdy again confirms the most fundamental pattern of his work---the gradual transformation of restrained pessimism into pervasive gloom.

Illustrative of the final point in the evolution of the voyage as a forced march is the poem "Le silence infernal"¹⁵⁰ from one of Reverdy's last volumes of poetry, Le Chant des morts. In this particular poem the traveler's itinerary leads him to the sea where he reflects upon his motivation to continue the voyage---"Seul dans le dénuement la haine qui te pousse." Suggesting an end to the traveler's terrestrial existence, the term dénuement anticipates the following line, "Écoute le remous de la mort qui attend." The silent motion of death as it swirls higher and higher recalls the title, "Le silence infernal."

The futility of the voyager's passage from beach to beach is felt in the expression "traîner le long filet," the verb traîner suggestive of resignation, the substantive filet

¹⁴⁸Reverdy, "Chemin perdu---piste d'envol," Main-d'oeuvre, p. 413.

¹⁴⁹Reverdy, En Vrac, p. 153.

¹⁵⁰Written between 1944-1948. Reverdy, "Le Chant des morts," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 449-450. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

LE SILENCE INFERNAL

A tous ceux qui ont pris la honte à son revers
A tous ceux qui n'ont pas de chambre sur la rue
A tous ceux qui se lavent les mains dans le malheur
Que la mort sonne à leurs oreilles
Un vent de feu souffle entre les lames du caisson
Carcasse à la mine rebelle
De ces visages nus ensoleillés par la douceur
Je n'ai pas démaillé les filets du mensonge
Encore la rigueur de temps amassé goutte à goutte
Et les boules gonflées dans la tempête du miroir
Seul dans le dénuement la haine qui te pousse
Écoute le remous de la mort qui attend
Il faut traîner le long filet de plage en plage
Le noir silence qui suivra la trahison
Une lampe de sang qui épuise mes doutes
Une route nouée autour de ma mémoire
Un signal de chagrin qui vibre à mon chevet
Pendant que je descends à mon niveau de chute en
chute
Glissant trop tôt au coin des marches du hasard
Une seule poignée de joie dans la balance
Une montagne de tristesse en contre-bas
On ne laisse entre les mains tendues aucune chance
Entre les coeurs reclus aucun mur mitoyen
Accablés sous le vent navires sans adresse
Sourires déroutés virant à contre bord

referring to a previous line, "... les filets du mensonge." The nets are the tools with which one man deceives another. Passage along this same path has become a habit for the voyager---"Une route nouée autour de ma mémoire." Suddenly he realizes that the itinerary has changed, "Un signal de chagrin ..." and the theme of slipping along a worn groove has become that of involuntary descent: "Pendant que je descends à mon niveau de chute en chute."

The voyager, aware that he is falling, finds himself no longer able to regulate his movements. As he slips out of control, his descent is measured by the "marches du hasard," Reverdy again indicating that there is no superior force which guides him, even to his death. The steepness and speed of his descent are emphasized by the line, "Une montagne de tristesse en contre-bas." The substantive montagne implies little possibility of future ascent or escape. Even near death, the poet pleads once more for direction, but the response to the "mains tendues" is "aucune chance." The voyager sees himself as one of the "coeurs reclus," completely separated from human interaction, denied even quasi-proximity to his fellow men, "aucun mur mitoyen." The image of the wall is used ironically here, for ordinarily a term of isolation in Reverdy's work, it symbolizes to the voyager the possibility of relating to others.

The voyage has failed; whatever movement forward it initiated is now neutralized in the ultimate result---death, presented here as a shipwreck, "Accablés sous le vent navires sans adresse." Although the poem is addressed to the victims

of this absurd adventure, "A tous ceux qui," Reverdy in the last line implies by his bitterness and cynicism that he too is to be included among the deceived ("sourires déroutés") who do not learn until it is too late that they have fatally veered off course ("virant à contre bord"), destroying themselves. The movement of the voyager is always out of phase with that of his objective as Jean-Pierre Richard states, "La vie réelle reste au-delà: au-delà de l'espace et au-delà du temps, car l'on ne coïncide jamais non plus chez Reverdy avec l'horaire objectif des choses; l'on y arrive toujours trop tôt ou trop tard."¹⁵¹ Reverdy himself confirms the inaccessibility of "la vie réelle" in the final poem of Le Chant des morts where it is towards death that he looks for refuge from the misery of everyday existence,

Chaque jour à gagner
 A retordre
 A forger un anneau de plus à la chaîne¹⁵²

A Journey to Sea

There are a few exceptions in Reverdy's poetry to the voyage as movement neutralized or reversed. However, of those few poems where constructive slipping is permitted, it is usually a voyage to sea undertaken to initiate artistic creation. Again it is during Reverdy's earlier work that this more positive aspect of the voyage appears. The poem "Bande

¹⁵¹Richard, Onze Études sur la poésie moderne, p. 16.

