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A STUDY OF LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR

BY

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
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Abstract

A Study of Les Chants de Maldoror

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With criticism of Les Chants de Maldoror proliferating over a one hundred seven year span after his death, the study examines a select number of critics: Bachelard, Pleyne, Sollers, Soulier, and Blanchot, evaluates them, rejecting some of their findings and acknowledging others, but considers Blanchot's viewpoint the most significant interpretation, because of his belief that the work is a cathartic literary exercise, which enabled Lautréamont to exorcise his demons. The viewpoint of the study is that although a severely disturbed young man, Lautréamont had the strong ego, identifiable as genius, permitting him to create a coherent literary masterpiece. On the basis of this premise, the study shows through an analysis of the form, content, structure, as well as the ironic tone and the didactic aspects of the work, how the obsessional psychological themes are given expression in the work. The study also concerns itself with the literary and stylistic aspects of Les Chants de Maldoror such as narrative technique, epic-incantatory lyricism, metaphor, and the debunking of genre and rhetorical figures.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter I: An overall examination of Lautréamont criticism	1
A. Recent criticism of Gaston Bachelard, Marcelin Pleynet, Philippe Sollers, Jean-Pierre Soulhier and Maurice Blanchot	5
B. Hypothesis and presentation of psychocritical viewpoint	53
Chapter II: A discussion of the formal aspects of <u>Les Chants</u>	61
Chapter III: A discussion of the content of <u>Les Chants</u> as it relates to the formal aspects	75
Chapter IV: An analysis of Chant VI	100
Chapter V: A discussion of the rhetoric in <u>Les Chants</u>	110
Chapter VI: Conclusion	138
Bibliography	145

CHAPTER I
AN EXAMINATION OF THE LAUTRÉAMONT CRITICISM

In this dissertation, our aim is not to examine the Lautréamont criticism in its totality. A task of this nature has been competently done by Franz de Haes in his book, Images de Lautréamont published in 1970 in Belgium, as well as the study of Michel Philip entitled Lectures de Lautréamont. The centennial of the publication of Les Chants de Maldoror and Les Poésies has come and passed and criticism and commentary of them have proliferated throughout a one hundred year span.

It is our intention to present some of the more recent critical analyses by specific critics, i.e. Gaston Bachelard, Marcelin Pleynet, Philippe Sollers, Jean-Pierre Soulier and Maurice Blanchot. We have chosen these critics because we feel that they have made a valuable contribution to our understanding and interpretation of Les Chants de Maldoror. Bachelard represents the first of the modern critics to examine Les Chants de Maldoror by using the text alone as the message which must be deciphered, describing the dynamism and the aggression of the work. Pleynet and Sollers both fall

into a category of criticism centered around the journal Tel Quel which regards the text as an object which exists in itself and may not be a referent to reality beyond it. The study by Jean-Pierre Soulier deals with the conviction that Lautréamont was a schizophrenic and systematically attempts to prove this by going through Les Chants and Les Poésies. He however concedes that Lautréamont was a great visionary poet and artist. The last critic, Maurice Blanchot, is, we believe, the most sensitive and cogent analyst of Les Chants. His interpretation of them tends to incorporate all the elements and inconsistencies into a coherent whole. His study Lautréamont et Sade published in 1949, is the most brilliant of all these critiques, primarily for his insight that Les Chants de Maldoror is a descent into hell by an ego fascinated by the horror of the depths, and finally through constant lucidity, it vanquishes and brings into daylight its very own obsessions by dint of having confronted them.

Before entering into the discussion of the above mentioned critics, we would like first to mention some of Lautréamont's earliest critics and admirers as well as note the idolatry that was tendered to him almost half a century after a period of total forgetfulness, by the Surrealists under the aegis of André Breton.

While the early critics of Lautréamont were both enthralled and shocked by Les Chants de Maldoror, it was Léon Pierre-Quint, in his book Le Comte de Lautréamont et Dieu, 1929, who was the first one to point out the strange struggle that leads Maldoror to fight sleep and his obsession with lucidity which is its corollary. His study is not really a viable interpretation, remaining a paraphrase rather than an exegesis. While abstracting the fundamental themes and their development, i.e. sadism, the marvelous, humor and madness, he shows how sadism leads to revolt and then to a search for the absolute which in turn becomes a quest, that of all adolescents for an innocent purity. He also comments on the humor of the work, pointing out that the marvelous leads to metamorphoses which in turn merge into the magical events of the serialized novel. He notes the rupture between Canto V and Canto VI and further describes the irony of the work, particularly in Canto VI. Lautréamont's humor according to Pierre-Quint is a mixture of serious intent and buffoonery. It manifests itself in "a scientific terminology applied in a derisive fashion and by sumptuous images and more profoundly by the general tone of the sentences."

Among the earlier critics, those of the 19th century, we wish to mention Remy de Gourmont, who wrote

a brief essay in 1891 in le Mercure de France: the article was entitled "La littérature Maldoror." In this article he detected the technique of plagiarism in Les Chants, which was later brought out by M. Viroux in his study Lautréamont et le Docteur Chenu, but also envisaged the larger problems that have occupied all the critics of Isidore Ducasse: madness, irony, the sources and the value of the work and the opposition between Les Chants and les Poésies.

In the twentieth century, the Surrealists not only discovered Lautréamont but they adopted him as a divinity. They refused to insert him in the main stream of literature and would not put his work into any historical perspective. His work had to remain untouched by any systematic elaboration of the reasons on which the Surrealists based their admiration. Most of the surrealist texts professed great empathy with Lautréamont and expressed high lyrical praise of his oeuvre. With the discovery of Les Poésies, the Surrealists became even more enthusiastic about Lautréamont: they could point to Les Poésies as a rejection of all literature. Lautréamont was not only viewed as a destroyer of old values, but as the affirmer of a new order: humor, the unconscious and the associations of new images were to be henceforth the new resources of the artist. It was

Breton who drew attention to the will-to-power present in the Lautréamont work. For him Ducasse's was a literary work that freed itself from all literary conventions and constituted an active refusal to participate in any of the taboos that inveigh against literature. Breton saw some evidence of "automatic writing" in Lautréamont's work. Humor became the synthesis between the romantic dilemma expressed in the Hegelian dialectic of the accidental nature of the subjective world and the accidental nature of the objective world. In The Second Surrealist Manifesto of 1930, in which Breton even found Rimbaud and Baudelaire suspect, a still more idolatrous view of Lautréamont was expressed. Only Lautréamont came off unscathed as a pure "deity." In 1925 Le Disque Vert dedicated an entire issue to Lautréamont. Eluard and Breton condemned the enterprise, but some of the Surrealists contributed articles. Some of those early critics such as Jean Hytier, Jean Cassou and Albert Thibaudet were less than laudatory and were repudiated by André Breton in La Révolution Surréaliste of March first 1926.

Having given some preliminary background to the Lautréamont criticism, we now examine the important study entitled Lautréamont by Gaston Bachelard, originally published in 1939 and then republished in 1956. In describing the Cantos in their totality, he states that

they are "une fable humaine en revivant les impulsions brutales si fortes dans le coeur des hommes." As he sees it, the first function of the imagination is the need to animalize. He believes that Lautréamont has penetrated into the arcana of the biological dream, a true "primitive."

Taking up the notion of the primitive in poetry, he states that it alone is capable of creating its own language. A psychology and poetry of the soul in the process of forming a newly flowering language must of necessity reject already defined symbols and imagery in order to return to the vital impulses of primitive poetics. What he abjures is the ready-made symbolism and the universal Freudian symbolism because these are examples of mutilated images of symbolizing power in nature. Metaphors are related to metamorphosis in the following way: metamorphosis is already an adaptation to an imaged milieu. What Lautréamont has done is to give substance and density to animal events by means of alliterative violence and brutality. He represents a dangerous and strongly neurotic complex. This study also identifies the complex as one which oscillates between marine and aerial life. Bachelard points out that in the primitive thinking of the child, there is a mechanical

correspondence between swimming and flying, and between the bird and the fish.

Defining "Lautréamontism" as an aggressive force related to animalistic function of biting and eating, he describes this force as having "animal density." He states that in the Cantos "l'animalité est saisie par le dedans, dans son geste atroce, irrécifiable, issue d'une volonté pure." Bachelard identifies the entire animal world in Les Chants de Maldoror as a Lautréamont bestiary, cataloguing it in the following way: domestic animals such as the dog and the horse do not partake of the dynamic complex, while the traditionally cruel animals such as the tiger and the wolf play no important role here. According to Bachelard, it is rather animal cruelty pluralized in its many scattered functions that are evoked in the Cantos. The reptile is also mentioned as lacking in aggression because its venom does not act on its victim immediately.

Bachelard identifies the different organs of aggression: the claw, the paw, the tooth, the horn, and the sucker. In focusing his attention on the active aggression in the Cantos and eliminating the harmless animals, he narrows the discussion down to two organs: the claw and the sucker. As he sees it these two symbols of Ducassian aggression permeate the work. For him the

desire to attack is dramatic and uncertain and merges pleasure with pain. The desire to claw, to lacerate, to seize, to press between the fingers, to use the nails to tear is fundamental to the sweep of Ducassian aggression. Bachelard says that if this dynamic force is understood, animal fabulation and the mythology of metamorphosis will take on its true meaning. Bachelard also notes that there is a high correlation between the types of mental disturbances and the bestiaries of antiquity and the middle ages. Human behavior is an attempt to liberate itself from instinct and therefore represents a time of inhibition, whereas the animal per se is a mad being representing a mono-valence where the instinct is concerned. For him metamorphosis in Les Chants de Maldoror is different from the metamorphosis in Kafka's tale. In the latter metamorphosis leads to lethargy and a slowing down of all life sustaining functions, while the metamorphosis in Lautréamont's work leads to acts of aggressive force.

By using the eagle and the vulture, Lautréamont emphasizes the claws and the beak: consequently aggression is not related to hunger but to tearing. The aggression thus described leads to certain fantasies and on a primitive level these desires are for specific actions.

The theme of the sucker is exemplified in the animals like the spider, the leech, the tarantula and the "vampire," the winged bat and the octopus. There is a whole range of sucking or vampirizing from the active role to the passive one of being vampirized and with this theme something viscous is introduced into Lautréamont's work.

Having identified the movement and the essential preoccupation in the text, the aggression and the two branches of Ducasse's phylogenesis: the claw and the sucker, Bachelard tries to delineate the more familiar psychological problems that animate Lautréamont. From reading the text alone, he makes the following observations: All human struggles are waged against an unequal foe; there is a "polarity" of vengeance. From these statements, he makes a connection to the situation of the student in a lycée of being ranked in to classes: higher to the lower classes, but subject to the commands of and inferior to the teacher, and exposed to the class of rhetoric where suspicion is brought to bear on the mother-tongue.

He also notes the complex of the scalp, which he considers to be a metaphor for castration. The Ducassian violence is directed against a child in a well guarded bourgeois family and also against God. The crime against

the child takes on a second duration: there is both menace and actual crime. The attack against the child is a pretext from passing from physical cruelty to moral sadism. The child returns good for the evil that is perpetrated against it. The adolescent will begin his revolt against the criticisms of the master by mockery and irony. He further links the challenge to God to a revolt in life and by extension to a revolt in language.

What Bachelard has done in his study is to show the relationship between personal revolt and sociological and cultural revolt, in which the explosive rebellion of Lautréamont takes on all the cultural values as well as the mother tongue as the arena for disobeying parental authority, giving further proof of his autonomy. Lautréamont's revolt attains the status of blasphemy. There is a tremendous inflation accomplished in the literary expression. It is mainly a cultural drama that is enacted. A true rebellion would have been acted out in real life: this however is a literary revolt.

Bachelard believes that the critics do not understand madness. For indeed, he agrees that the "unconscious" can become "written madness," but when an unconscious complex mounts to the center of language, it finds some possibility of exorcism. This process, Bachelard

calls "sublimation," a term which he believes to be much abused by psychoanalysts. He further explains that in the course of a literary work, sublimation takes on a specific meaning. It becomes a "veritable objective crystallization." This crystallization was never so clear as in the case of Lautréamont and he supports this statement with two proofs: 1) the work's acoustical coherence, for without meter or rhyme, a total reality was created having its own sonority, making it a work of "true" realization. 2) Once written, Lautréamont was able to detach himself from the work and become a stranger to it. As to Lautréamont's complex, the sixth Canto eliminates all animal fabulation and shows that Lautréamont had dominated his fantasies. Furthermore his life indicates none of the behavior of a mad person. He also quotes the alienist Gil Robin when he states that were he (Lautréamont) a case of madness, his work would be non-communicable to normal thought. Bachelard concludes his remarks on Lautréamont's supposed madness by stating:

Nous ne saurions trop souligner cette thèse, car nous croyons que l'oeuvre de Lautréamont est une oeuvre très cohérente qui doit porter la cohésion dans les activités oniriques et poétiques durant de nombreuses générations.¹

¹Bachelard, Gaston, Lautréamont, pp. 87-88.

According to Bachelard, Lautréamont was a precursor of depth psychology (the psychology of the unconscious) and postural psychology (that of Paul Schilder which states that each human being is a psycho-biological unity having a schema of his or her own body).

Lautréamont appealed to the obscure forces of the unconscious life which surge up in him similar to the way the animals of his bestiary assault his consciousness and ours. Bachelard also quotes Jean Vinchon who in La Folie d'Isidore Ducasse states that Lautréamont has pushed his explorations of the unconscious further than anyone before him.

The last part of Bachelard's study deals with the particular form which Lautréamont's complex assumes. He remarks that H.G. Wells' book The Island of Dr. Moreau is also a sublimation of a complex similar to Lautréamont's, however it is scientific, rationalized and de-poeticized. By way of comparison he also cites Leconte de Lisle's poetry as lacking in phylogenetic power. His poetry is made up of schemas of designs, panoramas of animals, seen visually from the outside. There is no psychological dynamism. The story of Wells and the poetry of Leconte de Lisle find their origin in unconscious conflict, but that is not enough to produce a great work. He goes on to elaborate his conception of primitive poetry:

La poésie se révèle alors comme un syncrétisme psychique naturel. Ce syncrétisme se reproduit dans certaines expériences d'endophasie et d'écriture automatique. La poésie primitive est toujours une expérience psychologique profonde.¹

In his conclusion he finds the contribution of Roger Caillois and André Petitjean helpful in formulating his idea that basic aggression, characterized by an "appetite for forms" joined to "an appetite for matter" is located at the root of all poetry and all thinking. "Lautréamontism takes poetizing forces and moves them about and dislodges them from the type of poetry that destroy itself in the task of description." For Bachelard, it is a force of the imagination which frees itself from the fossilized images that bear the mantle of repression. He concludes:

De toute manière, un lecteur des Chants de Maldoror qui aura vécu une fois sous la forme nerveuse, la poésie d'aggression n'oubliera jamais sa vertu tonifiante. Lautréamont place la poésie dans les centres nerveux. Il projette sans intermédiaire, la poésie. Il se sert du présent des mots. A ce simple point de vue linguistique, il était déjà en avance sur les poètes de son temps qui ont pour la plupart vécu une histoire de la langue, parlé une phonétique classique et qui nous redit, comme Leconte de Lisle, un echo souvent impuissant, toujours invraisemblable, des voix héroïques du passé.²

¹ Ibid., p. 141.

² Ibid., p. 156.

If we examine this study by Bachelard, we are impressed by the thoroughly perceptive manner in which he analyzes Ducassian aggression and animalism in the Cantos. He is also very keen in assessing the fact that Lautréamont is dealing with his unconscious and is delving into the deepest recesses of his psyche in working through his preoccupations. That his impulses take on animal forms and imagery is the peculiar nature of his complex. Where Bachelard's analysis seems weak is in the area of trying to extrapolate biographical data from the text. In our view this is not a psychologically valid method for developing this type of information. We know from the paucity of material on Lautréamont's life, that we have no way of corroborating the hypothesis, that the whole drama of his life began in the rhetoric class in the lycée, and thus these so-called biographical details remain largely in the area of pure speculation. As a critic of a psychoanalytic persuasion, it is surprising to us, that he would try to arrive at realistic or objective events, when he knows that reality is not the important factor as the determinant of neurosis. It is rather the phantasy life, or the psychological truth as expressed in the literary fiction that becomes the "reality."

In addition, Bachelard's interpretation of the term "sublimation" is inaccurate. He considers that Les Chants de Maldoror is a sublimation of Lautréamont's unconscious. However sublimation in Freudian theory is the channeling and alteration of instinctual drives, such as the sexual and the aggressive ones, into socially acceptable activities and modes. The creation of an artistic work would be an example of it. Maurice Blanchot's criticism of Bachelard's study seems justified to us. Blanchot states that by emphasizing the aggressive character of the work Bachelard negates the passive, somnolent and cataleptic aspect with its accompanying vampirism. The viscosity and the attraction to marine life are also neglected in Bachelard's study.

It will be seen later, that Bachelard's view that metamorphosis leads to greater and greater aggression can be controverted with the notion that metamorphosis leads to immobility and lethargy similar to Gregor Samsa's wind-down of basic processes in Kafka's tale. We must also mention our disagreement with Bachelard in his statement that the dog and the horse do not partake of the cruel dynamism of Le Comte de Lautréamont. We take issue with it because the mad dogs of Canto I which go barking through the night attacking man and beast are not lacking in cruelty nor the bulldog of

Canto III which violates the young girl and eviscerates her.

In his conclusion, the study by Bachelard indicates his recognition of the artistic value of Les Chants de Maldoror, stating that it originates in the "animus" and in the vital processes of the poet. He means by that that Lautréamont uses himself and those parts of himself that derive from the instinctual life, mastering them and himself in order to create a work of kinetic intensity. His belief that the work is an example of primitive poetry, which has found its own special forms and language is a viewpoint with which we are in agreement.

Before examining the study by Marcel in Pleynet entitled Lautréamont par lui-même, we would like to mention the fact that both Pleynet and Philippe Sollers belong to the Tel-Quel school of criticism. This new type of criticism can be defined negatively, by its indifference to the origins or sources of works, or the biographies of authors, breaking with the traditional university criticism. In common they share the view that the literary text is an object of autonomous knowledge. They view poetic texts as having multi-dimensional meanings and consequently the text has no referent to any specific reality beyond itself. Their criticism as

a result becomes almost a formal or structural analysis of the text itself. Lautréamont's works, both Les Chants de Maldoror and Les Poésies, are considered by them to be the text par excellence for this type of formal or structural analysis.

For Pleyne, the Cantos are a written text that blurs the frontier between the writer and the reader. For him the use of the pseudonyms are fictions whose purpose is to function as intermediaries between the writer and the reader and between Ducasse, Lautréamont and Maldoror, thus permitting the reader to discover the reading across the imaginary names. Pleyne believes that no one interpretation of Les Chants de Maldoror is viable, primarily because the text exists entirely in terms of its own literality or textuality. Much of the support for this hypothesis derives from his reading of Canto I, and all meaning, if any resides here. By absorbing reality into fiction, the rapport that the author maintains with his language, culture, and history, enables Lautréamont to affront or break the frontier of knowledge, or to make the obscure foundation of society his personal problem, i.e. suggesting that the taboo which is at the very origin of language and the emergence of the individual into a culture is the taboo against incest, he states that all fiction contains the

marginal understatement of this taboo or "sous-scription." The limits only exist as relationships which are maintained against this taboo. In the first stanza of Canto I, "la face maternelle" posits the taboo and its limits. The pivot or the principle of the Cantos is based on a bestiary or the transformation of men into beasts. The first Canto encompasses all those things which tend to debase the dignity of man. Dreams and the dream-like aspect of Lautréamont's work cannot be repudiated. The underlying mythology that Lautréamont is after cannot be found in classical rhetoric. As a result Pleyner reduces the Cantos to a body having three parts: myth-history-the unconscious or myth-rhetoric-unconscious.