¹⁵²Reverdy, "La vie m'entraîne," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 451-452.

BANDE DE SOUVENIRS¹⁵³

Second Half

Vague d'eau douce et transparente
 Mousse sous tes pas émouvante
 La pierre glisse
 Sous ton pied nu
 S'épanouisse
 l'or reconnu
 En étoffe de baldaquin
 l'odorant sillage des pins

Le clair de lune de travers
 s'en ira vers
 la route d'étoiles à l'envers
 Ciseau de lune miel des abeilles
 au bercement de la corbeille
 transformable en habitation
 Où naît et meurt ton émotion

Fausse est la promesse
 Noire la détresse
 Au verso du mur le
 grand chien qui hurle

Haie de cyprès
 du dernier pré
 repos sommeil
 dans le soleil

La brèche dans le mur
 débordant sur
 le chemin creux
 tout près du calvaire trop vieux

Longue rangée de platanes
 la lueur se fane
 à l'ombre douce
 l'eau dans ma bouche
 Encore d'en haut
 le soleil a bu le ruisseau

¹⁵³Written between 1913-1915. Reverdy, "Cale sèche,"
 Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 469-471. All quotations are from this
 text unless otherwise indicated.

Irradiante crête bleue
Vers les adieux
Chante au départ
S'il est trop tard

Continue le chemin
Ce soir comme demain
Mouvante lumière
dans la clairière
repos de la veillée
sous la lampe allumée

Ces calmes ornements supposent
le mystère immense où éclosent
voix plaintives en mouvement
les invisibles dans le vent

Par le choc amorti
sur un carré d'orties
du bloc de pierre
en aiguière
du bloc de bois
du Christ en croix

Puis brutalement tout s'évade
Mais le navire reste en rade
Aux mille feux du boulevard
Du phare ardent de ton regard

de souvenirs," the first part of which was analyzed previously as an example of an interior source of movement, portrays Reverdy at one of his most optimistic moments. The last half of the poem, as a sequel to the poet's descent within himself, describes a journey at sea during which, having resolved his interior conflicts, the poet discovers his own creative identity as he is guided by the sea, an agent of artistic transformation.

In this poem from Cale sèche the theme of movement toward artistic creation is emphasized more than the actual fruit of the creative process:

Vague d'eau douce et transparente
 Mousse sous tes pas émouvante
 La pierre glisse
 Sous ton pied nu
 S'épanouisse
 l'or reconnu
 En étoffe de baldaquin
 l'odorant sillage des pins

The verb mousser suggests the action of cleansing the poet's thoughts of any preconceived or socially imposed notions,¹⁵⁴ as well as a movement of transition, slipping toward an authentic poetic text. The authenticity of the poetic communication is also reinforced by the transparent quality of the water, an agent of purity. The transition itself from initial inspiration to fruition occurs as "La pierre glisse/Sous ton pied nu," the adjective nu again confirming the

¹⁵⁴The action of cleansing raw material received from inspiration is the theme of a play, Le Savon, by the poet Francis Ponge. Ponge, more than Reverdy, develops the idea of water bubbling and foaming as a symbol of transition between the poet's first intuitive feeling and the actual connotation that the poetic word will bear.

cleansing process which precedes literary creation. The theme of aperture, as opposed to its more frequent counterpart, closure, symbolizes the actual birth of the poem---

"S'épanouisse/l'or reconnu." As the waves rock the poet and transform him, waste material from the birth is left behind, "l'odorant sillage des pins," indicating a direction by which future creative attempts may be oriented.

In spite of the constructive movement which has been realized, the reader is warned that the poet's reserve of optimism is dwindling:

Fausse est la promesse
Noire la détresse
Au verso du mur le
grand chien qui hurle

At the end of the poem the waves, the medium of change, have vanished and the boat has been deserted, its actual location not even specified---"Mais le navire reste en rade." Perhaps its immobility is to be associated with the title of the volume, Cale sèche, the mind of the poet, including its inner sanctuaries ("les plis"), is barren, the traces of the creative process have been erased, and there is no reason to believe that it may reoccur. The poet like the voyager threatened by shipwreck in a poem from Grande nature, "Détresse du sort," must simply attempt to retain what he has created, for his

Reverdy, only in a few limited texts, uses terms of semantic slipping such as mousser in this poem and elsewhere bouillonner and écume ("Bel Occident," Plupart du temps, II, p. 59):

""Entre le dos du livre et les feuilles du vent
S'ouvre l'autre limpide
Où bouillonne l'écume""

work at least confirms his own identity, and constitutes a positive element which defies the neutral state:

Ce qui me rassure un peu c'est que je pourrais toujours
 Garder la rampe
 Et laisser sur la terre un léger souvenir
 Un geste de regret
 Une amère grimace
 Ce que j'aurai mieux fait¹⁵⁵

The slipping motion of the waves, seen as positive in the poem "Bande de souvenirs" is interpreted as completely negative in the text "Naufrages sans bouées,"¹⁵⁶ from Flaques de verre. Responding pessimistically to his short-lived optimism, Reverdy's fondness for polarity is apparent:

A cette enseigne on logera tous ces coeurs désolés
 qui flottent au gré du sort et roulent sur le sable
 ondulé que les lames sournoises caressent dans le
 fond, lissent et peignent.

Again the image of the épave appears. Human destiny is dependent upon the haphazard whims of the surging waves which eventually deposit man at will on an unknown shore.

¹⁵⁵Reverdy, "Détresse du sort," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁶Reverdy, "Naufrages sans bouées," Flaques de verre, pp. 15-16.

CHAPTER VII

MOVEMENT ABORTED OR DENIED

From the themes of movement analyzed thus far, destructive as well as constructive, the narrator, unnamed figure, and reader are drawn voluntarily or involuntarily along a path of precise dimension, the nature of which is dictated by the text: toward upheaval and holocaust, or restraint and literary vocation. Even in the case of the neutral state in which positive motion may be reversed, or a circular itinerary imposed, the direction of movement is always specified, whether upward, downward, positive, or negative. Yet, there is a final category among Reverdy's interpretations of movement in which the attempted motion is either only partially realized or completely denied. In either case, the poem and its author, as well as the narrator and reader, are "en attente," condemned to endless waiting, paralyzed by their inability to act, yet futilely anticipating that a direction upward or downward will be established. This final category of motion is analogous to the concept of an absence of spatial position found in Part I of this study, erasure of movement and resulting immobility corresponding to the dissolution of setting, and the creation of a void. Moreover, partial realization or denial of movement usually

occurs in poems where there is an emphasis upon setting, particularly restrictive sources of movement such as the crossroads and the wall. Such an emphasis contrasts with those aspects of movement previously discussed and found in poems where the theme of motion dominates its source.

Partial Slipping

In the poem "Les degrés de froid et de fièvre,"¹⁵⁷ movement is attempted in the corner of a room where, contained between two intersecting lines, it is suddenly aborted. The corner, recalling the images of the crossroads and the linguistic location entre, symbolizes not only limited movement but also complete immobility---"Alors la chanson dans le coin s'est arrêtée." As the flow of notes ceases, immobility is interpreted as agglomeration ("Un tas de mots accumulés"). Although motion has not been effaced, it will continue no further. The observer, not comprehending what has ensued, does not attempt to act; he implies by the response "Attendez " that he prefers to suspend judgement.

Later in the poem, motion again partially occurs, this time originating from the horizontal line. The setting changes from the corner of a room to the outlines of a bed occupied by an invalid, and more specifically, to one particular line on the bed, "Il passe un cortège sur le lit." The theme of partial movement is now seen as an extension of

¹⁵⁷Written between 1913-1915. Reverdy, "Cale sèche," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 463-464. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

LES DEGRÉS DE FROID ET DE FIÈVRE

L'ovale se perd dans la clarté de la lampe
 En bas
 Le visage blanc fatigué
 Dans le jour brumeux
 Tout est retourné
 Une émotion douce qui s'évapore

C'est une femme qui lit près d'un malade

Alors la chanson dans le coin s'est arrêtée
 Un tas de mots accumulés
 Je ne pourrai jamais vous dire
 Une autre fois pour revenir
 Attendez

On ne sait pas s'il va mourir
 Il passe un cortège sur le lit
 Un rêve lourd s'étend sur la table de nuit
 Les yeux se ferment
 Devant le mur d'en face lumineux
 Le temps s'arrête

Un couple vient d'entrer en costume de fête

La tête dépasse le plafond
 Un tremblement nerveux ébranle la maison
 Sil faisait moins froid
 La fenêtre ouverte
 Tout s'envolerait

Devant la porte il y a une soeur de charité qui bat des
 ailes

the subconscious as the world of dreams enables the dying man to attempt movement just once more: "Un rêve lourd s'étend sur la table de nuit/Les yeux se ferment." Just as motion begins, its limits are reflected in the outlines of the restricting wall. Although the dying man lives on through his dream, he is already dead to the world of objective reality: "Devant le mur d'en face lumineux/Le temps s'arrête."