The Cantos are the grasping of awareness of the origins of language. The entire undertaking of Lautréamont is aimed at breaking down the game of language (by playing with it and by bringing suspicion on the mother-tongue). This enterprise requires of Lautréamont a state of awareness, experiencing the "the ache of dawn" or "le mal d'aurore."

Pleyner says that Lautréamont uses the traditional figures of rhetoric, but the unconscious also uses these literary devices. He quotes Jacques Lacan in this connection: "l'inconscient est structuré comme un langage." Lautréamont therefore uses himself and his own perversities in his undertaking. All questions like:

the use of pseudonyms, the absence of biography, depsychologizing psychological structures, plagiarism, cultural sources are all resolved in the use Lautréamont makes of rhetoric. He views the textual material therefore not in terms of psychological fixation but in terms of the reversal of rhetorical processes. Everything for him hinges on this. He demonstrates how the topos of the conclusion is reversed, so that instead of a beginning and a conclusion, there is a beginning, return and repetition. He also notes Lautréamont's use of the topos of affected modesty when he recommends to the reader that he abandon the text rather than continue reading it.

By reversing rhetorical procedures, and by this generalized negation, there is implied the existence of the opposing related content. For Pleyne, all reversal constitutes the emergence in the conscious mind of formally repressed material (la suppression du refoulement). By examining the theme of the "inverted world," Pleyne discusses the association of incompatible things in Lautréamont. Accordingly, Lautréamont's undertaking is to bring about reversals not at the simple level of phenomena, but reversals of linguistic structures. In this perspective the "beau comme" displace reversals on normative fundamental concepts of the beautiful. The entire esthetic emotion is also under

suspicion here. With his "beau comme" Lautréamont also "attacks the very device of reversal which by rights he should have spared: by radicalizing it, he raises all the ambiguities that negation, as constitutive of denied content is called into being to cover over." Pleynet also believes that using this topos of reversal is an expression of negation which allows Lautréamont to have a repugnance in identifying himself with this content and thus the repugnance is what is aimed at.

In his conclusion, Pleynet does not consider Les Chants de Maldoror as some critics have done as a delirious production from a solitary literary game, but rather a deliberate clairvoyant enterprise, responding to the preoccupation of history and the thought of his contemporaries. Another aspect of the work that Pleynet finds has not been studied is an examination of the differences that exist from stanza to stanza, from page to page, from line to line which enable the reader to pass from utter reality to surreality. This passage from realism to surrealism, this displacement of logical differences is frequently used and seems on another level to double the effect of "beau comme."

Pleynet's analysis of Les Chants de Maldoror, while pointing out some very valid and perceptive observations on the uses Lautréamont makes of rhetoric, rejects

all attempts to explain the work in psychological terms. Using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic contribution to linguistics, that the unconscious utilizes language and is structured like a language, he forgets that the unconscious is located in a particular individual having a unique psycho-sexual history. The psychological basis of the work cannot be negated or eliminated merely because of the blurring of the distinctions between the writer and the reader and the use of pseudonyms. All this instability of the writer or lack of rapport with his text can also be explained in psychological terms. When Pleynet states that the Cantos seem to affront the taboo of incest, he is implying that Ducasse is dealing with this problem which governs all civilized society and distinguishes it from the instinctual-animal behavior. If the emergence of the self into society is based on the triad of the self, the mother and the name of the father (the law) which forbids incest, is at the basis of all culture, then by his own admission, the Cantos do not deal with the taboo at all. Yet the taboo is suggested in Canto I and appears later in the episode with the hanged man, being whipped by his wife and mother. We would tend to give this concern psychological weight rather than formal or structural meaning as Pleynet does. If Lautréamont's use of rhetoric is only an attempt to

bring about reversals in linguistic structures and has no relationship to simple phenomena, then why are all the "fictions" brought into the Cantos and what determines the choice of certain "fictions" and not others?

In conclusion, we cannot accept his notion of the topos of affected modesty, for while that may be true of the first stanza of the first Canto, the remainder of the other stanzas in the entire work show Lautréamont seducing his reader into enjoying and liking his kind of literature. In fact there is more than the usual trying to get the reader's approval: Lautréamont wants his reader's support and complicity.

According to Philippe Sollers in his study La Science de Lautréamont, Les Chants de Maldoror has become a projective test for all the critics who have grappled with it. He writes:

Texte inabordable donc, c'est à dire destiné à jouer le rôle h'hiéroglyphe, de révélateur et plus anecdotiquement de test projectif- ce à quoi d'ailleurs, il n'a pas manqué.¹

He tends to regard Maurice Blanchot as the one critic who considers that the words of the text mean something other than what they appear to mean. Believing that Blanchot's interpretation is caught in a pseudo-contradiction between

¹P. Sollers, Logiques, p. 251.

Les Chants de Maldoror and Les Poésies, he views the Blanchot interpretation as an "idealist" scheme, where image, theme and motive lead to a specific meaning, what Sollers calls "une suprême signification totale." Such an "essentialist" reading of the text is predicated on the following criteria: a) an author; b) a non-contradictory text; c) the effect of truth. Sollers, on the other hand, envisages the text in the same way that Jacques Derrida views it as:

Science de la possibilité, science de l'arbitraire su signe, science de la trace immotivée, science de l'écriture avant et dans la parole, qui doit nous amener à l'exploration d'un espace non-linéaire, multiple et dissimulé.¹

Sollers rejects an idealist, essentialist reading of Lautréamont. For him Les Chants de Maldoror is not a poetic experience. He repudiates a Freudian view of literature and quotes some of the early and rather naive formulations of Freud. He subscribes to the viewpoint that in Les Chants de Maldoror, there is both an annihilation of subject (author) and subject matter. Attempting to show how all of Ducasse's text hinges on a process of reversal of traditional rhetorical devices and by extension all linearity, story-line, plot, representation and absolute meaning, he says that the very material of the

¹Ibid., p. 252.

text is subject to a process by which realistic and fantastic recitals, myths and articles from a naturalist's notebook are destroyed, annulled and negated. In the text, God is equated with order, sense, meaning and logic, but Sollers notes that this hierarchical order of logical, meaningful events must not transgress in the sexual sphere (the episode of God in the bordello).

The pseudonyms employed by Ducasse, he says are no accident, and they are also a part of his demystification process and a denial of an authorship (sujet de l'énoncé). He agrees with Pleyne, when the latter states that Ducasse is the son of his works, rather than the other way around. All paternity is denied. He disengages the text from reality when he writes his description of Les Chants de Maldoror:

De ce text jugé pathologique ou intelligible (nous commençons à comprendre pourquoi) nous dirons donc qu'il est l'englobement d'un espace par un autre espace, son tissu de retournement, substituant à une pensée binaire mesurable, une pensée duelle qui ne peut s'éprouver qu'en termes de parcours d'étagement, de discontinuité, de mutation.¹

Sollers, in his analysis, speaks of the text as a transfinite one which accepts recognition in the following noun-words: the ocean, mathematics, the whirlwind. The transfinite text of which Les Chants de Maldoror is

¹ Sollers, Logiques, p. 255.

a perfect example is equated with "incarnate metaphor-icity." It transgresses or is criminal to the extent that it is a specific deviation from hierarchization (the meaningful linguistic code). Accordingly the body undergoes animalization, mineralization, vegetalization, thus liberating it and the text from the "sign" and from reason. By analogy, the text went in search of a man in his phenomenological alienation only to resuscitate him in the text in his varying metamorphoses. Consequently the reader must not give too much credence (to the representation) to what is said in the text. Language speaks about itself and abandons all fictions! The device or method of the text is "dialectical in nature, responding to instinct not as a civilized voice, is plural but uniform and regular." He explains the beginning of Canto IV stanza 1: "C'est un homme ou un pierre ou un arbre qui va commencer le quatrième chant" as well as the instability that occurs throughout in the changing of pronouns from "je" to "il" and in the non-identity of the writer in the following paragraph:

Le text infini de même qu'il désarticule et brise le système clos du langage, traverse et pense le corps dans l'ensemble ou la pensée ne peut pas se penser, dans un milieu contradictoire ou les points de vues multiples doivent prendre à la fois toutes les postures grammaticales et toutes les conditions naturelles: le langage devient cet état de commencement, s'énonçant de

partout, dont les effets insonores vont immédiatement se répercuter sur la charnière et le pivot de la langue; la comparaison (les guêpes du temple Denderah).¹

In the most detailed way, Sollers notes that because of the blurring of writer, reader, Maldoror, Lautréamont, Ducasse, there is a negation or sacrifice of all blood relationships. The multi-dimensional nature of the "je" of the writer and the "contre-je" of the reader, produces a contradiction or dialectic. Because of the constantly changing pronouns a permutation occurs. The metamorphoses of Canto V are like the turning mechanisms or pivots of the scenes of metamorphosis in the writing. This permutational science implies breaks, intermittences and permanent non-sleeping. He describes it further:

La dualité déclenchée par l'écriture et interpellée en elle se manifeste par une série d'anamnèses, de métamorphoses où il devient de plus en plus évident que tout sujet a depuis longtemps disparu, dissous dans le mouvement scriptural.²

This scriptural text in rejecting conventional discourse also rejects traditional resemblances that are perceived by the multitude, and opts for a recognition of implacable differences which may have underlying resemblances. He identifies "le travail scriptural" as

¹P. Sollers, Logiques, p. 269.

²Ibid., p. 272.

le réveil incessant, la dislocation du discours hiérchisant, l'attention capable de tout mettre périodiquement en rapport. "Beau comme" est précisément le travail scriptural.¹

When he turns to the sexual effect of Lautréamont's operation, he indicates that whereas in representative writing, the body is related to thought in language, in the infinite text, sexuality can only be recorded in a negative mode. Thus all statements that Lautréamont makes about sexuality are non-representational denunciations. For this reason homosexuality is both general throughout the work and exists in the unconscious of the heterosexual man (pseudo-difference). Sollers says that Lautréamont, in idealizing homosexuality is showing his opposition to the obsession with the phallus that our whole society is based on, i.e. the whole platonic, Christian, anti-scriptural, scientific truth, the father and the Creator. Homosexuality rather than a transgression of the "stupid law" is the complementary realization of what the law does not cease to desire.

In discussing Canto VI, Sollers considers the episode of "les trois Marguerites et le fou couronné" as an example of the total absence of meaning. It is the killing off of narrative and metaphors. He views

¹Ibid., p. 277.

this last Canto as "a dissection of writing interested in developing its thought and not in relating a narrative." In developing his thought, he constructs a "horror tale" mechanically and thereby produces that stupefaction or hypnosis which glazes over the logical sense reading and which disturbs absolute verities. Lexical substitutions may be made at any point throughout the Canto and consequently the text engenders a "glacial silence," thus destroying any possibility of accumulated significance. He concludes that the parabolic line created by Mervyn's body hitting the dome of the Pantheon can be analogized to the movement of the text which "fractures the black room of language and is stopped and by impulsive force attaches it to the spherical convex exterior of the depository of the 'immortals'."

Some of the objections that we have raised to Pleyne's criticism of Lautréamont also apply to Sollers'. We believe that Sollers is more systematic and more detailed in his attempt to explain all aspects of Lautréamont's work. He does use both Les Poésies and Les Chants de Maldoror in his structural analysis. His rejection of both subject and subject-matter in Les Chants de Maldoror does not bear up under closer scrutiny. We can accept his hypothesis that the subject-matter per se is language itself and it is played with in the

interests of reversing traditional rhetorical figures, that linearity and narration are repudiated and that an analogy between the seeming content and the form of the work or the movement the work takes, is constantly being made. However, the absence of a subject (author) seems to us a contradiction in terms. If there is a subject who plays with rhetoric, then he must exist in psychological terms even though a basic unified identity is denied. That the author used pseudonyms, that he blurred the distinction between writer and reader, that he hardly exists as a subject for biographical study, means that he had severe psychological problems, which led him to mask, to deny, to play fictionally with his own identity. His sense of self may have been severely impaired, and resuscitating himself through the pseudonyms in his work, may have enabled him to live as long as he did. Whatever fragmentation of his ego existed, is expressed in both the instability of these fictions, but also in the alternation and intermittences to which the stanzas are subjected. Our approach in this study will be to explain these apparent contradictions in psychological terms. We shall be analyzing the Cantos not for latent content as opposed to manifest content as some of the earlier Freudian literary studies tended to do, but we wish to develop an awareness of the unconscious personal myth and

show how the artistic transformation derives from this unconscious material.

Another aspect of Sollers' study that we believe to be inconsistent, is the fact that he accepts as referential, Lautréamont's statement that he is in constant vigil and the art he is practicing, "le texte scriptural" requires this vigil. Now, if what is said in the text cannot be considered as having sense or meaning, why does Sollers give credence to some statements and not to others? The selection of some of the data and not all of it seems to work against the theory as above.

There is another respect in which we do not agree with Sollers, that is, although he gives great weight to the unconscious and to the dream-like aspects of the Cantos, he seems to believe that the unconscious is a collective repository of all humankind, rather than an individual unconscious located and residing in each individual. Within this context it is natural for him to negate all psychological interpretation.

Sollers' statement that sexuality in Lautréamont can only be recorded in the negative mode, and that homosexuality is the antithesis of the phallic-worshipping culture of our society does not hold up to intellectual scrutiny. Homosexuality in males is also a form of

phallic worship and does not represent a denial of the importance of the phallus. In fact because homosexuality in Lautréamont's work is always directed toward males, it may represent a denial of difference and therefore a fear of the vulva, caused by castration anxiety.

Jean-Pierre Soulier's study, Lautréamont, Génie ou Maladie Mentale takes the hypothesis that Lautréamont was suffering from a chronic evolutionary psychosis accompanied by progressive dissociation. This dissociation becomes accentuated in Canto VI and is speeded up in Les Poésies. He is convinced that based on the data derived from Isidore Ducasse's work and the little we know of his life, that he shows all the signs of a typical schizophrenia.

Dr. Soulier bases his diagnosis on what he enumerates as: a) discordances relating to affect or feelings which bear on the humor, moral sense and the aggressiveness which contains much ambivalence; b) intellectual discordances, characterized by logical thought that is strongly structured, and a humor that is morbid in its rationality and a tendency to create neologisms; c) motor disturbances (an important symptom of catatonia); d) the phantasy world of Ducasse, i.e., feelings of hatred, pride and guilt merge into a fantasmagoria and fantastic mythology. Dr. Soulier then proceeds in a more

detailed way to develop these large categories of his analysis. Under the rubric of disorders relating to affect, he notes that in Les Chants de Maldoror, there is a detachment on the part of Ducasse during the cruel scenes and a suspension of moral judgment which permits the instinctual life to express itself. He also makes the observation that there is an absence of neurotic conflict. There are no internal debates, no ambivalence, but rather there is a "doubling" as in Canto II, in the combat between the eagle and the dragon, Maldoror is both spectator and actor. Taking Bachelard's description of "poésie des muscles et du cri," he states:

Les Chants sont une arène où se livrent
des combats sans cesse renouvelés, choc sauvages
d'où vainqueurs et vaincus sortent pareillement
éprouvés. Les victoires sont d'ailleurs vaines,
car l'adversaire naît sous une autre forme.¹

For Dr. Soulier, the Cantos are a long series of cries and tortures wherein mutilation and the symbolism of blood is most evident. He points out that blood has a very emotionally charged meaning because of its symbolic associations (notions of rank and nobility, race, family and religion, mutilation, castration, as well as the mysteries of sexual life, defloration and the menstrual cycle).

¹J.P. Soulier, Lautréamont, Génie ou Maladie Mentale, p. 31.

Dr. Soulier identifies the dynamism of the Cantos as a theme that is universal to schizophrenics. He defines and describes this theme in the following way: tenacious aggression, strong kinesis, frenzy of metamorphosis, frequent repetitions, the spiral and elliptical movement and the theme of flight. The theme of flight referred to, is the episode of the child pursuing the bus, Maldoror pursued by the female personification of Conscience, the madwoman pursued by the children. He also believes that Lautréamont is psychotic because his ego is centered in an autistic world of his own. He considers, however, that Lautréamont's humor is a striking aspect of his lucidity.

In marshalling more evidence for his thesis of Lautréamont's schizophrenia, he states that the loss of notions of time and space, as exemplified by Maldoror's ubiquitousness, confirms his belief that we are dealing with a personality that is emotionally pathological. In the text there is blowing-up out of all proportion of eroticism and each animal, mineral and plant is invested with a conscious or unconscious mission.

While examining the peculiarities of Ducasse's style, he notes frequent alterations of tone: familiarity is followed by solemnity and condescension is doubled with arrogance. He also cites the use that Lautréamont

makes of unusual words, neologisms and the taste he has for the rare expression, i.e. "les annales du ciel," "mon triple dard de platine." He mentions the use of repetitive leit-motives throughout the Cantos and the obsessive use of metaphors. These stylistic devices, he relates to the schizophrenic process. He cites J.L. Armand in Antonin Artaud et son double:

Le culte du verbe chez le schizophrène est sans conteste possible lié à l'abus de la pensée métaphorique. La métaphore représente en elle-même à l'état normal une substitution verbale permettant, par le moyen d'analogie de rendre la pensée plus claire et plus poétique. Dans le cas du malade voulant traduire en langage clair une expérience ineffable et apparemment incommunicable, elle prend un relief échevelé. Ce symbolisme du langage ne représente en fin de compte que la propension du sujet à exprimer un vécu délirant, étrange, appartenant davantage au monde du rêve et de l'inconscient et par conséquent, représentant l'interprétation d'une production onirique.¹

Schizophrenic art is characterized by a luxury of detail and fragmentation. In Lautréamont's work, he notes the division into stanzas, interminable sentences, themselves hacked up with innumerable commas, giving evidence of the fragmentation observed in schizophrenics. In discussing motor disturbances, Dr. Soulier points to the fact that catatonia is a symptom that is spread throughout the Cantos. Paralysis, immobility, nightmares,

¹ Ibid., p. 56.

catelepsy and lethargy as well as the non-recognition by Maldoror of his own image in the mirror are all indices of the more extreme forms of catatonia.

This irrational world is an expression of his dream-life. He lives what he writes and therefore psychosis is equated to the dream state. The latter is characterized by a loss of contact with reality and by the richness of rhetorical figures. According to Dr. Soulier, Les Chants de Maldoror consists largely of visual representations to which the reader is invited as witness and the protagonist is sleeper, actor and spectator. As in the dream (according to Freud) and also in psychosis nothing limits the development of images. There is a loss of distinction between subject and object (between the self and the world). But Soulier emphasizes this point: Lautréamont is not a hallucinator who misinterprets his hallucination for reality. He dreams inside his brain, he fleshes out his dreams, he produces a "cinematographic parade."

In his conclusion, Dr. Soulier perceives a progressive deterioration in Lautréamont's mental disorder. The last Canto reveals this: the sentences are cut short; the style is telegraphic and the narrative is non-linear. Rather than an ascent into lucidity, it is a descent and progressive dissolution of a brilliant

intelligence. In spite of all the evidence he marshalls to prove Lautréamont's dysfunction, irrationality as well as his schizophrenic symptoms, he believes that Lautréamont belongs to that small category of seers and visionaries who use their own unconscious as an area of exploration and have created great works of art. He makes a distinction between the paranoia of the insane and the perverse imagination of writers like Lautréamont and Blake. The paranoids as well as normal people are in a state of thought which has no orientation, full of tensions but lacking the control of an emotional and intellectual drive, while the works of Lautréamont and Blake are deliberate and intelligent, producing a consciously conceived effort, which belongs to the domain of art and not insanity.