Further impact of the term mur is experienced several lines later when the image of a head slips beyond the restrictive surface of the ceiling, interrupting the procession of visions which pass by one another in the dream. The explosive effect of the head as it extends beyond the ceiling suggests a balloon which, blown to capacity, bursts--- "La tête dépasse le plafond/Un tremblement nerveux ébranle la maison." An end to the extension of the subconscious is implicit in the destruction suggested by the verb ébranler. The lines "La fenêtre ouverte/Tout s'envolerait" indicate a potential dispersal of fragments; yet nothing will be swept away. Every element of the tableau is in a state of shock as if stunned by the rapidity of rupture. The fragments of the explosion fall victim to paralysis and stagnation, while those objects and people located outside the confines of the room are permitted to escape rigidity and death: "Devant la porte il y a une soeur de charité qui bat des/ailes."¹⁵⁸ The term aile, signifying mobility, offers, perhaps, a potential for favorable change in contrast to the prevailing atmosphere of gloom.

¹⁵⁸The nun seated outside is probably wearing a head

Absence of Motion

There is more variation upon the theme of a complete denial of movement in comparison with the related motif of a partial realization of movement, although both themes are found consistently in Reverdy's work. A poem from La Lucarne ovale, "Ruine achevée,"¹⁵⁹ is structured upon the contrast of past mobility and present fixation. In an introductory line Reverdy describes the paralysis which besets the narrator by repeating the syntactic formula noun+restrictive qualifier+relative clause. The fourth line combines the last two elements simultaneously instead of consecutively:

Plus rien ne tient
 C'est un homme sans pieds qui voudrait courir
 Une femme sans tête qui voudrait parler
 Un enfant qui n'a guère que ses yeux pour pleurer

Further contrast is established in the lines:

Pourtant je t'avais vu partir
 Tu étais déjà loin

 Et toi tu ne te retournais pas

The conjunction pourtant forewarns of change or opposition, in this case, the change from the immobility of the "homme/femme/enfant," to the mobility of the pronoun tu which may refer to another person, but more likely to the narrator himself, seen as an entirely different individual at an earlier point in life.

covering which projects upward on the sides and, therefore, resembles wings.

¹⁵⁹Written in 1916. Reverdy, "La Lucarne ovale," Plupart du temps, I, pp. 106-107. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

RUINE ACHEVÉE

J'ai perdu le secret qu'on m'avait donné
Je ne sais plus rien faire

Un moment j'ai cru que ça pourrait aller
Plus rien ne tient
C'est un homme sans pieds qui voudrait courir
Une femme sans tête qui voudrait parler
Un enfant qui n'a guère que ses yeux pour pleurer

Pourtant je t'avais vu partir
Tu étais déjà loin
Une trompe sonnait
La foule criait
Et toi tu ne te retournais pas

Nous avons un long chemin à suivre pas à pas
Nous le ferons ensemble

Je déteste ton visage radieux
La main que tu me tends
Et ton ventre tu es vieux
Tu me ressembles

Au retour je ne retrouve rien
On ne m'a rien donné
Tout est dépensé

Un pan de décor qui s'écroule
Dans la nuit

As the narrator returns from his reflections upon the past, his tone becomes more personal. He speaks not of the effect of paralysis upon others, but now upon himself:

Au retour je ne retrouve rien
On ne m'a rien donné
Tout est dépensé

The past participle dépensé indicates the impossibility of future motion; all resources are now exhausted. As if to further separate the narrator from his past identity, the theme of complete collapse appears, perpetuating isolation and solitude: "Un pan de décor qui s'écroule/Dans la nuit." The significance of the title "Ruine achevée" is now apparent; the presence of the wall ("pan") only formalizes the narrator's state of incarceration.

Another poem from La Lucarne ovale, "Son seul passage,"¹⁶⁰ a variation upon the theme of the voyage, explores the contrast between the traveler who, overcome by fatigue, is unable to continue his journey, and the environment which by its instinctive movements is oblivious to his exhaustion. The world of nature, as if operated according to a sense of time completely different from that of men, carries out its activities subject to no limitations whatsoever: "La forêt s'ouvre," "... dans les branches où passe le vent," "... monter la route vers les arbres." Although the voyager is sheltered by the forest, the countryside indifferently

¹⁶⁰Written in 1916. Reverdy, "La Lucarne ovale," Plupart du temps, I, p. 118. All quotations are from this text unless otherwise indicated.

SON SEUL PASSAGE

Sur le bord du chemin où il s'est laissé tomber, les bras pendants, ses mains traînent dans le ruisseau où l'eau ne coule pas. La forêt s'ouvre sur sa tête et d'en haut le passant regarde le chemin. Il attend; aucun bruit ne court ailleurs que dans les branches où passe le vent. Le silence a désolé son coeur solitaire et fermé.

Un chien qui mord, une roue qui crie sur le gravier un moment secoueraient sa torpeur. Mais pour lui le monde est une route interminable où l'on se perd. Il a laissé dans les buissons ses souvenirs et les années passées sans rien comprendre.

La forêt qui l'arrête est un abri où il fuit le soleil et il regarde, sans la voir, monter la route vers les arbres. Plus loin le village s'endort étendu dans les champs que la nuit assombrit, mais pas une fenêtre en s'éclairant ne lui sourit.

provides him with no water---"où l'eau ne coule pas." The motion of flowing is thus denied by the environment.¹⁶¹

The traveler, in contrast to the world of nature, makes no effort to move ahead on his course: "les bras pendants," "ses mains traînent," "le passant regarde le chemin." Unlike his counterpart in the previous poem "Ruine achevée," past motion holds no significance for him; he has understood nothing from his journey and even associates it with the indifference of the natural world---"Il a laissé dans les buissons ses souvenirs et les années passées sans rien comprendre." The phrase "une route interminable où l'on se perd" precludes a possible positive effect of future action. It is now more than fatigue which prevents him from moving; uncertainty as to whether to continue or not dazes him. Overcome by paralysis, he decides to delay judgement---"Il attend." Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the poem is the image of the road leading away from the traveler in an arbitrary direction---"il regarde, sans la voir, monter la route vers les arbres"---while he is stationary, condemned to only look on, realizing the ever-increasing distance between himself and an unknown destination.

In contrast to the poem "Son seul passage" is a text from Flaques de verre, "Les blancs déserts de l'immortalité de l'âme,"¹⁶² in which now even the instinctive movements of

¹⁶¹Here the motion of flowing has a positive connotation in contrast with its usual negative connotation in the theme of deviation. See my discussion, pp. 119-149.

¹⁶²Written in 1929. Reverdy, "Les blancs déserts de l'immortalité de l'âme," Flaques de verre, pp. 131-133. All

LES BLANCS DÉSERTS DE L'IMMORTALITÉ DE L'ÂME

Il n'y a plus maintenant, entre l'amour et moi, que les stigmates livides de la mort et les empreintes fugitives du silence.

Il n'y a plus, entre l'amour et moi, que l'étreinte glacée des poignées de mains rugueuses de l'angoisse. Il n'y a plus, entre l'amour et moi, que les gouttes de sang qui tracent mon chemin dans les gorges de la défaite. Sur cette plage, où chaque grain de sable est un souvenir imperceptible et inerte, vont et viennent dans une immense gravité, muets et sans aucun détail de forme, des personnages blancs, des tourments blancs, des remords presque blancs, des idées blanches; et moi qui deviens peu à peu, dans ce tourbillon sans portée, incolore. Une voix qui descend de roche en roche comme une cascade me dit: "Te voilà dans le désert sans ombre et sans fin de l'oubli. Ici, ne pénètre jamais le quadrilatère émouvant d'aucune lettre. Ici, la pensée creuse en elle-même sa propre tombe. Ici, les ailes intérieures déchirent de leurs battements la poitrine où brûle la flamme du départ. Ici, le sens de la solitude est passé du signe à la réalité.

La mer qui borde la plage vers le nord ne bouge pas. Les crêtes de ses vagues sont fermes et immobiles. Là, tous les hommes lourds pourraient marcher aisément sur les flots. A l'est, se lève sur une bande de ciel radieux l'âpreté splendide du désir. Sur l'ouest se couchent les tentatives ridées, toutes les désillusions fumantes, encore mal éteintes, les chagrins malmenés, les désespoirs sans nombre.