Dr. Soulier's study, while giving a great deal of documentation linking particular aspects of Lautréamont's work to schizophrenic symptoms and schizophrenic art, is a careful and systematic one. It seems, however, to be a wasted effort, one which goes all out to prove a hypothesis, which is, in the last analysis rejected, by his recognition of Lautréamont's literary power. He only gives lip service to this recognition, to his view that Lautréamont's work has great merit as art. His study would have been more interesting had he dealt with

the conscious operation and transformation of his psychosis into a coherent and structured work.

The last critic whose work we shall discuss is Maurice Blanchot. His study entitled Lautréamont et Sade treats of the two writers separately. In it Blanchot only interprets Les Chants de Maldoror without examining Les Poésies. His general remarks about the work revolve around the belief that the Cantos are achieved by a man inside a world, but who speaks of it as though he were outside of it. The work oscillates between total opacity and absolute lucidity. It is a work which contains its own commentary; however, the commentary is an important building block of the totality of the work, in its formation, transformation and modification, so that the final import and character of the work cannot be revealed. He questions the critics who seek to find literary sources in Lautréamont's work. He dismisses these by stating that Ducasse's creativity cannot thus be explained. Ducasse was an educated adolescent: "son imagination était environnée des livres." As was formerly pointed out, Blanchot rejects Bachelard's emphasis on the aggressive aspects of the Lautréamont work, while ignoring the immobility, lethargy, the underwater life and the realm of viscousness. What is more, Blanchot states that Bachelard has also ignored

"the waiting from stanza to stanza that imposes itself more and more and transforms the first five Cantos into an obsessive mincing-stepping before an issue that is always closer and always inaccessible."

Irony and satirical comments seem to be omnipresent and while certain attitudes and feelings are expressed, they are frequently contradicted. There seems to be no affirmative speech. Blanchot believes, nevertheless, that "one can, because of the constancy of motives, the obsession with a certain method, the fatal return to certain images and words, search for the meaning of the content through the form." For him, it is not the manifest content but the "meaning behind what he says with the aid of a new language, that constitutes the choice of images, the privileged piling up of words, the complicity of certain themes."

Any analysis according to Blanchot becomes an on-going autonomous motor. Once it is stopped, it becomes dislocated from the work, for it usually is a rudimentary, awkward construction from the outside. What is more important in an exegesis, he says, is the chronology or temporal unfolding of the work (the order or disorder).

Blanchot sees as the central experience of the work, the polarity between lucidity and madness. There

is an alternation between the development of fictional narrations and lucidity, where everything is discussed in a most logical way, where irony is used to correct, negate, revise and make parenthetical remarks. Although a fictional development is abandoned, it is later picked up in a logical fashion. Moreover, Lautréamont transfers to style the methods used in developing intrigue and plot in the gothic novel and popular serialized-novel. For Blanchot, it is the language per se that becomes the mysterious plot, like the marvelously combined action of the detective story. Plot twists are replaced by images, unusual murders by violences of sarcasm, where the guilty one is confused with the reader who experiences the guilt which was projected onto him by the writer. This intention bursts forth in Canto VI where similar to Gérard de Nerval, Lautréamont says in the style in which one might say a rosary, the beautiful hermetic sentences that he elucidates later on one by one, but with a bizarre lightness, which seems to allow a doubt to glide over the nature of these exercises.

Blanchot's important contribution to the Lautréamont criticism seems to center around the belief that Lautréamont makes use of the Cantos to cure himself and exorcise his demons. The polarity between lucidity and the somnolence which is constantly menacing, forces him

into supreme lucidity. It is not only the main "spring" but also the "stake" of the work. Blanchot states that this lucidity "overflows in all parts with a clarity that affirms itself, looks for itself, loses itself and then finds itself and finally denounces itself."¹

Blanchot views the Cantos as a work in which Lautréamont has used the depths of his mind to produce, but he demands of the work a deepening of these parts of his mind, and there turns out to be a reciprocity between the work and Lautréamont and Lautréamont and the work. It is essentially a "work in progress" before which he does not cease to marvel:

Est-il un autre ouvrage, qui comme celui-ci d'un côté, tout à fait à la merci du temps, inventant, ou découvrant sons sens à mesure qu'il s'écrit, étroitement complice de sa durée, demeure cependant cette masse sans commencement, ni fin, cette consistance intemporelle, cette simultanéité de mots, où semblent effacées et à jamais oubliées toutes traces d'avant et d'après?²

Contrary to Pleynet's view that the first Canto contains all the meaning and indices of the entire work, Blanchot regards Canto I as not giving any clues to the rest of the work to come. Maldoror as vampire seemed to be a device in the solid literary tradition, and the last stanza with the toad could easily be a conversation

¹M. Blanchot, Lautréamont et Sade, p. 90.

²Ibid., pp. 91-92.

between friends. But, says Blanchot, the discovery of the first edition of Les Chants de Maldoror, revealing the crossing out of the name Dazet (a co-pupil of Ducasse's at the lycée of Tarbes) and the later insertion of animals such as the octopus with the silky look, the winged-bat and the venerable louse in the subsequent edition, shows that writing the work changed Ducasse: otherwise these substitutions would not have been made.

As the work progresses, Blanchot believes, the atmosphere changes and the air becomes dense with animals. So strong is the density that the metamorphoses, rare and sketchy in the beginning, are accomplished in the full light of day exposing their depth. Since the dominating dispositions of the work are extreme aggressiveness and complete passivity in the form of somnolence, Blanchot thinks that Lautréamont wishes to bring everything out into the "open," to achieve lucidity but fearful of total disclosure, which would be too terrifying. He uses the resource of always ending the stanza and beginning all over again. If he were too logical in his development, he would not be able to surprise the obsessions and the reader at the same time.

Blanchot examines the theme of childhood in the Cantos stating that there is an idealization of the pure and innocent child with some allusion to imprisonment and

to the lycée as prison. The maturation of the girl-child is deplored, indicating that adolescence can lead to a "strange" sex. From the first two Cantos, Blanchot develops the following schema: the child is abandoned by his parents and the adolescent is mid-way between virility and femininity: the conclusion is the solitude of the hermaphrodite.

He then proceeds to show that as the material of the Cantos becomes more dream-like, the impulse to see more clearly becomes more imperative, but in so doing his descent and fascination with his own depths provokes transformations. In Canto II, Blanchot gives a kind of associational coherence and a progressive explanation of the transformations that occur from stanza to stanza. He points out that the cannibalistic God is transformed into the episode of Maldoror and the louse, the child of the omnibus incident is transformed into the adolescent girl accosting Maldoror on one of his walks; the two then become transformed into the hermaphrodite. Blanchot then sees a progress to the trinity as exemplified in the three branches of mathematics.

In viewing Canto II, Blanchot regards the excesses of Maldoror's defloration of the young girl and the violence of the bull-dog as the mirror image of God's performance in the Convent-bordello. Eroticism is seen

by him to take on an inordinate expansion, wherein a modest incident is transmogrified into a myth. In addition, he says, all metaphors used at the end of Canto II relate to animality . . . "âme royale livrée au crabe de la débauche, au poulpe de la faiblesse de caractère, au requin de l'abjection individuelle, au boa de la morale absente, au colimaçon monstrueux de l'idiotisme."

Blanchot views the search for the double, the self forever lost as an allusion to the nostalgia for a mythic identity. He elaborates further:

La hantise de son semblable, le soi à jamais perdu est une allusion à la nostalgie de l'identité mythique qu'expriment la plénitude de l'océan, le souvenir de l'enfance, l'horreur de la duplicité symbolisée par la prière, duplicité qui s'insinue hypocritement partout et devenue loi universelle, sous le nom de Dieu, des hommes, du bien et du mal par les exigences de la lucidité, par les jeux du miroir introduit jusqu'en nous même la séparation et la dissemblance.¹

Maldoror is not looking backwards for a lost paradise (everything is separated and divided by the excesses of conflicts and vicissitudes) but for a negative plenitude and an escape in life. The search for the double is not a calm appeal for similitude but an expression of the madness and fury of another existence. Thus the search for reconciliation is absurd since reconciliation is only an aspect of discord.

¹M. Blanchot, Lautréamont et Sade, p. 134.

Blanchot says that at some point in the work a decision is taken, to make of the taking over of the unconscious forces a voluntary experience, and so The Cantos become a concerted effort to see clearly into them. Exactly when this decision occurs, is not clearly delineated. He also points out that metamorphosis has two dispositions in the work: it represents a freedom from moral constraints but it is also a power in itself. The amphibious man is liberty incarnate, liberty from his memories and nostalgias as well as power to move through the waves at phenomenal speed.

Blanchot stresses the importance of the image of whirlwind in Lautréamont's work. He indicates how the emotionally charged event of the scalping of Falmer, the gigantic hair of the creator and the hair of the hanged man are related to impotence:

Le recul horrifié devant les relations sexuelles normales, mais l'ironie laisse entrevoir que ses rapports, au lieu de se dérouler sur le plan ordinaire, remontent vers le passé, conjugalement nul, cherchant à devenir une union mère et fils, et dévié, accaparé par le rêve d'une union incestueuse, union elle-même manquée, de sorte que le châtiment est celui de l'impuissance.¹

But, he says, the obsession is not the important thing but the movement linked to the obsessions. He sees this

¹Ibid., p. 144.

movement as a turning around a center (as the movement of Falmer's hair), and he states that this gyrational movement around a center is the underlying one of the Cantos. The image of the hair touches apotheosis in the description of Falmer's scalping and passes into the more elementary and also more comprehensive one of the whirlwind and continues to perpetuate itself as one of the emotional knots of a new image: the flight of the starlings. In the stanza of Falmer, the movement of the cyclone is expressed both in the form and the content of the recital and "the sentences turn along an order of knowledgeable gyration: a gyratory power inhabits the language."¹

The movement which Blanchot has identified is not pure artistic virtuosity, but an attempt to produce reason in aberration and lucidity in sleep, while the "beau comme" link the language in an irony which abandons equilibrium and "an affirmation of poetry and intelligence, enthusiasm and cold detachment, reason and putrefaction and by total sarcasm projects the obsession with evil and sickness on to the reader as in the first Canto, it is suggested, that he will become what he reads."²

¹ Ibid., p. 145.

² Ibid., pp. 145-146.

Blanchot notes that the narrative in Canto IV and V begins to take on such an animal density that the work becomes so remote from everyday representational events, that it is here that it becomes most conscious of itself. The episode of the scarab rolling the ball of excrement and the pelican-headed man (the metamorphosed creatures of the erotically linked couple of the adulterous wife) is a reversal of the episode where impotence is inflicted on the man by the licentious mother and daughter, while above the same drama of combat is enacted by two rapacious birds. Here Blanchot notes in the *Lautréamont* work the tendency toward "doubling" and the fear of a premature denouement, the moderation of the violence, not from a sense of moral outrage, but it contains a warning to the writer himself that an end will be attained.

Blanchot notices also *Lautréamont's* insistence on control: "je ne suis pas un autre." His ego must be a voluntary force which is horrified by the possible eavesdropping of the "other." The triumphal alternative of metamorphosis is preferred to the horror of loss of control. Each animal that his imagination conjures up, is under his voluntary control.

Lautréamont, according to Blanchot, makes *Ducasse's* struggle a universal battle. In the episode

with the python-God, Ducasse accuses God of being human and in the stanza to the homosexuals, Maldoror arrogates super-human, cosmic powers to himself. In the latter stanza there is a destructive transcendence of his cosmic power which is equated with eroticism. In eroticism, vertigo, anguish and furor of desire produce the excesses, capable of destroying all limits. The dream of convulsive super-power leads to destruction and sterility. This fantasy is identified by Blanchot as the metaphorical reworking of what Lautréamont experiences as going on within himself. His statement, "je me cache secrètement dans les endroits les plus inaccessibles," indicates the hidden and repressed nature of the erotic drive, which is given such disproportionate excess in the fantasy.

In Canto V, the 10-year-old child in the funeral bier seems to be an allusion to the death of childhood; however, Blanchot connects its meaning to the 10-year-old imprisonment in a nightmare. The cadaver of ten years will be identified with the past, thanks to an obstinate struggle, from which he has found an escape. The final revelation is given in the form of the giant tarantula, the terminal metamorphosis of the terrible woman, which gives birth in its spider belly to two adolescents, Reginald and Elseneur, who have been betrayed

in friendship by Maldoror and who now swear eternal loyalty to each other. It is the release of these memories and their revelation in the light of day that renders the narrative almost simple and banal after their opacity and denseness. In this revelatory episode, Lautréamont uses the conventional fiction of novelistic exploits to convey the deep-seated psychological processes he is trying to communicate. Blanchot believes that what is achieved here at the end of Canto V is a transparency that terminates in a banal narrative. The image of a tarantula whose double pouch contains the two adolescents is the reverse image of the two brothers arguing the fate of the excrement-ball (the woman who has the powers of a witch). The mythic quality of the work has transformed the two brothers, has attracted them to very center of the black sphere, has thus absorbed them, devoured them and rendered them definitely to the day. Blanchot says that we know Lautréamont has exorcised his personal demons when he writes in Canto V: "nous ne sommes plus dans la narration . . . hélas! nous sommes dans le réel." The Cantos thus become a dream-work, that enable him through a form of self-analysis to exorcise his problems by bringing them to the light of day.

Finally Blanchot gives his attention to Canto VI. By Lautréamont's own description, the first five

cantos are the frontispiece of his work. In similar fashion Blanchot regards them as the "foundation for the edifice" and Canto VI as "the edifice itself." Lautré-
mont has found his true vocation, that of novelist and he is going to write a novel of thirty pages. Blanchot characterizes Canto VI as the only one in which logical events occur without obstacle, with speed, joy, rapture and frenzy. In Canto VI the dream-like atmosphere of the rest of the work is lacking. Nightmares are no longer seen from the inside but from the outside. The vision is clear and deprived of shadow. Metamorphosis is almost eliminated and eroticism and sadism are minimal. The dream-like aspects of the work are not as prevalent, but continue in the recital of "les trois marguerites." The last image of Mervyn, rising like a comet smashing against the dome of the Pantheon, is a very contrived and overly conscious creation reaching for apotheosis. The meaning is reinforced by this highly elaborated image: the hair, the whirlwind movement of the meteor or comet and death produced on the dome of the edifice which represents the glory and the prestige of the immortals.

In his conclusion, Blanchot examines the stylistic device of irony in the Cantos and shows it to be an expression of negativity, but also one in which

metamorphosis is pursued in the "bosom" of language. The self-consciousness of the irony, transforms the words and their meaning to such an extent, that merely reading the Cantos changes the reader. When irony is finally used in the clear light of everyday Paris, as it is in Canto VI, it becomes a parody of mysterious twists in plot, surprises and caricatures of typical characters of the Anglo-saxon aristocracy. For Blanchot, this last Canto is manipulated by the novelist in full control of his medium, however burlesquing it and joking, thus creating a literary pastiche.

If we examine the Blanchot essay in the light of what the preceding critics have said, we are convinced that his analysis of Les Chants de Maldoror makes the greatest contribution to the Lautréamont criticism. It is of course predicated on the belief in subject who gives psychological unity to his analysis of the work. His viewpoint, that Lautréamont is translating a deep personal experience into a cathartic literary exercise seems valid. If it is the "unconscious" that is the source or origin of all great art, then we can readily accept that conscious manipulation of primary process material (unconscious) can find its outlet in a literary work. All art whether plastic or literary (verbal) is a conscious fashioning or reworking of the deep-seated

contents of the psyche. Freud has shown us that the unconscious itself uses language, imagery symbolism, condensation and displacement in "dream-work" (traum-arbeiten). Jacques Lacan, the well known French psychoanalyst, has noted that the stylistic devices of metaphor and metonymy are the very ones that the "unconscious" uses and can be equated to the more elementary formations of condensation and displacement. He believes that access to language and the formation of the unconscious occur simultaneously and that there is a very close relationship between the unconscious and the science of linguistics:

La science dont relève l'inconscient est certainement la linguistique. Il est fait comme un langage et se déploie dans les effets du langage. Il arrive que ça pense là où il est impossible que le sujet articule: donc je suis, parce que là est exclu structurellement qu'il accède à la conscience de soi (se nommer comme étant ce qui parle). Je pense là où je ne puis dire que je suis, là où il faut poser le sujet de l'énonciation comme séparé de l'être par une barre. Le statut de l'inconscient: je l'articule par la fonction du signifiant. Je dis qu'à l'être succède la lettre.¹

If we utilize the above viewpoint in our interpretation of Les Chants de Maldoror, then the work itself will give all the data available to get at its meaning. All the critics including Blanchot emphasize the

¹ Interview de Jacques Lacan à la R. T. B. le 14 décembre 1966.

dream-like aspects and point to the unconscious of the author as the well from which much of the content of the work derives. They disagree about manner and the conscious use that Lautréamont makes of his unconscious, and the aim and direction of his work. What makes the contribution of Blanchot unique is the fact that he was able, through examining the form and movement, to arrive at some coherent elucidation of its content and meaning. He saw within the transformations and elaborations a kind of doubling process as well as a reversal of some of the basic themes. He indicated the obsessive characteristics of the work, such as the progress from friendship to aggression, from secret aggression to eroticism and the entire erotic experience is linked to a whirlpool in the ocean. Through his careful signaling of the movement and the transformations that occur from stanza to stanza ending with the revelation of the tarantula yielding up the fraternal couple (the adolescents betrayed by Maldoror), we see how Lautréamont's mission to see clearly, was an attempt to escape the cavern and to end the search in the clear light of a Paris day.

It is Blanchot who had definitely opened up the Lautréamont criticism and in so doing has written some of its most significant chapters. His study permits us to explore further the personal myth of the author

and to show how this is transformed by him into the literary art: to develop the study of Les Chants de Maldoror from what is called a psychocritical point of view.

Hypothesis

While the approaches of the above critics open up some avenues of understanding to Les Chants de Maldoror, no one of them seems to incorporate the totality of the work, to provide us with a thoroughly comprehensive interpretation. Even Blanchot tends to neglect the long incantatory stanzas in his study. As Sollers has pointed out, the text serves as a projective test, and we notice that all the critics seem to impose some subjective interpretation and project their views onto the text, claiming that their findings derive from it and thus contending that they are being objective. There is certainly a danger of criticism becoming the art of self-interpretation, when it is a question of such a complex work as Les Chants de Maldoror.

In this dissertation, there will be an attempt to prove the hypothesis, that this work by Isidore Ducasse was therapeutic for him, i.e. enabled him to articulate his unconscious phantasy-life and didactic in terms of devoting himself to a conscious discussion of

style and a desire to impart a viewpoint on the subject of rhetoric.

Since all biographical material pertaining to Ducasse's life is minimal and we have no way of corroborating certain hypotheses regarding the actual life of the author of The Cantos, we have had to base all our hypotheses on data derived from the text alone. We are convinced, having analyzed the subject matter and the form, the themes and the general structure of the work, that Ducasse, a product of a specific culture and time, utilizing a particular code (the French language) elaborated a work which permitted him to articulate his phantasy-life, deal with it, examine it, exorcise it. Since he was a remarkably intelligent young man, he knew that giving expression to the most violent and disturbing aspect of his personality might be considered too private and too personal to get the kind of audience and impact he wished; he therefore needed to cajole, inform, teach and instruct the reader in how to read him. Ducasse must have known that only by showing conscious control over his material could he claim to be a literary artist. "L'autonomie ou bien qu'on me change en hippopotame," he states in Canto V. After all many schizophrenics undergo a "creative spell," but according to Ernst Kris, a psychoanalyst who has explored the creative process,

this creativity does not produce great art, but is an attempt to transform the world magically and therefore has deteriorated from communication to "sorcery."

What approach shall we use in making Les Chants de Maldoror more intelligible to the modern reader over a century after its initial publication? Our aim is to analyze the work from a psycho-critical viewpoint. The method will be the following: we shall try to develop a unified model relating the important obsessional themes in the work. Through a systematic examination of the recurring obsessions, and the form and the structure of the work, we hope to shed some light on the personal (unconscious) myth of Ducasse.

Melanie Klein, an English psychoanalyst, who has worked with children, considers that the work of art is the interiorized mother restored to full integrity. According to her, the supreme mediation between the ego and its milieu would be, while still tolerating the diversity of reality, to reestablish the perfect communion before birth. The work of art becomes therefore a project of psychic integration between the personal myth (the unconscious) and the vision (conscious) of the world.

We shall be using this point of view in sustaining our original hypothesis. Jeffrey Mehlmann in his

article in Poétique in discussing the creative process gives the theoretical justification we can use for our approach to the study of the Cantos when he states:

La synthèse ne peut se faire que par le langage, dont la spécificité serait d'être simultanément perméable aux deux logiques (processus primaire et secondaire). De ce point de vue on pourrait assimiler l'activité créatrice à une forme d'autoanalyse, récupérant les fragments dissociés de la personnalité, tout en tournant le sujet vers le réel.¹

By examining both the form and the content, we hope to extract the personal myth and see how Ducasse uses the primary process to achieve that psychic integration of which Melanie Klein speaks.

In general the Cantos defy categorization into a specific genre. By referring to its parts as cantos and stanzas, Ducasse links his work to poetry, although he writes in a very varied prose. In addition, there is no stability in the characters presented in the text, except for the omni-present Maldoror. Characters are introduced and subsequently abandoned, insuring a total lack of continuity of the narrative kind. The gulf between the stanzas unhinges our attention. In the presence of this work, we experience a total confusion and disarray. It is a work with no precedents, no

¹J. Mehlmann, "Entre psychanalyse et psychocritique," Poétique, 1970, p. 365.

guide-posts and an absence of cultural norms and values. It is a deviant work by what appears to be an anarchic adolescent mind.

If we look at the entire six cantos, a certain structural unity suggests itself to us. We perceive a protagonist, Maldoror, involved in a quest. The quest has three components: evil, the infinite and a similar being or his double. The quest is achieved by entering into an open confrontation with God or Nature. We notice also that certain functions are very much in evidence: the two most important ones are metamorphosis and aggression. When Maldoror's conflicts with God's emissary occur, metamorphosis turns out to be an unsuccessful resolution of his quest. He must always be returned to his human form and again pursue his search. Occasionally the metamorphosis leads to catalepsy or immobility. We note that the important metamorphoses undergone by Maldoror relate to the oral stage of development in man; the giant octopus vampirizing the armpit of God relates to this early stage of sucking; the next metamorphosis of Maldoror into the giant eagle, which because of its rapaciousness, can be linked to a later stage of oral development: biting. Finally the transformation into the wild boar, a carnivorous animal, relates to a later stage of oral incorporation by the human being.

On the other hand, in his quest for his double, we frequently observe his aggression directed against a child or an adolescent. This aggression appears to be a more successful resolution of his quest, however since it is both an erotic and narcissistic one, the aggression becomes self-destructive.

Where neither aggression nor metamorphosis are the prevailing function, the prose-poem itself through its incantatory stanzas becomes the mediator of the open hostilities and aggression which Ducasse perceives both in himself and in the universe. In the incantatory stanzas, the prose-poem becomes what the title of the work suggests, a lyrical chant to his passion for the infinite.

If we examine the Cantos, we cannot fail to be impressed by certain recurring, emotionally charged obsessions or themes. They are the following: cruel and insensitive parents often abandon their offspring, a helpless child of eight or ten years old; where there are twin brothers, the more intelligent and more handsome sequesters and tortures his brother; scalping is a punishment for having imprisoned someone for several years; it is also aggression perpetrated against another adolescent because of one's superior strength. Maldoror rejects the notion of biological lineage in a human

family: his phantasy is that he is the son of a female shark and a tiger; all women are either adulterous, vindictive or incestuous; they are either prostitutes or witches; the only coitus that occurs in the Cantos as a positive experience is the coupling of Maldoror with the female shark in the midst of the ocean's whirlpool. This union is described as "chaste and hideous."

A personal myth begins to emerge from these disparate themes. To give these elements a tentative coherence, let us say that the myth (the unconscious) is this: Ducasse's entry into the universe is accompanied by a rejection of his biological origins (hence no biography, no traces). Normal sexual union between man and woman is repudiated, but when a child is born, the fruit of their union is abandoned, trodden upon and tortured; there is always the threat of a sibling or the possibility of sequestration by the parents or the sibling. Additionally there is a fear of castration implied in the preoccupation with scalping and the scalp. The various transformations experienced by Maldoror appear to be felt in oral terms and are a regression to the infantile sexual life. The search for the double is a turning toward the world, but this unleashes a tremendous amount of aggression and the victory over the double becomes an exercise in self-destruction because

of the narcissism involved. The self destruction produces a self-inflicted immobility.

The first five cantos of Les Chants de Maldoror are therefore an attempt to integrate these fragments of his personality and turn Ducasse toward the real world. Having given expression to his obsessions and exorcised them from his unconscious, he can placate the reader in Canto VI by writing a condensation of a "thriller" novel.

All the critics have mentioned the fact that Les Chants de Maldoror contains its own commentary. We shall be calling this part of the work its didactic aspects. It has three divisions. First there is an attempt to convince the reader that although the content is unusual and a radical departure from the cultural norms of literature, the work nevertheless has literary value. Secondly the Cantos exhibit a deviant sound or tone, one which is characterized by constant negation and irony. The third aspect of his didacticism is Ducasse's attempt to teach a viewpoint about metaphor and rhetoric that permits him to take the widest liberties with the language and bend it to his needs and purposes.

CHAPTER II

THE FORMAL ASPECTS OF LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR

In examining the formal aspects of Les Chants de Maldoror, we shall be identifying first of all the different kinds of prose utilized by Ducasse. The sixty stanzas are written in a prose that is remarkably varied. We shall be discussing the stylistic devices used in specific stanzas and the general structure of the work.

An overwhelmingly large number of stanzas are narrative. These narrative stanzas themselves can be categorized in the following way: a) realistic or naturalistic narration which conform to an empiric reality such as the drowned man of the Seine, or the episode of the young girl accosting Maldoror on the Paris street, or a discussion by Maldoror of his vigil, his sleeplessness, or his psychological state; b) narratives which have the quality of an interior monologue and contain emotionally charged refrains, e.g. the child pursuing the omnibus, the scalping Falmer, the shipwreck stanza in which Maldoror goes forth in pursuit of his "double" and narratives in which psychological events have a novelized element such as the episode of

the giant spider spewing forth the contents of its pouch in the form of two adolescents, whose narratives are revealed and which point to the guilt-laden memories of Maldoror; c) allegorical narratives wherein events are mythologized or given mythical treatment, or abstractions are personified, e.g. the episode of the glow-worm and "Prostitution," Maldoror doing battle with the gas lamp turned angel, or Maldoror pursued by conscience; d) surreal events and episodes of animal fabulation and metamorphosis as well as narrations of an epic or cosmic quality, e.g. the encounter with the amphibian man or the episode of the scarab and the pelican-headed creature in conflict over the fate of the excrement ball, or the event in the Convent-bordello where the gigantic hair describes God's behavior in a monologue punctuated by Maldoror's questioning refrain, or the episode of the wild barking dogs.

We can see from the above enumeration that there is a great variety in narrative styles and Lautréamont is using his rhetorical skills in their widest range of possibilities. His ability to alternate the stanzas not only in terms of content but also in terms of style gives his work a richness and complexity that the use of one single mode would have eliminated. These different narrative styles can be classified under specific

rubrics: 1) realistic and naturalistic narrations which try to approximate an everyday reality; 2) mythical narrations related to romance, a style which transcends everyday life for the heroic and grandiose; 3) the interior monologue with its emphasis on reproducing the inner thoughts and emotions of the narrator; 4) narrations with animal fabulation and metamorphosis which are more examples of the fable or récit connecting them to fairy tales, adventure stories and detective fiction. In utilizing all these different types of narrative techniques through the Cantos, Lautréamont is indicating the breakdown of all rules governing purity of genre and is demonstrating them in a collage or montage effect. Since his aim was non-representational, he was doing at the end of the 19th century with narrative styles what the cubists of the 20th century were doing on canvas.

Our discussion will begin by examining some of these narrative modes. It is noteworthy that when the narratives contain refrains or leit-motives, they are closer to the primary process (unconscious) and therefore seem to have a strong emotional charge. For this reason they are closer to poetry, since the aim in the narrative is not to convey a logical story but to express an emotional state. The leit-motive refrain is a continual return to the emotional preoccupation of the poet, and as

Suzanne Bernard remarks in connection with the structure of certain stanzas in Lautréamont's Chants de Maldoror, this is a "mosaic technique" which develops the interior monologue in a fragmented, non-logical sequence where there are many returns, backward looks as well as subjective and associational insertions. The best example of this technique occurs in Canto IV, the last stanza:

Chaque nuit, plongeant l'envergure de mes ailes dans ma mémoire agonisante, j'évoquais le souvenir de Falmer. . . . chaque nuit, ses cheveux blonds, sa figure ovale, ses traits majestueux étaient encore empreints dans mon imagination . . . indestructiblement . . . surtout ses cheveux blonds. . . .

and further on in the same stanza:

Ce choc l'a-t-il tué? ses os ont-ils brisé contre l'arbre . . . irréparablement? l'a-t-il tué, ce choc engendré par la vigueur d'un athlète? A-t-il conservé la vie quoique ses os soient irréparablement brisés . . . irréparablement? Ce choc l'a-t-il tué? En effet . . . surtout ses cheveux blonds, je m'en fuis au loin avec une conscience implacable. Il avait quatorze ans. Chaque nuit.

Here we are decidedly privy to an interior monologue. The aim is expressive, with the poet conveying his disarray, his emotional upheaval. The stanzas in which a leit-motive or repetitive refrain laces through the narrative preventing the straightforward exposition of the fiction, tend to remind us of musical themes in

musical compositions, the sonata for instance. In this sense, Lautréamont can rightfully speak of his work as cantos.

Stanza 19, Canto II relates the episode of the eight-year-old child trying to board a bus and contains a leit-motive. The refrain is repeated at intervals and underscores the sadism and victimization of the child. The omnibus is off at top speed:

Il s'en fuit. . . . Mais une masse informe le poursuit avec acharnement sur ses traces au milieu de la poussière. "Arrêtez, je vous en supplie: arrêtez mes jambes sont gonflées d'avoir marché pendant la journée. . . . Je n'ai pas mangé depuis hier . . . mes parents m'ont abandonné. . . . Je ne sais plus que faire. . . . Je suis résolu de retourner chez moi, et j'y serai vite arrivé si vous m'accordiez une place. . . . Je suis un petit enfant de huit ans et j'ai confiance en vous. Il s'en fuit. . . . Il s'en fuit. . . . Mais une masse informe le poursuit avec acharnement sur ses traces au milieu de la poussière."

In the allegorical narratives, Lautréamont injects his preoccupations. He attempt to create a completely personal mythology to explain natural phenomena. In nature he finds the correlates for human suffering, as we note in stanza 7 of Canto I:

C'est pourquoi, ô peuples quand vous entendrez le vent d'hiver gémir près des bords ou audessus des grandes villes, que depuis longtemps ont pris le deuil pour moi, ou à travers les régions polaires, dites: Ce n'est pas l'esprit de Dieu qui passe: ce n'est que le soupir aigu de la Prostitution uni avec les gémissements du Montévidéen.

In addition we would like to point out the originality of the contrast between "le soupir aigu" and "les gémissements graves." By means of this unusual contrast, Lautréamont gives unity to the suffering of mankind and the lament and pain of the poet.

When the narratives take on an epic or cosmic quality, the style is characterized by grandiose descriptions, all of which produce a huge fresco of the universe. In these narratives, the enumerations, the similes have the function of incorporating all events in the cosmos to which they could possibly be related. Here again style and the formal use that Lautréamont puts the French language to is a reflection of his pre-occupations and are a means of imparting expression to his view of the universe. There also appears to be in the Cantos an attempt to give cosmic and transcendent meaning to all aspects of nature. In the famous stanza in Canto I describing the mad dogs barking at the moon, Lautréamont relates certain phenomena that occur in nature and in the human and animal world as a strain to achieve the "infinite." The dogs aspire to it and so does Maldoror:

Alors les chiens rendus furieux brisent leurs chaînes s'échappent des fermes lointaines: Ils s'arrêtent, regardent de tous les côtés avec inquiétude farouche, l'oeil en feu: et de même que les éléphants, avant de mourir, jettent dans

le désert un dernier regard au ciel, élevant désespérément leur trompe, laissant leurs orielles inertes, élèvent la tête, gonflent le cou terrible et se mettent à aboyer tour à tour, soit comme un enfant qui crie de faim, soit comme un chat blessé au ventre au-dessus d'un toit, soit comme une femme qui va enfanter, soit comme un moribond atteint de la peste à l'hôpital, soit comme un jeune fille qui chante un air sublime, contre les étoiles du nord, contre les étoiles à l'est, contre les étoiles au sud, contre les étoiles à l'ouest, contre la lune, contre les montagnes, semblables au loin à des roches géantes, gisantes dans l'obscurité, contre l'air froid qu'il aspirent à pleins poumons qui rend l'intérieur de leur narine rouge, brûlant. . . .

Here we see the crescendo-like piling up of images almost to infinity, conveying his human desire to encompass and incorporate the universe: the quest for the infinite. The progression of cries, from the barks of the dogs, the death trumpets of the elephants, to the crying child, to the cat, to the woman in childbirth, to the death rattle of the plague victim are Lautréamont's way of unifying his universe, reining it down to a size he can comfortably deal with. It is an attempt to come to terms with the polarities of existence.

In those stanzas where there is a strong degree of animal fabulation or where the episode goes beyond reality into the realm of surreality, he starts out by piling up realistic detail upon realistic detail, only to transport us beyond the limits of reality to suspend our disbelief and forge our entry into the purely imaginary arena he has conjured up. He demonstrates his

technical mastery in narrative art in relating the episode in the convent-bordello during which the gigantic hair cavorts about while narrating God's transgression in the sexual domain: this is a skillful and adroit narrative device to dramatize the cosmic nature of the guilt associated with the participation in animal-like behavior, as for example the coupling of God with the prostitute. The anxiety-ridden refrain of the narrator: "Et jeme demandais qui pouvait être son maître? et mes yeux se recollaient à la grille avec plus d'énergie," provides the necessary contrapuntal tone to contrast with the heavily charged narration of the giant hair.

Besides those narrative stanzas with their manifold variations, there are the stanzas which take the form of miniature dramas or dialogued scenes in which Lautréamont skillfully contrives a dramatic event which contains menace of aggression and actual conflict. Some of these stanzas begin as simple narratives and change into dialogued scenes such as the stanza with Maldoror and the child in the Tuileries Gardens. Others start out as a description of a scene, with the introduction of characters and then a dramatic sketch follows as in Stanza 11 in Canto I, the episode with Edouard. It is in this type of stanza that a specific content is conveyed: i.e. the seduction by ideological means and the

aggression committed against a pre-adolescent boy or an adolescent as in the case of Mervyn in Canto VI.

On further examination, we note that there are many stanzas devoted to a confessional-complicity with the reader. These are characterized by a self-mocking ironic tone. Very often these stanzas lead to a didactic discussion on the subject of style, rhetoric and the metaphor. Frequently a narrative stanza will be interrupted and a didactic discussion will take place and then Lautréamont will resume the narrative at the point where he left off. This we believe to be one of the unique aspects of the work. No progress across the text can be made by the reader without Lautréamont's self-mocking and didactic remarks to the reader. This complicity with his imagined audience often gets very long-winded, like a jet of sentences that cannot be stopped. The prose of these part of the Cantos is full of restrictions, parenthetical remarks, which at times may exasperate the reader, yet at all times maintain his attention and his involvement. In stanza 37, Canto IV, we see a clear example of this self-mocking ironic, yet classical prose:

Si le lecteur trouve cette phrase trop longue
qu'il accepte mes excuses: mais qu'il ne s'attende
pas de ma part à des bassesses. Je puis avouer
mes fautes: Mais non pas les rendre plus graves
par ma lâcheté. Mes raisonnements se choqueront
quelquefois contre le grelot de la folie et

l'apparence sérieuse de ce qui m'est en somme grotesque (quoique d'après certains philosophes, il soit difficile de distinguer le bouffon mélancolique, la vie elle-même étant un drame comique ou une comédie dramatique) cependant il est permis à chacun de tuer des mouches et même des rhinoceros afin de se reposer de temps en temps d'un travail trop escarpé.

There are a few stanzas, the style and the tone of which are a radical departure from those mentioned above. They are the hymn to ocean, the hymn to mathematics, the lyrical praise of the hermaphrodite and of homosexuals. These stanzas are characterized by an epic incantatory apostrophe in which the virtues of each are lyrically celebrated and exalted to grandiose proportions. In the hymn to the ocean each characteristic of the sea is named and intensified, in order to make a comparison with man, and by a series of antitheses, the ocean is lionized and man becomes more and more insignificant. By means of a series of inverted metaphors, the poet describes the ocean physically and concretely, in order to put the moral pettiness of man in dramatic relief. This advance and return from the concrete sphere to the moral sphere suggests the movement of the waves. The reader is thrown back and forth between the concrete (literal) and the moral sphere. By emphasizing the differences between man and the ocean, the narrator shocks our everyday perception of objects. Yet he is also, by means of his idealization, creating for himself and the

reader a sense of harmony and serenity, producing a feeling of oneness with the universe, a cosmic, pan-oceanic feeling, a merging with infinity:

Vieil océan, ô grand célibataire, quand tu parcours la solitude solennelle de tes royaumes flegmatiques, tu t'enorgueillis à juste titre de ta magnificence native, et les éloges vrais que je m'empresse de te donner. Balancé voluptueusement par les mols effluves de ta lenteur majestueuse, qui est plus grandiose parmi les attributs dont le souverain pouvoir t'a gratifié, tu déroules au lieu d'un sombre mystère, sur toute ta surface sublime, tes vagues incomparables, avec le sentiment calme de la puissance éternelle.

The stanza of praise to mathematics, by idealizing its subject also has an epic incantatory quality. The three sciences of arithmetic, algebra and geometry are personified into three queens drawing the young Ducasse to their breasts and nourishing him with their fortifying milk. Here again the old rhetorical devices are used: personification becomes deification, as the queens are transformed into goddesses; antitheses are used in which mathematics are praised while man and nature are repudiated. Here the science of mathematics is a method, a weapon against the evil acts of men. In the hymn to mathematics, the reader experiences a sense of harmony in opposition to all the chaos and disunity of the universe. Bachelard believes that for Lautréamont, mathematics becomes a realm, remote from human conflict and deceptions, which brings solace to the poet, by

conveying absolute truth and eternal verities. He states:

Il semble que le fougueux poète ait la soudaine nostalgie d'une discipline, qu'il se souvienne des heures où il arrêta ses impulsions, où il anéantissait en lui la vie pour avoir la pensée, où il aimait l'abstraction comme une belle solitude. Ainsi d'un seul coup, le lecteur a été transporté aux antipodes de la vie active et sensible.¹

There are two stanzas of lyrical praise of the hermaphrodite and the homosexual. These stanzas bear a strong formal similarity to the hymn to the ocean and to mathematics. In the stanza in praise of the hermaphrodite, its beauty is compared not only to its inhuman treatment by humanity, but also the monstrosity of its natural conformation. The serenity and the harmony of the hermaphrodite is achieved in a romantic dream-like idealization that is lyrically evoked here:

Là, dans un bouquet entouré de fleurs, dort l'hermaphrodite, profondément sur le gazon, mouillé de ses pleurs. La lune a dégagé son disque de la masse des nuages, et caresse avec ses pâles rayons cette douce figure d'adolescent. Ses traits expriment l'énergie la plus virile, en même temps que la grâce d'une vierge céleste.