Les bruits de la fortune se glissent partout sournoisement.

Mais les désastres des ruines subites et des misères lentes illuminent les chaînes des montagnes de leurs clartés sinistres. L'or circule dans les veines des corps, jusqu'au bout des doigts d'où il s'égoutte comme l'eau claire et le sang lourd, comme la bave du plaisir. L'or, les fleuves d'or, les rails de la liberté, la lumière tendre de l'amour. Les mains secouées, on entend un bruit sourd. Les gémissements honteux de la misère. L'écume de la crasse pauvre au sommet de chaque lame de sang, de chaque tombe, dans les cimetières réservées aux pauvres. Ici, dans ce désert parcouru en tous

sens par les caravanes de la pauvreté immortelle, il n'y a plus, entre l'amour et moi, que les précipices brûlants de la douleur et les sommets vertigineux de la malchance.

nature are stilled: "La mer qui borde la plage vers le nord ne bouge pas. Les crêtes de ses vagues sont fermes et immobiles." The immobility of the natural world is a reflection of the stagnation which besets the world of men, and is perhaps a symbol of waste accumulated from the creative process, both literary and psychological, and doomed in this poem to failure:

A l'est se lève sur une bande de ciel radieux
l'âpreté splendide du désir. Sur l'ouest se
couchent les tentatives ridées, toutes les
désillusions fumantes, encore mal éteintes, les
chagrins malmenés, les désespoirs sans nombre.

The traveler, at this point, will concede his inability to deal with the absurdity of existence. The poem "Dans ce désert,"¹⁶³ found at the end of one of Reverdy's last volumes, Bois vert, finds the voyager standing still, with no intention of resuming his journey, his will dwindled, his energy spent:

Mon coeur a dévidé sa laine
Plus de feu dans le coin
Plus d'amour plus de haine

The yarn symbolizes the threads of destiny which now are all played out. There is nowhere to go, since, with no understanding of the metaphysical enigma which confronts him, the traveler is like a boat with no mast, deprived of the possibility of selecting his direction:

Bateau perdu sans mât
Sans orientation
Tête tranchée
Poitrine sans passion

¹⁶³written between 1940-1946. Reverdy, "Bois vert," Main-d'oeuvre, pp. 528-530. All quotations are from this poem unless otherwise indicated.

DANS CE DÉSERT

Ce regard
 qui m'a laissé son dard dans le flanc
 Ce dard qui n'en sort pas
 Cette tête inspirée qui tient tout l'horizon
 Le plat bord de la nuit
 qui me sert de baïllon
 Et la soif de bonheur qui me donnait la fièvre

Dans ce désert

Enfin rien ne sort
 Rien ne vient
 Dans la réalité trop sombre
 Où le soleil déplie son papier de couleur
 toujours neuf
 On ignore le jeu et la partie se gagne
 Sur le trapeze d'os où le singe s'endort
 Encore un cran dans la montée sévère
 Et décidément rien ne sort

De ton coeur démonté où la rumeur s'apaise
 Rien ne tient à la loi des mots
 A la liste des morts au sommeil sans encombre
 Arbres couverts de sel
 de fruits cueillis dans les ruelles
 Têtes charnues plissées de rires pleins d'abeilles
 Rien ne tient au fond
 Ni à la forme
 L'esprit monte à la corde sans effort
 Comme le soleil dans les ombres
 Puis je tâche de vivre à mon moindre ressort
 Je tâte la nuit qui approche
 Comme la mer repue
 qui regagne ses bords
 Ma nuit sans horizon où la lune s'accroche
 Rien ne répond à mon appel muet
 Rien ne s'oppose à ce geste durci
 qui fauche ma moisson
 Allons il fait plus chaud
 plus noir dans la maison
 Mon coeur a dévidé sa laine
 Plus de feu dans le coin
 Plus d'amour plus de haine
 Bateau perdu sans mât
 Sans orientation

Tête tranchée
Poitrine sans passion
Houle du monde nu
Fermé
Cercle de ma prison
Amour sec
Et la mort à secret
Sur la fenêtre bleue
Qui m'attend au balcon
Veilleuse au cadre noir
A l'angle des saisons
Ma part de faim
de soif
mains vides
sang perdu