In the stanza in praise of homosexuals there is an apostrophe of a general nature addressed to them. In it homosexuality in its more classical, platonic and idealized form is lyrically expressed. At the same time

¹Gaston Bachelard, Lautréamont, p. 98.

homosexuality in its carnal form is negated and denied and is transformed into an apocalyptic vision of poet's seminal attraction and sexuality in this carnal expression takes on a grandiose and volcanic force which results in the destruction of the universe. The style alternates between lyrical praise, complicity with the possible homosexual inclinations of the reader and moves to the grandiose erotic phantasy which culminates in a panoramic description of destruction and carnage.

Because the stanzas in their infinite variety permit a modicum of experimentation, Ducasse is free to reject the conventional notions of literature and to insert his own unfettered one and also to impart his ideas on the entire subject of rhetoric. In Les Chants de Maldoror, there is no confusion of genres, but rather a conscious effort to utilize all of them in a total mixture. By dividing the work into cantos and stanzas, narrating them as fiction, dramatizing them as plays and explaining and discussing them as in a tract or book about rhetoric, or describing animal behavior in a way similar to the entries in a naturalist's notebook, and finally writing a parody of a "thriller" novel, Ducasse pulverizes all our notions about literature. He is totally aware of what he has done, when he himself refers to the first five Cantos as "une préface hybride,"

stating that it is the synthetic part of his work. It brings together all extant forms of literature and is a surprise to the reader:

Cette préface hybride a été exposée d'une manière qui ne paraîtra peut-être pas assez naturelle, en ce sens qu'elle surprend, pour ainsi dire, le lecteur, qui ne voit pas très bien ou l'on veut d'abord le conduire; mais, ce sentiment de remarquable stupéfaction, auquel on doit généralement se soustraire, ceux qui passent leur temps à lire des livres ou des brochures, j'ai fait tous mes efforts pour le produire.

Now if we look at the entire structure of Les Chants de Maldoror, we cannot fail to note that a fissure exists between the first five Cantos and the sixth one. With Blanchot, we believe that the first five cantos are an attempt to bring out into the light the opaque demons plaguing Ducasse. Therefore Canto VI can take place in the clear light of a Paris day. The episode of the abduction of Mervyn has a beginning, middle and end. Here the topos of the conclusion is observed. The movement of the first five cantos together with the obsession with certain thematic content enabled Blanchot to put the subject (Ducasse) back in the work and thus he was able to examine it in all its modalities. Since we believe that the form, style and structure of the work to be intimately linked to the content, we shall now pass in the next chapter to an examination of the content of Les Chants de Maldoror.

CHAPTER III

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONTENT OF LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR

In this chapter our aim will be to discuss the content of Les Chants de Maldoror, as it relates to the formal aspects of the work. As was observed in the preceding chapter, the Cantos themselves are of uneven length and the stanzas into which each Canto is divided, very greatly in length and style. There is, however, a certain consistency in the treatment of specific content, i.e. certain stanzas dealing with specific subject matter are stylistically elaborated in a particular way, and in our analysis we shall be pointing this out.

There are stanzas in which Ducasse verbally attacks God. These stanzas can be described as diatribes against God and expositions and proofs of man's evil nature. Frequently these appear in stanzas that form the links between the Cantos or they are digressions from the narratives. Not only is God assailed in the third person by fictionalized characters but often Ducasse as narrator-Maldoror addresses God personally as in Canto II, stanza 17:

Tu me feras plaisir de me laisser épancher mes sentiments. . . . Je frapperai ta carcasse creuse: mais si fort, que je me charge de faire sortir les parcelles restantes d'intelligence que tu n'as pas voulu donner à l'homme, parceque tu aurais été jaloux de le faire égal à toi, rusé bandit, comme si tu ne savais pas qu'un jour ou l'autre, je les aurais enlevées, et les aurais partagées avec mes semblables.

Generally, however, the assaults on God occur in stanzas which are allegorical narratives or regular narrations depicting the limits of sadism and violence. In the former kind of stanza, Maldoror becomes a fictional vehicle for these attacks on the Creator. The contact with God is never first-hand. Either God is observed from an unusual vantage point, or through an emissary or representative. Maldoror, the protagonist, becomes locked in combat with Him. Within the struggle, nothing is resolved and this is the pattern except for Canto VI which we shall take up separately.

As examples of this content, we mention Stanza 25 of Canto II, wherein Maldoror engages in a struggle with an emissary of God. His aim is to conquer the omnipotent being and reign in his place. The gas lamp hanging in the sacred entry to the church is transformed into an angel, who enters into combat with Maldoror. The struggle is unresolved, however, because, although the angel is gangrened by contact with Maldoror, he manages to negotiate an escape, all charred and poisoned by Maldoror.

In stanza 29, the attack against God takes on its uniquely lautr eamontian form, i.e. metamorphosis. In an allegorical narrative Ducasse describes Maldoror as wanting to destroy Conscience, a phantom which pursues him. In the course of his narration Maldoror is transformed into a giant octopus, vampirizing the armpit of God. His stylistic device for giving added drama to the narrative is to allegorize Conscience, by making her into a woman with steel claws, who attacks him, but after vampirizing God as the octopus and "well nourished by the sacred blood," he is able to vanquish her.

In stanza 33 of Canto III, one of the typically allegorical narratives, Maldoror engages in combat with a tiger-headed dragon, allegorized as Hope. Maldoror becomes an immense eagle. The metamorphosis this time takes the form of a rapacious bird. The eagle not only represents rapacity but also keen vision. It is another dimension of Maldoror's ability to project the "evil eye" with the power to kill with a look. The battle is a particularly bloody one in which Maldoror vanquishes the tiger-dragon but is almost destroyed as well.

Stanza 22 in Canto II is a narrative episode elaborating Maldoror's first genuine encounter with God. God is a personage overseeing a lake of blood filled with human excrements and remains. In the midst of this

setting, the poet describes God indulging in cannibalistic activity:

Ne trouvant pas ce que je cherchais, je
soulevai la paupière éffarée plus haut, plus
haut encore jusqu'à ce que j'aperçusse un
trône d'excréments humains et d'or sur lequel
trônait avec un orgueil idiot, le corps
recouvert d'un linceul fait avec les draps
nonlavés d'hôpital, celui qui s'intitule lui-
même le Créateur! Il tenait à la main le
tronc pourri d'un homme mort et le portait
alternativement, des yeux au nez et du nez à
la bouche: on devine ce qu'il en faisait.

In stanza 34, God, introduced as a character is presented to the reader as inebriated and the basest of men. As he has fallen by the roadside into a stupor, birds and animals alike victimize him. This stanza serves as an introduction to Stanza 35, where God will be presented in a characterization making him the most corrupt being in the universe. This stanza begins as a narrative but soon becomes a monologue, by a detached hair from God's head. Ducasse makes us privy to the event in the Convent-Lupanar, by having the detached hair jumping up and down in anxiety over its separation from his master's head, while relating the lascivious acts behind the closed doors of the bordello. By means of an ingenious device, that of making the detached hair a character, who has feelings and relates events, the reader is made to experience a voyeuristic pleasure as he watches the devastatingly destructive behavior of God.

As the hair bounces to and fro, talking about his master, Maldoror glues his eyes to the window grill and periodically uses the refrain already mentioned in Chapter II. In this stanza, we experience the total reversal of good into evil. A convent becomes the scene of illicit sexual practices, and as though that weren't enough, God turns his anger on an innocent young man and in a most violent scene tears off his flesh.

In a transitional or linking stanza between Cantos III and IV, in stanza 35, Ducasse continues to attack man and all humankind. The difference here is that he believes his much feared skill as a poet will enable him to vanquish his adversary.

Que je doive remporter une victoire désastreuse
ou succomber, le combat sera beau: moi seul contre
l'humanité. Je ne me servirai pas d'armes
construites avec le bois ou le fer: Je repousserai
du pied les couches de minéraux extraites de la
terre: la sonorité puissante et séraphique de
la harpe deviendra sous mes doigts, un talisman
redoutable.

In general when the content contains attacks against God, man and humanity, they are rendered in the main by allegorical narratives occasionally by dramatized narratives or monologues. God as well as man at times, is presented as a fiction and as a fictionalized character is debunked and debased.

When the content of the Cantos deals with cruel and sadistic acts perpetrated against children and

adolescents, the form of the stanza is a dialogued narration or drama. Generally a scene is described (narrated) and characters are introduced and their dialogue recorded. A miniature play becomes the stylistic mode of the stanza. Maldoror insinuates himself into the drama in his role of sowing disorder in the very heart of a bourgeois family. In Canto I, stanza 11, we see an example of this type of dialogued family drama. Edouard, an only child of a typical middle-class family, undergoes a fatal attack perpetrated by Maldoror, who tries to seduce him ideologically away from his family. His seductive manoeuvres, while not completely successful, result both in the death of Edouard and his mother.

Again in stanza 20 of Canto II, we observe Maldoror in another miniature drama. The scene takes place on a bench in the Tuileries Gardens in Paris. It contains a dialogue in which Maldoror cynically reveals to the child the facts of total evil operative in the world. Maldoror's aim is to cause the child great anxiety at his tender and innocent age and to lay bare to his uncorrupted mind how the dynamic of evil functions in the world.

The entire last Canto (VI) contains the episode of the drama of Mervyn. Here the playlet takes on the

form of a condensed novel, which is given expression and continuity from stanza to stanza. This miniature novelized drama appears to be an expansion of and the reworking of the incident with Edouard in Canto I. There are differences, however, namely that the episode with Mervyn begins with a combat with God's emissary over Mervyn's fate. It becomes Maldoror's successful assault on God.

At other times inhuman and aggressive acts against children and adolescents are rendered in a different kind of narrative stanza from those mentioned above. For example, there is the stanza, in which Maldoror wishes to kill Lohengrin with a highly refined weapon. He however forswears the act and offers to exchange places with the supposed victim. Those stanzas with acts of violence against an adolescent victim are permeated with the idea of the quest for the double and there always seems to be role reversal: i.e. executioner-victim and vice-versa. Very often these stanzas with the above subject matter have strong emotional charge as demonstrated by an oft-repeated refrain throughout the stanza. One of the most memorable of these stanzas is the physical attack of a fourteen-year-old adolescent in stanza 43, Canto IV. This stanza is highly charged emotionally because Ducasse describes Maldoror's memory of a violent blow inflicted on Falmer. The guilt is so overwhelming that he dares

not ascertain what has happened. He has scalped his friend with such force, that he is not sure whether Falmer has died from the shock of his head hitting the tree or not. The entire stanza is punctuated with fragments of sentences (the interior monologue) referring to his agonizing memory of the incident.

Another stanza which has a strong emotional narrative style is the one dealing with the eight-year-old trying to board the coach which goes from the Bastille to the Madeleine in Paris. This stanza has all the qualities of a nightmare. The passengers on the coach look like cadavers. The child is pleading with the coach-driver to stop so he can get on. The repetition of a certain refrain (already cited in the previous chapter) becomes the leit-motive of the entire stanza and reinforces the poignant cries of the child, who finally falls by the wayside.

In the Cantos, we also find stanzas dealing with violent crimes perpetrated against women. The imagery is most bloody and the acts described are extremely sadistic. One gains the impression that any association or contact with women is anathema to Ducasse. For this reason, as well as other aspects of the work, Les Chants de Maldoror bears a strong homosexual stamp. The portrait of the mother is that of a moral authority,

submissive to men, whereas young girls exist to be violated. In addition the entire quest for the double seems to be an inability to tolerate difference as it manifests itself in the opposite sex (femaleness). Some examples follow below.

In another narrative stanza (19) Canto II, Maldoror during his usual walks encounters a young girl. The description begins innocuously enough, but anger builds up in Maldoror gradually, so that he feels compelled to attack her, because under the mask of innocence she is probably a prostitute. The narrative changes into an exhortation to the young girl never to appear in his path again, otherwise he will inflict the most horrible tortures upon her. This stanza really ends up as a catalogue of sadistic acts.

The next episode in which extreme violence against a girl is inflicted by Maldoror, occurs in Stanza 32, Canto III, where the narrative begins with a description of a mad woman, punctuated by the leit-motive: "Les enfants la pousuivent à coups de pierre, comme si c'était un merle." The narrative then becomes a revelatory confession of the events that have produced madness in her. It is a manuscript which she drops that becomes the vehicle for the narration. The stranger who picks it up is none other than Maldoror, the very

perpetrator of the most sadistic violence inflicted on anyone in the Cantos. He reads about the deflowering and subsequent evisceration of the young daughter of the madwoman by the malevolent man and his bulldog. The imagery conveyed in the narration of the events reaches such a paroxysm of violence, that Maldoror faints after reading it. This stanza further confirms the reader's belief in the totally evil character of Maldoror, not merely stating that he is evil as was done in the first Canto, but citing chapter and verse of his evil acts. It is also a stylistic device of distancing the reader somewhat from the violence of the narrative in having the events related in a manuscript that is being read by Maldoror.

Although in stanza 35 the episode in the Convent-Lupanar, there is no overt violence against women, violence is the direct result of God's coupling with a prostitute. (God turns his anger on an innocent young man in a sadistic physical assault.) In addition, the detached hair, symbol of God's guilt, describes the poison that has invaded its structure as the coupling between God and the prostitute continues:

Moi, pendant ce temps je sentais des pustules
 envenimées qui croissaient plus nombreuses, en
 raison de son ardeur inaccoutumée pour les
 jouissances de la chair, entourer ma racine de
 leur fiel mortel, absorber, avec leur ventouses
 la substance génératrice de ma vie.

The carnal pleasure mutually shared by God and the prostitute is totally rejected as the allegorical suffering of the detached hair is expressed:

Plus ils s'oubliaient dans leurs mouvements insensés, plus je sentais mes forces décroître. Au moment où les désirs corporels atteignaient au paroxysme de fureur, je m'aperçus que ma racine s'affaïssait sur elle-même, comme un soldat blessé par une balle.

Sexuality of the polarized kind (male-female) appears to be strongly repudiated in this very dramatic handling of the symbolic guilt associated with it. It is further intensified by projecting those guilt feelings onto God, who in order to obliterate his transgression must attack without provocation the young man in the brothel.

In Canto IV stanza 38, cruel and inhuman acts are perpetrated against a man by two lascivious women, his wife and his mother. This is a narrative stanza where even within the confines of conventional-legitimate relationships (wife and mother) the polarization mentioned before exists, but here the women repudiate the man. In this stanza the events are related to Maldoror as a slowly unfolding drama. The women are inflicting a highly refined torture on the man, that of hanging him from a gallows bracket by his hair and abandoning him to hunger and the elements. They whip and tar him before his expiration. Maldoror succors the dying man and it

is from the latter's lips that we learn that his only crime was to refuse the incestuous advances of the mother.

The above stanza does not contain an interrupted narrative but there are frequent digressions, restrictions and parenthetical remarks, and some discussion of style, which take the reader back and forth, to and fro, in and out of the narrative itself. It would appear that Ducasse's didactic aims take over as he digresses from his narrative, his emotionally charged obsessions (like the sexual polarization that we have singled out) find expression in what he recommends that the reader do in order to appreciate his poetry. Therefore in Stanza 44, Canto V, while expounding on the art of rhetoric and discussing the structural development of his Cantos, he recommends to the reader, that it would be wise to dismember his mother or his sister, and chop them up for consumption:

Comme nourriture astringente et tonique, tu arracheras d'abord les bras de ta mère (si elle existe encore), tu les dépèceras en petits morceaux et tu les mangeras ensuite, en un seul jour sans qu'aucun trait de figure ne trahisse ton émotion. Si ta mère est trop vieille, choisis un autre sujet chirurgical, plus jeune et plus frais sur lequel la rouille aura prise et les os tarsiens, quand il marche, prennent aisément un point d'appui pour faire la bascule: ta soeur par exemple.

Aside from the strong penchant for violence that is displayed throughout the Cantos, there is another subject matter that deserves our attention. From the point of view of content alone, we are struck by the frequency with which Ducasse explores the experience of immobility, sleeplessness and vigil. This immobility is expressed first in Canto IV, stanza 36, when we read the lines "C'est un homme ou une pierre ou un arbre qui va commencer le quatrième chant." The sleeplessness is also mentioned in this stanza, when the poet gives vent to hostile feelings against man, he begins to describe the voyage of the comet with its brilliant vaporious tail, and then speaks of his inability to sleep:

Sans doute, elle (la comète) n'a pas conscience de ce long voyage: il n'en est pas ainsi de moi: accoudé sur le chevet de mon lit, pendant que les dentelures d'un horizon aride et morne s'élèvent en vigueur sur le fond de mon âme, je m'absorbe dans les rêves de compassion et je rougis pour l'homme! Coupé en deux par la bise, le matelot, après avoir fait son quart de nuit, s'empresse de gagner son hamac; pourquoi cette consolation ne m'est elle pas offerte?

The next stanza where his immobility is further explored occurs in stanza 39, Canto IV. Here we are made to watch the slow decomposition of his body. He is a living cadaver, being gnawed by vermin, lice and toads. This agreement on his part to live with sickness and immobility until he succeeds in conquering God, was

initiated when a sword was implanted in place of his vertebral column.

The stanzas that convey Ducasse's immobility tend to impart the immediacy of the experience. They are not narrations per se; but they often take on the character of an allegory of a physical state. The elaborate description of the lice and the toads that have taken up residence under one armpit and the chameleon giving chase under the other armpit, the crab lodged in the anus, the viper who has consumed his phallus and carried it off, the small hedgehogs in the interior of his testes and the absence of blood suggest a whole animalistic universe. The chameleon, the toads and the viper suggest a reptilian one, while the porcupines or hedgehogs convey the figurative idea of a forbidding person. At any rate, the whole tumultuous activity of these animals in his body are metaphors for his physiological state. His impaled body has become a total environment of unrestrained animality, which he views with a measure of detachment.

When the content deals with Ducasse's somnolence, his vigil, his nightmares and insomnia, it tends to become more literal and less metaphorical. For example in stanza 46, he informs the reader that he has vowed never to sleep and consequently he maintains himself in

a constant state of wakefulness. He states that his will alone enables him to gain control of the products of his imagination:

Cependant, il m'arrive quelquefois de rêver, mais sans perdre un seul instant le vivace sentiment de ma personnalité et la libre faculté de me mouvoir: sachez que le cauchemar qui se cache dans les angles phosphoriques de l'ombre, la fièvre qui palpe mon visage avec son moignon, chaque animal impur qui dresse sa griffe sanglante, eh bien, c'est ma volonté qui pour donner un aliment stable à son activité perpétuelle, les fait tourner en rond.

By means of his vigil, he does not allow God to penetrate into the privacy of his "self" and eliminates the possible eavesdropping of the Creator. The "white catacomb of his intelligence will never open its sanctuaries to the eyes of the Creator." Sleep for Ducasse represents castration. "Celui qui dort est moins qu'un animal chatré." Ducasse believes that with sleep and the emergence of the dream state, the ego suspends its function, and another part of him takes over. He rejects that part of him over which his ego cannot exercise complete control. It would mean losing his autonomy, which loss he refuses:

Je n'ai pas mérité de supplice infâme, toi le hideux espion de ma causalité. Si j'existe, je ne suis pas un autre . . . je n'admets pas en moi cette équivoque pluralité. Je veux résider seule dans mon intime raisonnement. L'autonomie ou bien qu'on me change en hippopotame.

The above passage is striking both because of its acute self-understanding and its metaphorical language. There are the two poles of existence: "intimate reasoning" or brute bestiality as exemplified by the hippopotamus. Here in the passage cited above, Ducasse seems to hint at a literary description of the theoretical psychoanalytic concepts of the human psyche: the Ego and the Id, however we are inclined to view his desire for complete autonomy as a protest against the deterministic aspect of human life: the mortal decay to which we are all subject. Now in the case of schizophrenics in general, the body is negated and is transcended by creating one's own personal meaning and thereby assuring the continuity of the self. At any rate there is certainly a repudiation of the instinctual or animal life in his insistence on his complete autonomy at all times. The other alternative for Ducasse is total metamorphosis into the animal, e.g. the hippopotamus, the wild boar.

We shall now pass on to those stanzas in the Cantos where the content deals with style and the use of metaphor. A large number of stanzas are a mixture of narration and self-conscious discourse on rhetoric. In addition there is a frequent self-mocking irony that pervades these discussions. In these stanzas Ducasse

may start out with one of his narrations, but he interrupts it in order to discuss with the reader what he has transferred to the paper (text). In Stanza 44, Canto V, after explaining the manner in which his work develops (the analogy to the flight of the starlings), he breaks into an imagined intimate dialogue with his audience:

N'est-il pas vrai, mon ami, que jusqu'à un certain point, ta sympathie est acquise à mes chants. Or, qui t'empêche de franchir les autres degrés? La frontière entre ton goût et le mien est invisible: tu ne pourras jamais le saisir: preuve que cette frontière elle-même n'existe pas.

Further on in the same stanza he again projects his notion of the reader's receptivity to his work, stating that the instinctive repulsion of the first few pages has diminished, by virtue of reading the work, and that the malady of the reader will be followed by speedy healing.

All those stanzas and passages in the text whose content is style, metaphor, literature, poetry and the structure of the Cantos convey Ducasse's involvement and complicity with the reader. When compared to the narrative part of the text, they might be considered as digressions from the main subject matter, however their altogether great frequency does suggest that they themselves are an integral part of the work, if not the

very armature on which the work is welded. They form, together with the narrative stanzas, the miniature dramas and the incantatory stanzas, an orchestrated master-work.

The stanzas that have not been discussed from the point of view of their content are those we call the epic-incantatory ones. They include: the hymn to the ocean, the hymn to mathematics, the pæan of praise to the hermaphrodite and to homosexuals. Owing to their form and their tone, these incantatory stanzas impart a harmony and a tranquility and serenity that the vituperative and violent narrations lack.

From the point of view of their content as well as their form, it is our impression that the incantatory-epic stanzas are an attempt by Ducasse-Lautréamont to harmonize and bring together the polarities which he perceives in the universe, as well as in himself. He intones these epic stanzas in order to mediate and reconcile good and evil, the self and the body, the self and the world, the self and the other, and male and female. We shall see that these polarities, particularly the male-female, are not so easily reconciled.

The hymn to the ocean is one stanza in which polarities may exist (his comparison of it with man), but the ocean is always identical with itself, a unified

whole, with which Ducasse can experience the sensation of harmony and completeness:

Vieil océan, tu es le symbole d'identité toujours égale à toi-même. Tu ne varies pas d'une manière essentielle, et si tes vagues sont quelque part en furie, plus loin dans quelque autre zone, elles sont dans le calme le plus complet.

The ocean represents serenity and eternity, while hiding treasures in its depths. The ocean is more profound than the human heart. Man himself compares most unfavorably with the ocean. In continuing his litany of praise, he regards the ocean as his great healer when he states:

Pourquoi reviens-je à toi, pour la millième fois vers tes bras amis, qui s'entr'ouvrent, pour caresser mon front brûlant, qui voit disparaître la fièvre à leur contact!

The entire stanza (content-wise) is a detailed and elaborate tone poem to the ocean, all of whose properties, diversity, scope and depth are encompassed. The ocean becomes the metaphorical image for reconciling the manifold polarities of the universe.

In the incantatory hymn to mathematics, Ducasse praises truths, axioms, and theorems. These abstractions share a structural harmony and universality that relieve Ducasse from the tension and conflict created by the polarity between good and evil. In this stanza after describing all the violence, carnage, earthquakes,

metamorphoses in the world, he apostrophizes these lines to mathematics:

Mais vous restez toujours les mêmes, aucun changement, aucun air empesté n'effleure les rocs escarpés et les vallées immenses de votre identité.

Mathematics, with its cabbalistic figures, its laconic equations and its sculptural lines will be seated as the just avenger of the all powerful being. In his exalted resort to mathematics, Ducasse is choosing a cognitive and intellectual sphere of human inquiry, which is remote from the affect-laden area of the emotions. He is therefore grateful to mathematics for providing him with the intellectual coldness, removed from passion and conflict as he states here:

Vous me donnâtes la froideur qui me surgit de vos conceptions sublimes exemptes de la passion.

With the aid of mathematics, Ducasse-Lautréamont was able to struggle against God and man. He has had success in making the Creator descend from his pedestal. Mathematics, like the ocean, is also the great healer and consoler as he states in the closing lines of his ode:

O mathématiques saintes, puissiez-vous, par votre commerce perpétuel, consoler le reste de mes jours de la méchanceté de l'homme et l'injustice du Grand-Tout.

The paeon of praise to the hermaphrodite and the stanza in praise of homosexuals share some similarity in

tone with the other two incantatory stanzas mentioned above. There is, however, a dramatic difference. Whereas the stanzas to mathematics and to the ocean harmonize the polarities between the self and the universe and the self and others, the odes to the hermaphrodite and to homosexuals are more concerned with a mediation of the sexual polarities, that constitute such a threat to Ducasse personally.

The hermaphrodite is a symbol, harmonizing the male and the female and although he-she is an anomaly in nature, Ducasse describes him as the incarnation of innocence, modesty and beauty.

The refrain used as a leit-motive throughout the stanza (cited in the previous chapter) indicates the strong emotional charge identified with this image of unified sexual polarity. There is further sanctification and beautification of the appearance and demeanor of the hermaphrodite:

Cette chevelure est sacrée. . . . Il ne veut pas que les lèvres humaines embrassent religieusement ses cheveux parfumés par le souffle de la montagne, pas plus que son front, qui resplendit, en cet instant, comme les étoiles du firmament. Mais il vaut mieux croire que c'est une étoile elle-même qui est descendue de son orbite en traversant l'espace, sur ce front majestueux qu'entoure avec sa clarté de diamant, comme d'une auréole. La nuit écartant du doigt sa tristesse se revêt de tous ses charmes pour fêter le sommeil de cette incarnation de la pudeur, de cette image parfaite de l'innocence des anges.

In the stanza to the hermaphrodite, the content and the form and the tone convey the notions of beauty and harmony. The happiness that the hermaphrodite can experience, exists only in a dream: it is a chimera. Therefore he exhorts him to sleep for eternity; he does not wish him to wake up and above all he does not want to be present at his awakening, for only in a dream can the peaceful nirvana, that calm serenity throughout eternity, be achieved. This kind of harmony is an experience that is rarely conveyed to the reader of the Cantos. For Ducasse this harmony is a mirage, a phantasy, a night dream of the hermaphrodite:

Il rêve qu'il est heureux, que sa nature corporelle a changé ou du moins il s'est envolé sur un nuage pourpre vers une autre sphère habitée pas des êtres de même nature que lui. Hélas! que son illusion se prolonge jusqu'au réveil de l'aurore! Il rêve que les fleurs dansent autour de lui en rond, comme d'immenses guirlandes folles, et l'imprègnent de leurs parfums suaves, pendant qu'il chante un hymne d'amour entre les bras d'un être humain de beauté magique.

It is also clear from this citation that the hermaphrodite (a resolution of male-female polarity) cannot tolerate his corporeal self and dreams of beings who are identical with him.

The stanza which begins with "O péderastes incompréhensibles" appears to be one which will form a unity both in terms of form and content with the

aforementioned epic-incantatory stanzas, however the idealization and lyrical praise end after some preliminary appreciation:

Soyez bénis par ma main gauche, soyez
santifiés par ma main droite, anges protégés
par mon amour universel.

It is the idealization that has long been associated with homosexuality in the Ancient Greek platonic tradition. In this hymn of praise, Ducasse uses the same imagery of innocence and chastity to describe the homosexual as he utilized for the hermaphrodite as these lines indicate:

Il a fallu que je devinasse par moi-même
les innombrables trésors de tendresse et de
chasteté que recélaient les abattements de
votre coeur oppressé, poitrine ornée de
guirlande, de roses et vetyver.

After his sensitive and idealized introduction, he begins to taunt the reader, telling him that if he has passed the age of puberty, he had better keep his distance. He then goes into a litany of crimes that he, Maldoror, has perpetrated against homosexuals. A radical alteration in tone takes place within the framework of this stanza. The idealization is transformed into a realistic intrusion of the poet's carnal interests. This original idealization of homosexuals triggers the other more narrow meaning of homosexuality (genital meaning), and this for Ducasse Maldoror becomes

intolerable. He wishes that the world with its accompanying polarities including the self and others could in itself become the object of sexual desire. He transforms this stanza into a grandiose phantasy of sexual prowess, in which he expresses his desire to sodomize the universe.

Si au lieu d'être un enfer, l'univers n'avait été qu'un céleste anus immense, regardez le geste que je fais du côté de mon bas-ventre: oui j'aurais enfoncé ma verge à travers son sphincter sanglant, fracassant par mes mouvements impétueux les propres parois de son bassin.

The remainder of this stanza develops the phantasy and intensifies it into his description of his great sexual power as well as the magnetic attraction of his seminal fluid. (It is the enchanted talisman with which Providence has endowed him.) He envisions the destruction of humanity. The reconciling or harmonizing of the polarities is never fulfilled: instead the devastation of humanity results.

There is one other stanza in the Cantos which we could relate to the stanza in praise of homosexuals, both in tone and structural development. It is the stanza dedicated to the louse. Here again Ducasse builds up a description of lice and their function in relation to the human species, elaborating a hymn of glorification to the louse:

Ô pou à la prunelle recroquevillée, tant que
 les fleuves repandront la pente de leurs eaux dans
 les abîmes de la mer: tant que les astres
 graviteront sur le sentier de leur orbite: tant
 que le vide muet n'aura pas d'horizon, tant que
 l'humanité déchirera ses propres flancs par des
 guerres funestes: tant que la justice divine
 précipitera ses foudres vengeresses sur ce globe
 egoïste: tant que l'homme méconnaîtra son créateur
 et se narguera de lui non sans raison, en y mêlant
 du mépris, ton règne sera assuré sur l'univers,
 et ta dynastie étendra ses anneaux de siècle en
 siècle. Je te salue soleil levant, libérateur
 céleste, toi l'ennemi invisible de l'homme.

The louse is initially idealized as a liberating symbol for liquidating and destroying all of humanity with its wars and carnage. The rest of the stanza describes Maldoror's coupling with a female louse which results in a mime of lice being engendered, thus like grains of sand the entire earth is covered with lice and the human species obliterated, while Maldoror contemplates the destruction and suffering. Here again the idealization is followed by a display of sexual prowess, leading to rebirth, which in turn results in the destruction of the human race.

CHAPTER IV
AN ANALYSIS OF CANTO VI

Canto VI deviates from the other five Cantos which preceded it, because it relates a (linear) narrative and observes some but not all the conventions of time and space and the logic of cause and effect. It has an introduction, a development and a conclusion, as well as some of the digressions similar to those utilized in Cantos I-V. This does not mean that Ducasse has written in classical traditional style. Rather he has taken the conventional style of the serialized mystery novel of his day, has speeded it up, condensed it and in the process of calling the reader's attention to all the gimmickery involved, he succeeds in satirizing and ridiculing the very genre he is employing.

Ducasse announces at the beginning of Canto VI, that the first five Cantos have merely been preparatory steps for the choice of genre which he has made and which inexorably have led him to the "novel." Not a novel of 400 pages which bog the reader down in fatigue and boredom, but a novel of 30 pages.

Any discussion of genre calls attention to the internal development of literature. Books are influenced by books and books imitate, parody and transform other books. In the first five Cantos, we had examples of epic narration, the central problem of which concerns the relation of the author to his work. The epic poet tells a story as a professional story-teller, including his own comments within the poem and giving the narration proper in his own style. Now we saw that Ducasse not only interrupted his fictions (narratives with digressions, sarcastic and ironic remarks, discussions of style and rhetoric, but also apostrophes to characters and dialogues with them), he has also created miniature dramas where the narrator all but disappears behind the theatrical scene.

One of the ways of deviating from the mixed-genre of epic narration is called "romantic irony," which deliberately magnifies the role of the narrator, and in so doing violates any possible illusion that this is life and not art. This is the all-pervasive enterprise of Ducasse in the Cantos. While the first five Cantos mince back and forth between dramatic scenes, epic narrations and lyrical outpourings, in Canto VI, Ducasse takes a stand in favor of the novel.

According to his own description, the first five Cantos were the "synthetic" part of the work, the sixth Canto will now be the "analytic" part. In it he will flesh out and concretize many of the abstractions and feelings presented in his "hybrid" preface. Again the irony so prevalent in the first five Cantos is very pronounced here in his absurdist detailing of how the reader will experience the "realism" of his novel:

La vitalité se répandra magnifiquement dans le torrent de leur appareil circulatoire et vous verrez comme vous serez étonné vous-même de recontrer, là ou d'abord vous n'aviez cru voir que des entités vagues appartenant au domaine de la speculation pure, l'organisme corporel avec ses manifestations de nerfs et ses membranes muqueuses, de l'autre le principe spirituel qui préside aux fonctions physiologiques de la chair. Vous toucherez avec vos mains des branches ascendantes d'aorte et des capsules surrénales et puis des sentiments.

By making reference to the literary genre--the novel--Ducasse indicates the highly literary quality of his concerns. Since its inception in the eighteenth century with the Castle of Otranto, the gothic novel provided an example of the literary genre par excellence. In Theory of Literature by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, a superb description of the gothic novel is given:

This is a genre by all the criteria one can invoke for a prose narrative genre: there is not only a limited continuous subject-matter or thematics, but there is a stock of devices (descriptive-accessory and narrative, e.g. ruined castles, Roman catholic horrors, mysterious portraits, secret passageways, reached through

sliding doors, abductions, immurements, pursuits through lonely forests), there is further a kunstwollen, an aesthetic intent to give the reader a special sort of pleasurable horror and thrill ("pity and terror" some of the gothicists may have murmured).¹

Now what Ducasse does in Canto VI is to take aspects of the gothic novel and parody some of its devices and in so doing transforms it into something totally different. Instead of relating the episode of the abduction of Mervyn in strict chronological order, he uses some of the former techniques used in Cantos I-V to undermine the linearity of the narrative. For example there is the stanza of Maldoror's combat with the crab, the stanza of Maldoror's description of himself and the recital of the story of "les trois marguerites," as well as the usual digressions and discussion of style and the devices he is using to develop his novel. In addition there is an attempt to give a prophetic quality to this Canto by the use of enigmatic statements which act as an anticipatory filter through which the narrative must pass. All these aspects of the gothic tale, as well as a refusal to produce a realistic narration and thereby equally rendering ludicrous and absurd any such aim.

¹René Wellek and A. Warren, Theory of Literature, pp. 232-233.

By stating at the outset that he will take the characters presented in the first five Cantos, the Creator and Maldoror and frame them into a drama in which they confront each other over the fate of Mervyn, he is once more deliberately magnifying the role of the narrator, delighting in violating any possible illusion that the episode is life and not art, and once more emphasizing the completely literary character of this final canto. This constant reminding the reader that he is reading literature is a species of romantic irony, prevalent throughout the Cantos but extremely evident in Canto VI.

Whereas the first five Cantos partake of the epic-narrative mode, with ruptures into dramas, self-critical ironic statements, stylistic observations and lyrical incantatory stanzas, the final Canto incorporates them all with the exception of the incantatory lyric mode. In this ultimate Canto, we see the epic narrator, but also the dramatist engineering the dialogues, as well as the novelist manipulating the plot and using onomatopoetic characterizations: Maldoror, the satanic hero, and Mervyn the Anglo-Saxon innocent and the other stereotyped characters such as the commodore and his wife, all of whom are located in a recognizable and specific setting: the city of Paris. The locales of the

action are indicated: l'Arc du la Carrousel, La Place Vendôme, le Panthéon. It is a modern naturalistic setting, not metonymical, not metaphorical, but we see here Ducasse's attempt to scale down the cosmic battle to the familiar relativity of time and space. By inserting the episode of Mervyn's abduction into the everyday pedestrian setting of Paris, Ducasse is not aiming for realism but parody and by implication a denial to the reader to give credence to the narrative as "reality." It is clear that this "novel" of thirty pages cannot be considered as one in which there is an attempt to create mood or tone similar to the romantic function of Edgar Allan Poe or Anne Radcliffe or to create an illusion of reality such as the realistic documentation of reality of a Zola or Flaubert. The romantic irony dominates Canto VI from beginning to end.

Ducasse is constantly reminding the reader in Canto VI of the very materiality of the text, denying any reference to a reality beyond the words. He begins almost immediately in the second stanza of Canto VI by telling the reader how to view the literature he is elaborating:

M'emparant d'un style que quelques-uns
trouveront naïf (quand il est si profond),
je le ferai servir à interpréter des idées
qui malheureusement, ne paraîtront peut-être
pas grandioses! Par cela même me dépouillant

des allures légères et sceptiques de l'ordinaire conversation, et assez prudent pour ne pas . . . je ne sais plus ce que j'avais l'intention de dire, car je ne me rappelle pas le commencement. Mais sachez que la poésie se trouve partout où n'est pas le sourire stupidement railleur de l'homme à la figure de canard.

The style of which he speaks, alludes to the world of ideas, however in the process of describing his style he violates the notion of language as a conveyor of "meaning," by losing the thread of what he intends to elucidate. By means of this unrelenting self-spoofing of itself, the style of the Cantos becomes the subject matter of work and not distinct from its own materiality. While parodying the detective novel, he informs the reader that he is knowledgeable about the techniques used by the novelist of this type of fiction. Therefore in narrating the episode of Mervyn, he asks a series of questions concerning Mervyn's belief that he will arrive home safe and sound and then parenthetically he states the following:

Ce serait bien peu connaître sa profession d'écrivain à sensation que de ne pas au moins mettre en avant les restrictives interrogations après lesquelles arrive immédiatement la phrase que je suis sur le point de terminer.

This emphasis on the material character of the text is further emphasized by the complicity Ducasse maintains with the reader:

Puisque vous me conseillez de terminer en cet endroit la première strophe, je veux bien obtempérer à votre désir. Savez-vous que lorsque je songe à l'anneau de fer caché sous la pierre par la main d'un maniaque, un invincible frisson me passe par les cheveux.

Having brought the reader so far and having defused reader objection, Ducasse is aware that the knowledgeable reader can be counted on to peruse the text because he is habituated to twists in plot, linearity and the shock or thrill of suspense produced by not knowing the denouement. Now since Ducasse has refused to seriously write a detective novel, he nevertheless avails himself of the techniques that he would use if he were writing a "thriller." The playing with rhetorical devices thus becomes a substitute for subject matter and is also substitutive of the twists in plot that we are accustomed to. The technique is remarkable to the extent that it maintains a constant spoof of itself. In the above quotation the complicity with the reader becomes so complete that the writer identifies with the reader and the chill the latter will be experiencing in the reading of his text.