Dans ce désert

Houle du monde nu
Fermé
Cercle de ma prison
Amour sec

In addition to his inability to achieve physical movement, he is also unable to realize psychological development, for he has no one with whom he can communicate. Turning inward for solace, the voyager becomes locked within his own psyche, gradually stagnating "dans ce désert."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This most pervasive of Reverdian themes, that of a journey narrated by an anonymous observer or traveler, provides a thematic center through which most of the other themes in some way intersect. There is seemingly little hope that the Reverdian traveler will attain his objectives. As he attempts to initiate movement, his efforts will be countered by some mysterious force beyond human understanding. Yet, to believe that he will have failed is to deprive him and his creator of one fundamental idea to which they stubbornly cling: namely, that attaining a given end is probably impossible, or at least well beyond their control, but the decision to act as well as the actual efforts directed toward movement, lie within their limited capacity. It is the psychological or physical motion toward the goal which gives meaning to the attempt.

The theme of the voyage is usually found in a setting which, initially, is exterior and then gradually becomes interior. It may be a journey by foot along an endless road or path, through unfamiliar terrain, or one which terminates at a crossroads. This point of intersection introduces another thematic figure, that of seuil or threshold, signifying the possibility of transition from one type of experience or level of reality to another, or on the other

hand, indecision resulting from this potential selection. Regardless of the particular type of linear setting, the linguistic figures au bord de and entre clearly define the limits of the hills, rivers, shores, or horizons which the observer is attempting to describe.

When the exterior context of the voyage is succeeded by an interior setting, the theme of transition, implicit in the figure seuil, is again reintroduced. The focal point of the poem changes from an unending route to a room or chamber in the channels of the mind. Here, within places of refuge, the poet will seek his own identity and eliminate all that has been imposed upon him by convention. As he journeys through these passages, there will always be moments of decision when images of crossroads appear to initiate reflection. In contrast to this rather tranquil passage through the inner sanctuaries of the mind, are moments when the journey is considered a descent into a pit of contradictory thoughts. The figure of the room, joined to the theme of descent, provides the setting for a possible resolution of various crises represented by an overflowing stream. In fact, the room becomes a cauldron which, filled with boiling blood, indicates the violence and instability of the poet's psyche. If the crisis is resolved and the waste material from the confrontation eliminated, the traveler ascends the heights from which he has fallen, the entire cycle representing artistic rebirth.

Juxtaposed to the voyage of the lonely traveler proceeding at his own pace is that of unnamed, hysterical masses of people fleeing on foot, against a background of universal holocaust. With a vocabulary drawn from both physical and psychological contexts, the narrator emphasizes the motion of collapse and rupture. Here, the linguistic figure entre, previously referred to, defines the location of those who flee; they are seen by the observer between intersecting paths and gaps or wounds in the earth from which escape rivers of blood and debris. The gaps again refer to the image of the pit, a symbol of cosmic and human instability. Although the images of the crossroads signify possible change and transition, they are ignored by the panic-stricken masses guided solely by convention. Usually this turmoil can be traced to human strife and war, sometimes symbolically represented by the wind. This natural element appearing in the form of a whirlwind or hurricane, shreds or scars all that lies across its path. Temporal passage is usually associated with the wind, and images of crosses in this context refer not to a moment of decision but, rather, to the transition from life to death.

If the voyage is a journey by train or boat, its course may be circular as well as linear. Despite the speed of the train, the voyager who has repeatedly seen similar views of the countryside, feels as if he has not moved, or as if he is traveling in circles. When he glances at the train window, which functions as a mirror, all he can see is himself, a self immobilized by the glass. The frame of the window is

in effect a wall, a false threshold, permitting no passage from the outside in---the traveler does not know himself or understand the reasons for his actions.

The figure of the wall again converges with the theme of the voyage in other poems where together they are associated with the theme of flight. As multitudes of people are being stifled by images of walls, they hysterically turn and flee, viewing the train as a means of escape. However, although the figure of the solitary narrator is linked to the flight of the unruly masses, there is never any interaction between them. As the voyage nears its end, the passengers are sometimes abruptly removed from the setting, or the entire setting may be dissolved. The figure of the wall appears sometimes as a curtain which conceals the entire tableau. The train itself may slide into an abyss, covered by unchecked streams of temporal flow. Those who observe can only wonder if the incident ever really took place.