Canto VI is in many ways the most didactic of Ducasse's cantos. It is laced through with many comments on style and poetry. In it he rejects the conventional norms and hopes to come up with a poetry that is off the beaten track. He attacks the literary productions

of his day which engender paralytic fatigue in the reader. In the last stanza of Canto VI, Ducasse states his ars poetica, but because everything he says about style must be strained through his sieve of romantic irony, we must be somewhat careful about taking him too seriously. Here he states what effect he wishes his brand of literature to produce:

Je veux dire, afin de ne pas me faire mieux comprendre mais seulement pour développer ma pensée qui intéresse et agace en même temps par une harmonie des plus pénétrantes, que l'on propose d'inventer une poésie tout à fait en dehors de la marche ordinaire de la nature, et dont le souffle pernicieux semble bouleverser même les vérités absolues, mais amener un pareil résultat (conforme du reste aux règles de l'esthétique, si l'on réfléchit bien). Cela n'est pas aussi facile que l'on pense; violà ce que je voulais dire. C'est pourquoi je ferai tous mes efforts pour parvenir! Si la mort arrête la maigreur fantastique des deux bras longs de mes épaules employés à l'écrasement lugubre de mon gypse littéraire. Je veux au moins que le lecteur en deuil puisse dire: "Il faut lui rendre justice. Il m'a beaucoup crétinisé. Que n'aurait-il pas fait s'il eût pu vivre davantage! C'est le meilleur professeur d'hypnotisme que je connaisse."

Is Ducasse really suggesting that the aim of literature is to produce a state of idiocy in the reader? The answer to the question is, I believe, more complex than an affirmative or a negative one. In the light of his refusal to make realistic narration or fiction his aim, or drama his concern, but rather irony, auto-criticism, didactic discussion of rhetorical devices, the re-writing of romantic and gothic fictions: he seems

to be over-emphasizing these aspects of literary activity. Thus the words hypnosis and hypnotic fluid help us to clarify his meaning. He is essentially referring to a state in which there is a transference of control on the reader's part to a new Svengali of literary taste different and distinct from the classical arbiters of taste. He wishes the reader to be magically won over to his view of literature. Is this not the definition of all good literature: an experience that takes the reader away from everyday reality and thus permits him to enter into the self-contained world of art? It is an escape which numbs one to everyday reality and thus a kind of hypnosis operates.

CHAPTER V

A DISCUSSION OF THE RHETORIC OF LES CHANTS DE MALDOROR

Since the beginning of this dissertation, we have been emphasizing the idea that Les Chants de Maldoror is a unique literary work to the extent that it contains its own ongoing commentary. No progress across the text is made by the reader as well as the writer without constant reference on Ducasse's part to the fact that a literary work is being produced, Ducasse is observing himself in the process of writing and the very process is the subject matter of his text. He involves the reader (his audience) at all times in the experience he is undergoing and thereby makes him privy to what is occurring both in the psyche of the writer and what is being transferred to the text.

Because this topic of rhetoric is a wide-ranging one, we would like to divide it into the following three categories so that we examine in depth Ducasse's notions on the art of writing. We use the word didactic because there is no doubt in our mind that Ducasse is attempting to teach and impart certain ideas he has on the subject of rhetoric. The first category we shall examine will

be Ducasse's conception about language and the tone of his literary work as well as the topic of inspiration. The second category will deal with his discussion of style in general and the third will be an examination of the use of the metaphor in Les Chants de Maldoror and how Ducasse himself views the metaphor.

Let us now examine the first category mentioned above. From the very outset, in Canto I, the reader is made aware of the very materiality of the text and the perception of itself as literature. There is the almost constant reminder to the reader that this is literature, since we are constantly being told: "these are pages, this is a stanza, this is the end of Canto I, my cantos develop in an elliptical structure, my poetic language has a strange tone." True, narrations and fictions are part of the text, but they are continually interrupted by digressions and commentary about the work itself.

It is important to note as Pleyner has already shown, that initially the topos of winning reader approval is reversed and the writer states to the reader that it were wise not to read "these somber pages" and that he abandon "these desolate swamps" and observe the following:

Ecoute bien ce que je dis: dirige tes talons
en arrière et non en avant, comme les yeux d'un
fils qui se détourne respectueusement de la
contemplation auguste de la face maternelle.

Here Ducasse is making clear to the reader that perusal of this literary text violates the laws governing society, i.e. the taboo against incest and by the same token the mother tongue will be violated. At the very beginning of the work, Ducasse begins playing with rhetorical devices. Instead of using the traditional devices of developing a character and describing it in depth, he states at the beginning of stanza 3:

J'établirai dans quelques lignes comment
Maldoror fut bon pendant des premières années,
où il vécut heureux: C'est fait.

His announcement in one of the first stanzas in Canto I, that he will "paint the delights of cruelty" alerts his reader to absence of traditional subject matter and to the establishment of a new tone in literature. In fact at the end of Canto I he makes a very specific reference to the "strange tone" of his lyre.

At the beginning of Canto II, in the opening lines of the first stanza, Ducasse makes the most self-conscious use of his writing by alluding to the very title of the work itself:

Où est-il passé ce premier chant de Maldoror
depuis que sa bouche pleine de feuilles de la
belladone le laissa échapper à travers les
royaumes de la colère, dans un mement de
réflexion?

Belladonna is a drug which stimulates respiration and suggests a "high" produced by hyperventilation.

Implied is the notion that a literary work may require the stimulant of a drug to gain expression.

In reviewing and turning back to see the textual material covered by the first two Cantos, Ducasse has second thoughts; however, he decides that what has been committed to paper must stand as is:

Non . . . ne conduisons pas plus profondément
le meute hagarde des pioches et des fouilles à
travers les mines explosibles de ce chant impie.
Le Crocodile ne changera pas un mot au
vomissement sorti de dessous son crâne.

The crocodile usually is the animal chosen to represent hypocritical sorrow, however Ducasse's crocodile is not weeping but vomiting, pouring out venom, anger. Having used the imagery of the swamps for his introductory pages of the Cantos, he extends it by alluding to the common swamp inhabitant, the crocodile. Because it is a reptile which can partially live on land and partially live in the waters of the swamp, it is intermediary between man and shark and prepares the reader for the somewhat later encounter of Maldoror with the female shark in the whirlpool of the ocean.

The importance of the mouth and the tongue as the origin of language is constant in the Cantos. From the beginning to the end of the work, there is the allusion of his tongue to a hard a brilliant weapon, while writing is equated to the "distilling of spittle from his square

mouth." The character of Maldoror, whose thinly disguised identity with the author, is a constant source of labial images, and is described as "l'homme aux lèvres de saphir, l'homme aux lèvres de jaspe, l'homme aux lèvres de soufre." The lips are again identified with hard semi-precious stones and metals.

Ducasse also affirms the right of an individual genius to express himself. It is both a need to express his thought and to submit to natural law. His writing is for himself alone and not necessarily to communicate to others:

Il y aura dans mes chants une preuve imposante de puissance pour mépriser les opinions reçues. Il chante pour lui seul, et non pas pour ses semblables. Il ne place pas la mesure de son inspiration dans la balance humaine. Libre comme la tempête, il est venu échouer, un jour sur les plages indomptables de sa terrible volonté. Il ne craint rien si ce n'est pas lui-même.

If we now summarize what Ducasse says about his language, we must state that it is a sharp and brilliant arm or weapon, an expression of his thought, "vomit" from under his crocodile cranium, "spittle from his square mouth," which gains vitality from the leaves of a drug and nourishes itself from the terrifying dreams of an insomniac. His writing therefore becomes a synthesis of all the prevailing theories of literature of his day. Certainly literature partakes of all or some

of the above conceptions, however Ducasse seems to be favoring a literary romanticism throughout the Cantos.

We shall now turn our attention to the topic of literary inspiration as it is viewed by Ducasse. Whereas many writers state that their inspiration derives from an external authority, the muse, God, Ducasse reverses this traditional conception by negatively making God responsible for "his terrifying verve." He states that God forces him into constantly attacking the all-powerful being. Therefore he puts on the stage of his drama a literary hero whose role it is to attract irreconcilable hatred by attacking both humanity and God. In fact God is present in Canto II as an arbitrary Zeus hurling thunderbolts at the narrator in an attempt to thwart him and paralyze his limbs and prevent him from writing. The whole creative process as Ducasse views it derives from insomniac phantasies, from nightmares over which he has no control and gains definition and expression from God's personal attacks on him:

Ce n'est pas moi qui commence l'attaque; c'est lui qui me force à le faire tourner, ainsi qu'une toupie, avec le fouet à cordes d'acier. N'est-ce pas lui qui me fournit des accusations contre lui-même? Ne tarira point ma verve épouvantable! Elle se nourrit des cauchemars insensés qui tourmentent mes insomnies.

From time to time Ducasse speaks in the work about inspiration itself. For example at the end of Canto II,

he tells of having written at break-neck speed at the height of inspiration and states that upon braking his velocity, he must stop to examine the route he has taken. He seems to procure erotic-aesthetic gratification in so doing:

Il est temps de serrer les freins à mon inspiration et de m'arrêter un instant en route, comme quand on regarde le vagin d'une femme, il est bon d'examiner la carrière parcourue et de s'élancer ensuite les membres reposés, d'un bond impétueux. Fournir une traite d'une seule haleine n'est pas facile: les ailes se fatiguent beaucoup d'un vol sans espérance et sans remords.

Writing in the white heat of inspiration non-stop is physically demanding and is compared to the airborne movement of a bird. The analogy of flight and the imagery of the elliptical movement of the starlings flying platoon-like around a center, will be the structure that Ducasse will attribute to the development of his Cantos. From the initial image in Canto I of the wise old crane leading her platoon to the final image in Canto VI of the parabolic thrust of Mervyn's body from the Colonne Vendôme to the Pantheon, we are reminded of the flight and the gyrational movement around a center, which is analogized to the ebb and flow of artistic inspiration.

As a matter of fact Ducasse-Lautréamont discusses the act of inspiration in the very first stanza of Canto II. In it he describes the imaginary beings which his mind conjures up. These beings appear momentarily: they

erase themselves and return to chaos. New substances will take their place. "They will be born from a famished and stormy love that human contact cannot satisfy." He then addresses his fictions: Léman, Lohengrin, Lomban and Holzer, explaining how he will use them structurally in his work:

Un instant vous apparûtes recouverts des insignes de la jeunesse à mon horizon: mais je vois ai laissés tomber dans le chaos comme les cloches du plongeur. Vous n'en sortirez plus. Il me suffit que j'aie gardé votre souvenir: vous devez céder la place à d'autres substances peut-être moins belles qu'enfantera le débordement orageux d'un amour qui a résolu de ne pas apaiser sa soif auprès de la race humaine. Amour affamé qui se dévorerait lui-même s'il ne cherchait sa nourriture dans des fictions célestes, créant à la longue une pyramide de séraphims plus nombreux que les insectes qui fourmillent dans une goutte d'eau. Il les interlacera dans une ellipse qu'il fera tourbillonner autour de lui.

While not exactly telling us how literary inspiration occurs, Ducasse indicates the way an image or fictional notion insinuates itself vaguely to the conscious mind and then gradually takes on greater shape, form and definition:

Mais silence, l'image flottante du cinquième idéal se dessine lentement comme les replis indécis d'une aurore boréale, sur le plan vapoureux de mon intelligence, et prend de plus en plus consistance déterminée. . . . Mario et moi nous longions la grève.

The very materiality of the text is sustained by the great pains Ducasse takes to elaborate a continual

complicity with the reader so that he makes his kind of literature acceptable to his audience. At the beginning of Canto V, in the first stanza Ducasse exhorts the reader not to get angry with him, if Ducasse's prose fails to please him. He wishes the reader to at least admit that Ducasse's ideas are most unusual. As previously mentioned, he then reveals the elliptical structure of his Cantos, by the analogy to the flight of the starlings. By means of this comparison, he demonstrates his recognition that his Cantos do not follow a linear progression but circle to and fro around a center. He recommends that the reader also follow the motion of the starlings:

Toi de même, ne fais pas attention à la manière dont je chante chacune de mes strophes, mais sois persuadé que les accents fondamentaux de la poésie n'en conservent pas moins leur intrinsèque droit sur mon intelligence.

He does recognize that at the beginning, the reader may have had an instinctive repulsion to his cantos, but upon having progressed across the pages to the fifth Canto, he hopes that this repulsion has been appreciably reduced and the reader now in full convalescence, is in need of some medication, or prescription to better appreciate the poetry of Ducasse. He proceeds to describe the mutilation and dismemberment of a sister or mother, recommending to the reader the cannibalism of

these members. Implied in this is an attempt to get the reader to accept the "unthinkable" for doing so makes his poetry which pushes itself to the outer limits of phantasy, pleasurable.

In detailing what is going on in his psyche and what is happening in the transferral of the experience to the text, a very dramatic example occurs at the end of Canto V. While Ducasse-Lautréamont-Maldoror is experiencing the arrival of the giant spider readying itself to suck his blood, he tries to convey his passivity to this overwhelming phantasy, when he writes: "Nous ne sommes plus dans la narration. . . ." and as the phantasy takes possession of him he continues "hélas! Nous sommes maintenant arrivés dans le réel."

There are also intervals in the text when Ducasse repudiates the reader demanding his complete receptivity and complicity, without which he will not share his narrative phantasy:

Faites abstraction des occupations étrangères qui obstruent le portique de votre esprit et soyez au moins reconnaissant de l'intérêt que je vous porte en faisant assister une véritable attention de votre part, car qui m'empêcherait de garder pour moi les événements que je raconte.

In a sort of pique, Ducasse is saying that the reader must meet him more than half-way and again, we see the reversal of the usual topoi.

We have seen that not only his tongue and language are subject matter of his text, but also the topic of inspiration, as well as the self-conscious aspects of the work (complicity with the reader) and all of these aspects of the work reinforce its materiality and by so doing deny any reality beyond itself. Ducasse also uses his text as a forum to teach a viewpoint on rhetoric which is at deviance with the literary conventions of his day.

Initially in Canto I, we saw his announcement that he will "paint the delights of cruelty." By rejecting traditional themes in poetry he sets about convincing the reader that poetic subject matter can be as widely disparate as the killing of flies is from the killing of rhinoceros. Here he expresses his refusal of traditional values in poetry:

Jusqu'à nos temps la poésie fit une route
fausse s'élevant jusqu'au ciel ou rampant
jusqu'à terre. Elle a méconnu les principes
de son existence, et a été, non sans raison
bafouée par les honnêtes gens.

He also rejects these traditional values because there is hypocrisy inherent in them, for such poetry does not elaborate all the human qualities present in man as well as the wide variety of human tastes. He claims that his poetry will not conceal his vices. He will use his imposing creative powers to attack man and the

creator. The aim of his poetry is explicitly stated: he will portray himself as he really is and not as he "should" be:

Moi je veux montrer mes qualités, mais je ne suis pas assez hypocrite pour cacher mes vices. Le rire, le mal, la folie paraîtront tout à tour entre la sensibilité et l'amour de la justice et serviront d'exemples à la stupéfaction humaine: chacun s'y reconnaîtra non tel qu'il devrait être, mais tel qu'il est. Et peut-être que ce simple idéal conçu par mon imagination surpassera cependant tout ce que la poésie a trouvé jusqu'ici de plus grandiose et de plus sacré.

In one sense he is supporting the ancient classical idea that everything relating to humankind has merit, but he is also affirming that the "darker" or "satanic" side of man's nature is perfectly acceptable subject matter for poetry.

Ducasse asks the reader to render him deep confidence and not to have "a vague idea about the beauties of literature that he sheds like petals in the rapid development of his sentences." He admits that his long-windedness is motivated, however, by his desire to "track down with a scalpel the fugitive apparitions of truth." If the reader will but follow the prescription outlined by Ducasse, then his "poetry will receive him with open arms just as a louse cuts off with its kisses, the root of the hair." By this imagery of the louse, Ducasse suggests that his poetry will be acceptable if

one permits it to penetrate right down to the roots of the hair and by extension to the cranium.

The entire stanza 37 in Canto IV is devoted to a discussion of literature, rhetoric, style and metaphor. He begins by justifying a comparison of two pillars, two baobabs trees and two pins, on the basis of their geometric and architectural similarity. (We shall be discussing the whole subject of metaphor in more detail toward the end of this chapter.) He then proceeds to explode some of the prevalent notions about genre, stating that his approach to literature will involve his reason which will come into shock with madness and thus apparent seriousness will result in the grotesque. By speaking about comic-buffoonery and serious comedy, Ducasse is pulverizing our logical and well ordered notions about tragedy and comedy. Since literature contains within it the two polarities of tragedy and comedy, then according to Ducasse a particular work may simultaneously combine both. All seriousness points to the grotesque and all comedy points to seriousness. The ass eating the fig may become the fig eating the ass.

We can see from all that is stated in the text, that Ducasse wishes to push the frontiers of literature beyond their usual boundaries. In doing so, any frame or rigidity such as genre must be repudiated by ridicule

and parody (Canto VI for example). Any and all subject matter and even the absence of subject matter may be enrolled in a literary work and traditional rhetorical devices must be reversed. Simile and metaphor must be given a more radical and revolutionary treatment. At the beginning of Canto V, after having discussed the similarity in structure between the flight of the starlings and the development of his Cantos, Ducasse launches into an explanation of his orientation toward literature in general and his work in particular:

Ne généralisons pas des faits exceptionnels. Je ne demande pas mieux: cependant mon caractère est dans l'ordre des choses possibles. Sans doute entre les deux termes extrêmes de ta littérature telle que tu l'entends et de la mienne, il en est une infinité d'intermédiaires et il serait facile de multiplier les divisions, mais il n'y aurait nulle utilité, et il y aurait le danger de donner quelque chose d'étroit et de faux à une conception éminemment philosophique qui cesse d'être rationnelle, dès que'elle n'est plus comprise comme elle a été imaginée, c'est à dire avec ampleur.

While admitting to his "cadaverlike reasoning," he exhorts the reader to transport into his imagination "the diverse modifications of that reasoning." If he had initially repelled the reader, he hopes that he has recovered from his repulsion (by having taken the prescriptions mentioned earlier, i.e. the cannibalism of a mother or a sister).

By recommending the most offensive and unthinkable actions (from a moralistic and human point of view), he is teaching the idea that a radical departure in content from the traditional literature must be accepted by his audience. Views that were once thought axiomatic must be changed and new axioms must be permitted to flourish. It is almost as though in the field of esthetics, he were rejecting the kind of absolutism that governed poetics from ancient classical times to the contemporary romanticism of his day. Only by breaking down the most conventional notions concerning form and content could he educate the reader to the true function of a literary work, i.e. to bring about reversals of our most unquestioned truths and thereby revolutionize the perceptions of the reader. If the value system of the reader is put into doubt, then by the same token all value systems begin to have relative merit and thus lack absolute validity. Wishing to accustom the reader to the kind of literature he is producing, Ducasse warns of the problems that may accrue:

Mais sois prudent. A l'heure que j'écris de nouveaux frissons parcourent l'atmosphère intellectuelle: Il ne s'agit que d'avoir le courage de les regarder en face.