Unlike the voyage by train, the journey by boat usually occurs in a context both exterior and interior. In a literal sense, the traveler departs by boat in order to escape the frustration and meaninglessness of everyday life. Yet he finds that his problems follow him and even worse, that the voyage ends abruptly, terminating just as it begins, like the movement of the train. Repeatedly the voyage fails because of violent winds; the boat either turns back or is destroyed. In those poems where the theme of the whirlwind provides the focal point, the narrator describes the disaster, with full emphasis placed upon the imminent defeat of the

traveler. The ship struggling to escape the storm recalls the hysterical masses running in vain from the forces of war. One setting is immediately superimposed upon another, creating in effect an extensive collage. Under the force of the wind, the boat deviates from its course and slowly disintegrates. Associated with the theme of the dismasted ship, having completely lost its orientation, is that of closure. The frame of the setting, acting as a wall, moves in and down upon the ship, gradually compressing it, until it descends below the surface of the water. The transition between life and death is completed and the boat entirely disappears from sight. An uncertain future awaits those who survive the shipwreck as they are washed up on unknown shores by the swelling motion of the waves.

In a figurative sense, the journey by boat may refer to a re-evaluation of the meaning of language. The motion of the waves will cleanse words of their socially ascribed values, and their true primitive significance will be discovered. However, this type of voyage, too, sometimes ends in failure and as the poem closes, the boat remains in dry dock. Again as with the train poems, the reader questions whether it all really occurred. Yet in those poems which recount this mission of semantic redefinition, another possibility is offered---perhaps it all actually did happen in the narrator's subconscious.

Related to the dream is a host of visual images, all referring again to the figure of the threshold, here implying the transition from the conscious to the subconscious. The

dream itself may appear as a nightmare during the course of which ghostly specters whirl by the voyager against a background of an immobile countryside paralyzed by sterility and death. In addition to images of whirlwinds and funnels, the traveler is met with stares from inanimate observers; the openings in walls appear as eyes or eyelids, actually false openings since they only reflect the traveler's face. Time recorded by such mirrors stands still. The intense movement of the spectral figures shown against the immobile countryside creates a tension which breaks as the speed of the whirlwind increases. The setting becomes more and more transparent; the eyelid opens, and the narrator awakens.

However, dream in Reverdy's poetry can also bear a more positive connotation, that is, a means of escape from death. The transition from the conscious to the subconscious occurs as the eyes of a dying man close. The light is then transposed upon the wall, which becomes a screen where the dream will appear. The linguistic figure en face de is frequently linked with this theme since the viewer is often seated opposite the wall or screen. Recalling the collapsed setting which closes in upon the crippled ship, images of extension transport the cadaver's dream into the infinite, the transition from death to life finally realized.

In other interior settings the dream is linked to a reconstruction of the past, in short, to memory. As the threshold is crossed from the present to the past, the confrontation between these periods is emphasized by the reappearance of the linguistic figure en face de. Although

past moments can be resurrected from chambers within the mind where they have been stored, their reconstruction is somewhat ephemeral. No sooner do they appear than they become transparent shadows which, like the specters in the nightmare, disappear. In some poems uncontrolled memories spin around in the mind of the person dreaming and when partially reconstructed, are effaced by the flowing waters of time. The failure to reorganize past events is seen as psychological devastation from the point of view of the narrator who has in vain attempted to end his mental instability. In other poems an old photograph may lead the narrator back through time. However, the frame of the picture, acting like a wall, limits movement. Although the narrator recalls incoherently related portions of events, he can not associate them in logical order. It is as if their superimposed movements and gestures never occurred; they are in effect suspended in time. The narrator is faced with a completely alien past. Since the past is impossible to resurrect, the dream ends, sometimes tranquilly, sometimes violently, with the pulverization of the transparent state. A lamp, placed on a table from a room of the past, is frequently a symbol representing both the re-creation of past events and their subsequent destruction. Its light guides the voyager through the maze of incoherent memories, and then begins to flicker and quiver, before it is finally extinguished. Even the table upon which the lamp is positioned totters; the entire room shakes and trembles. As the setting dissolves under the force of spiraling winds, the linguistic figure

autour de emphasizes the funneling motion. The privacy of the subconscious is now violated.

From poem to poem, the major Reverdyian themes are bound one to the other. Indeed this close interrelation is somewhat ironic, for in poems where there is no interaction between people and events, images used in the development of one particular theme introduce a succession of others. Reverdy, disillusioned by the lack of unity and interaction in human relationships, re-creates a plane of existence drawn from both reality and illusion. The narrated journeys of the traveler resemble the objective everyday world in terms of its solitude and violence, yet seem unreal in a continuous emphasis upon thematic convergence. For Reverdy, human existence is a dissolving world of meaninglessness whose only constants are contradiction and turmoil, stylistically intertwined with rupture and disintegration.

APPENDIX

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