Throughout Ducasse's discussion of literature, poetry and the ways to appreciate them and defuse the reader's antagonism, he maintains an ongoing complicity

with the reader. He seems to be holding an imaginary dialogue with the latter anticipating the reader's possible responses and answers them as though the hypothetically imagined objection had actually been raised. In this sense, we can say that the reader is omni-present throughout the work, and is equal in his ubiquitousness to the writer, so that we can almost agree with Pleynet when he states that the reader becomes what he reads. The reader, the writer, and that which is written are all one and the same.

The last part of this chapter will deal with how Ducasse uses the metaphor and how he himself views this figure of style. According to dictionary definition, the metaphor is a rhetorical figure or stylistic device which consists in a comparison resulting in a transfer of meaning (a concrete term in an abstract context, a substitution by analogy; an image). From a stylistic viewpoint, Ducasse's comparisons tend toward a desire to incorporate globally the most disparate phenomena and relate the least likely objects or events to other phenomena he wishes to describe. As an example of this technique in the use of comparison, let us take the description of the wild dogs in Canto I, stanza 8. In it he describes the behavior of these dogs who begin to bark: then there is a seemingly endless litany of

events which are compared to the barking dogs. But not content with these analogies alone, he further extends the images so that the reader is presented with a vast panoramic fresco of the universe. Finally an analogy between the behavior of the dogs and the abstract-symbolic one of language is established when Lautréamont-Ducasse writes that the dogs are on a quest for the infinite. The analogies pile up one upon the other, producing a crowded collage of images, which encompass the universe panoramically. While lending an aura of mystery and complexity, the collage of images also gives the text a decorative literary appeal.

Ducasse's metaphorical handling of his hymn to the ocean is noteworthy. In his incantatory stanza to the ocean in Canto I, stanza 9, he not only describes the physical attributes of the ocean, but simultaneously makes antithetical comparisons between the ocean and man's moral qualities and behavior. He writes:

Vieil océan tu es le symbole de l'identité:
 toujours égale à toi-même, tu ne varies pas d'une
 manière essentielle, et si tes vagues sont quelque
 part en furie, plus loin, dans quelque autre zone,
 elles sont dans le calme le plus complet. Tu n'es
 pas comme l'homme qui s'arrête dans la rue pour
 voir deux bouledogues s'empoigner au cou, mais
 qui ne s'arrête pas quand un enterrement passe:
 qui est ce matin accessible et ce soir de
 mauvaise humeur; qui rit aujourd'hui et pleure
 demain. Je te salue, vieil océan!

In another part of the same stanza, describing the

ocean's surface, its waves and its foam, he again refers to them in an antithetical comparison to human beings:

Balancé voluptueusement par les mols effluves de ta lenteur majestueuse, qui est le plus grandiose parmi les attributs dont le souverain t'a gratifié, tu déroules au milieu d'un sombre mystère, sur toute sa surface sublime, tes vagues incomparables avec le sentiment de ta puissance éternelle. Elles se suivent parallèlement. Séparées par courts intervalles. A peine l'une diminue, qu'une autre va à sa rencontre en grandissant, accompagnées du bruit mélancolique qui se fond, pour nous avertir que tout est écume. (Ainsi les êtres humains, ces vagues vivantes, meurent l'une après l'autre d'une manière monotone: mais sans laisser un bruit écumeux.)

The ocean and its waves become a metaphor for the earth and its human inhabitants. The analogy of waves to human beings is a highly suggestive one, a metaphor conveying the transitoriness of existence and the reduction of all human life to the foam of the sea.

When Ducasse makes positive comparisons between the ocean and other phenomena or events in the universe, the metaphors appear to be more traditional but they are not. He uses moral-spiritual terminology and comparisons to describe a physical entity. This metaphorical technique is striking as we can see in the following example in his apostrophe to the ocean:

Ta grandeur morale, image de l'infini est immense comme la réflexion du philosophe, comme l'amour de la femme, comme la beauté divine de l'oiseau, comme les méditations du poète. Tu es beau comme la nuit.

It is also striking because the comparisons are explicitly stated (not implied) and the ocean, a concrete, material entity is given moral and spiritual dimension by the multiplicity of comparisons between it and the spiritual human spheres.

As we read the Cantos, we become increasingly aware that Ducasse makes rather unusual comparisons. Let us take for instance his description of the "humming of the wasps around the columns of the ancient temple of Denderah on the Nile," which appears in the stanzas at the beginning of Canto IV:

Je compare le bourdonnement de leurs ailes
métalliques au choc incessant des glaçons
précipités les uns contre les autres pendant
la débâcle des mers polaires.

From the microcosm of the insect world and the sound produced by their wings, we are plunged into the macrocosm of the sound produced by giant icebergs bumping each other in a glacial drift. The poet here is stating that the two sounds regardless of their different contexts share a structural affinity. As though this comparison were not dramatic enough, he then makes an analogy between these sounds above and the "murmur" caused by his spiritual pain:

Mais si je compare la conduite de celui
auquel la providence donna le trône sur cette
terre, les trois ailerons de ma douleur font
entendre un plus grand mumure.

As for Baudelaire and other followers of Swedenborg, all the phenomena of the universe are viewed as having some correspondence in the personal spiritual sphere.

Sometimes, however, Ducasse uses comparison and metaphor to produce a comic effect. In stanza 42, Canto IV, he describes the sight of the amphibious man. With his eyes glued to the horizon, he is fascinated by what he sees. He notices that only he perceives the strange amphibious creature. The peasants note Maldoror-Ducasse in his fascinated observation, but do not see the amphibious man. He then launches into the most visually dramatic descriptions of their laughing mouths. He writes:

De telle manière que quant à ce qui me concerne, tournant machinalement les yeux du côté de l'envergure remarquable de ces puissantes bouches, je me disais, en moi-même, qu'à moins qu'on ne trouvât dans la totalité de l'univers un pélican grand comme une montagne ou au moins comme un promontoire (admirez, je vous prie la finesse de la restriction qui ne perd aucun pouce de terrain) aucun bec d'oiseau de proie ou mâchoire d'animal sauvage ne serait jamais capable de surpasser ni même d'égaliser, chacun de ces cratères béants, mais trop lugubres.

Here the comparison produces an ironic comic effect, which is caused by an appeal to the absurdity of the imagery. Small laughing mouths are blown up in size to that of a giant pelican mouth. He continues in the same vein, while articulating his view of the metaphor:

Et cependant, quoique je réserve une bonne part au sympathique emploi de la métaphore (cette figure de rhétorique rend plus de services aux aspirations humaines vers l'infini que ne s'efforcent de le figurer ordinairement ceux qui sont imbus de préjugés ou d'idées fausses, ce qui est la même chose), il n'en est pas moins vrai que la bouche risible de ces paysans reste encore assez large pour avaler trois cachalots. Racourcissons davantage notre pensée, soyons sérieux et contentons-nous de trois petits éléphants qui viennent à peine de naître,

There is no doubt that the multiplicity of comparisons as well as the accompanying commentary combine to produce a comic effect. Here we are struck by the absurdity of linking the peasant mouths to the capacity for swallowing three whales or three small elephants. The comic effect also derives from the self-consciousness of the ironic commentary coupled with the absurdity of the images.

Ducasse-Lautréamont appreciates and values the metaphor as a particularly important rhetorical figure. He has stated in the quotation above that it fulfills human aspirations for the "infinite." It is also a way of taking the most disparate objects and by comparing them, one can discover the similarities and differences between them. He writes in Canto V, stanza 49:

C'est généralement parlant, une chose singulière que la tendance attractive qui nous porte à rechercher (pour ensuite les exprimer) les ressemblances et les différences qui recèlent dans leurs naturelles propriétés, les objets les plus opposés entre eux, et

quelquefois moins aptes en apparence à se prêter à ce genre de combinaisons sympathiquement curieuses et qui ma parole d'honneur, donnent gracieusement au style de l'écrivain qui se paie cette personnelle satisfaction, l'impossible et inoubliable aspect sérieux jusqu'à l'éternité.

The rest of the stanza is devoted to a rather elaborate metaphor in which the flight of the royal milan is compared to the head of a child raising its uncovered head in a funeral bier and a water-lily floating on the surface of the water. He believes that this comparison may not be appreciated by the mass of the people who regard most objects with a "profound feeling of unjust indifference." In his usual didactic way Ducasse-Lautréamont attempts to get his audience to accept his comparison by propagandizing in favor of it. In stanza 50, Canto V, he states:

Chacun a le bon sens de confesser sans difficulté (quoiqu'avec un peu de mauvaise grâce) qu'il ne s'aperçoit pas au premier abord, du rapport, si lointain qu'il soit que je signale entre la beauté du vol du milan royal, et celle de la figure de l'enfant, s'élevant doucement audessus du cercueil, comme un nénuphar qui perce la surface des eaux: et voilà précisément en quoi consiste l'impardonnable faute qu'entraîne l'inamovible situation d'un manque de repentir, touchant l'ignorance volontaire dans laquelle on croupit.

In the metaphor above relating the beauty of the bird in flight to the face of the child's raised head in the coffin, to the water-lily piercing the surface of the water, Ducasse widens our perception of the child's face

in the transfer of multiple meanings. He also denigrates the perception of those who view objects indifferently and without wonder and admiration. The analogy between the three-part comparison can be inferred as the movement of an animate creature through the elements, in this case, air or water. These entities seem rather disparate and antithetical, yet by linking them, by cognitively thinking of them in the same visual frame, we widen our perception of each one, i.e. the water-lily takes on a human quality, the ten-year-old child's head floating above the casket looks flower-like and the bird in flight partakes of the properties of the other two entities linked in the comparison.

In conclusion we shall now discuss the role of Lautréamont's metaphorization and the use of his now famous "beau comme." These comparisons are most extraordinary because they are a striking departure from the conventional comparisons that spring to mind when confronted with the adjective--beautiful. In Canto V, stanza 45, when Maldoror sees the pelican-headed creature, unable to categorize him and place him in the proper slot in Natural History, he refers to him in the following way:

Quoiqu'il ne possédât pas un visage humain,
il me paraissait beau comme les deux longs
filaments tentaculiformes d'un insecte: ou

plutôt comme une inhumation précipitée ou
encore comme la loi de la reconstitution
des organes mutilés et surtout comme un
liquide éminemment putréscible!

These similes seem to be an attempt to harmonize the most widely disparate phenomena: from natural physical objects to abstract ideas or laws, to the aesthetic notion of beauty. Through this stylistic device, Ducasse-Lautréamont operates a breakdown of the traditional mind-body dualism. He views the material world as continuous with the symbolic spiritual one, and by so doing he denies the inherent antithesis that exists between these two domains. By blurring the distinction between material and spiritual realms, he is able to play with metaphor and simile per se. The juxtaposition of very disparate verbal entities may become a harmonizing game of different sonorities.

This kind of metamorphorization appears to become obsessive in Cantos V and VI. In Canto V stanza 45, Ducasse is confronted by the scarab, the pelican creature and overhead by the warring eagle and the bird of prey known as le Grand-duc de Virginie. These are all metamorphosed creatures who had originally been deceived by the same woman. He considers each in turn beautiful and the simile which follows gains for each of the creatures a kind of appreciation that is forever etched in the mind of the reader, by its uniqueness and

its apparent unrelatedness to the creature described. Since these are fictionalized creatures, the similes introduced by the "beau comme" have an equally fictionalized quality as we note in stanza 45:

Le grand-duc de Virginie, beau comme un
 mémoire sur la courbe qui décrit un chien
 courant après son maître, s'enfonça dans
 le crevasse d'un couvent en ruines. Le
 vautour d'agneau, beau comme la loi de
 l'arrêt de développement de la poitrine
 chez les adultes dont la propension à la
 croissance n'est pas en rapport avec
 la quantité de molécules que leur organisation
 assimile, se perdit dans les hautes couches
 de l'atmosphère . . . le scarabée beau comme
 le tremblement des mains dans l'alcoolisme,
 disparaissait à l'horizon.

For Ducasse, every aspect of the universe, whether it be human deterioration, laws governing physical growth of the human organism or mathematical concepts, all exercise an undeniable fascination for him and consequently form the subject matter and the forms of his metaphorical combinations.

These kinds of similes are used with greater boldness in Canto VI, when Maldoror begins to describe himself; the comparisons are extremely elaborate and read like an anatomy or natural history text:

Je jette un long regard de satisfaction
 sur la dualité qui me compose. . . . Et je
 me trouve beau! Beau comme le vice de
 conformation congénital des organes sexuels
 de l'homme consistant dans la brièveté
 relative du canal de l'urètre et la division
 ou absence de sa paroi inférieure, de telle
 sorte que ce canal s'ouvre à un distance

variable du gland audessous du pénis: ou encore comme la caroncule charnue de forme conique, sillonnée par les rides transversales assez profondes qui s' élève sur la base du bec supérieur; ou plutôt comme la vérité qui suit "le système des gammes des modes et leur enchainement harmonique ne repose pas sur des lois naturelles invariables, mais il est au contraire, la conséquence de principes esthétiques qui ont varié avec le développement progressif de l'humanité et qui varieront encore"; et surtout comme une corvette cuirassée à tourelles!

In the above comparison there is an attempt to unify in the most detailed way the mind and the body, by bringing together in a literary style the most startling disparate entities, i.e. an anatomical description of the male genitals, the detailing of the callused excrescence on the beak of the turkey, an elaborate intellectual statement about chords and aesthetical principles in music, and finally all these linked to a turreted warship. These comparisons transcend all logic and rational thinking, and therefore point to some process or state of the mind where such entities can exist side by side and are visualized in such a way that rationality is suspended to accommodate them.

In stanza 53, Canto VI, when Ducasse describes Mervyn, we are again immersed in a litany of analogies all of which convey his view of what is beautiful. Although we may not always agree with his comparisons, we are nevertheless intrigued by his shocking images.

Speaking of Mervyn, the adolescent of sixteen, he writes:

Il est beau comme la retractabilité des serres des oiseaux rapaces: ou encore comme l'incertitude des mouvements musculaires dans les plaies des parties molles de la région cervicale postérieure: ou plutôt comme ce piège à rats perpétuel toujours retendu par l'animal pris, qui peut prendre des rongeurs indéfiniment, et fonctionner même caché sous la paille: et surtout comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!

Here again there is a transcendence of the logical world of causality, and rationality is suspended as we enter a state closely akin to the dream world, where disparate entities can exist side by side in the same visual frame. Just as in dream, one has the conviction of the aptness and the rightness of certain types of comparison, so too Ducasse strings out his similes convinced of their appropriateness. They are most dream-like in their strangeness. They seem to partake of some sort of primary process dream symbolism, rather than referring to an easily accessible fund of commonly shared experiences. It appears that with these strangely imaged metaphors, Ducasse is plummeting us into the dream idiom of the twentieth century, into free association and even without being able to analyze the symbols, we cannot help but be stunned by the juxtaposition of certain types of images, e.g. the dissecting table, the sewing machine

and the umbrella, the rat-trap and the retractable claws of predatory birds and Mervyn's youthful beauty. While it is true that we are not always won over to this type of comparison, we are nonetheless shocked into the realization that images of this kind can be imaginatively conceived and linked to each other as it happens in dreams and thus literature can forge our entry into a non-logical, non-causative and non-rational world.

Because Ducasse's emotional problems forced him to stamp his literary work with the use of imagery and metaphors derived from primary process of the unconscious, Lautréamont was a true revolutionary, freeing language from the conventional straitjacket of 19th century molds. We are able to see why the surrealist poets and painters alike were so intrigued by his metaphors. He represented for them an iconoclast of language who incorporated the imagery of the unconscious whose liberating effect enabled the poets and painters to search for a broader and more "truthful" reality.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Now that we have examined Les Chants de Maldoror in all its aspects, i.e. the form, the content, the irony, the general structure and its deviation in Canto VI, and the didactic orientation, we feel that some definitive interpretation of the work is possible. From our reading, we perceive that the overriding concerns or obsessional themes in Ducasse's work are the following: the prevalence of evil in the world, a desire to show aggression in its most blatant forms; a belief in innocence and an attempt to show how corruption takes place (mythologically through the personage of Maldoror); which always leads to demonstrating the two facets or duality of life: good and evil, executioner and victim, immortality and death (decay). The entire project of Ducasse therefore becomes an effort to break down these oppositions in several ways: a) to attack God and impede or alter his control over the universe, b) to assail man because he is imperfect and renders evil for good, c) to idealize between these dualities in the symbolization provided by the ocean, mathematics and

the hermaphrodite, d) to leave through the legacy of his poetic work his personal immortality system: Les Chants de Maldoror, although Ducasse himself will die. According to Ernest Becker in his book entitled Denial of Death, the problem of the human being can be summed up in the statement that he is a self-conscious animal, and consequently aware of his own demise. He therefore wishes to achieve some perpetuation beyond his mortal decay. This awareness creates the problem of life for most men: for the body is given but the self or soul is created by culture. It is with the body that Ducasse has the greatest difficulty. He will not allow it to be used in the standard biological manner of the mammalian species. Becker believes that many individual psychological disturbances and perversions as well as the fetishes of man are related to the problem of the denial of the normal animal sexual function of the human organism. Homosexuality and the hermaphroditic image are two of the most dramatic refusals to fulfill the species function. Becker sheds a great deal of light on the meaning of the hermaphroditic image, stating that "it is an idea that goes right to the heart of the human condition and reveals to us the dynamic of perversions and what is at stake in the desperate efforts of crippled people to find some kind of animal satisfaction in the

world."¹ Because the remainder of what he says on this subject is so probing and relevant to our understanding of Les Chants de Maldoror, we present his remarks in their entirety:

The hermaphroditic symbol is no mystery after the writings of Rank, Jung and many others. The problem has been again to strip it of its narrow sexual connotation. It is not a sexual problem. The self finds itself in a strange body casing and cannot understand the dualism. Man is aghast at the arbitrary nature of genitality, accidentality of his separate sexual emergence. He cannot accept the impermanence of the body casing or its incompleteness--now male, now female. The body makes no sense to us in its physical thingness, which ties us to particular kind of fate, a one sided sexual role. The hermaphroditic image represents a striving for wholeness, a striving that is not sexual but ontological. It is the desire of being for a recapture of the (Agape) unity with the rest of nature, as well as for a completeness in oneself. It is the desire for the healing ruptures of existence, the dualism of self and body, self and other, self and world. Add the desire of self-perpetuation beyond the body, and we can understand how the partialness of sexual identity is further limitation and danger.²

The above quotation helps us clarify the epic-
incantatory stanzas in Les Chants de Maldoror. The hymn
to the ocean, the hymn to mathematical verities, the
hymn to the hermaphrodite and possibly the paean of
praise to homosexuals coming as they do at strategic
intervals throughout the Cantos can be viewed as an

¹Ernest Becker, Denial of Death, p. 224.

²Ibid., pp. 224-225.

attempt by Ducasse to recapture that feeling of wholeness, by reconciling the sexual polarities, the body and the self, the self and the other, the self and nature. For if we juxtapose the other stanzas where violence, brutality, cruelty, anger, vengeance, cannibalism and bestiality occur, then these stanzas represent a subsiding of the ruptures and fragmentation of existence, which are expressed in the disturbing catalogue of events in the Cantos.

In exalting the symbol of the hermaphrodite and the concept of homosexuality, Ducasse reveals his desire to deny species function and to obliterate sexual polarity. His staging of the coupling of Maldoror with the female shark in the whirlpool in the ocean is a fictional, ideological psychological intercourse and therefore an entry into the realm of culture (literature) and not biological succession. In copulating with the female louse, Maldoror creates a mime of lice which endangers the entire human species and destroys their universe. Here again his protagonist denies human determinism and arrogates super-human powers to himself. This attempt to wrest power for himself and to enter into combat with God is a way of destroying others to assure his own immortality (power equal to God's).

The frequency of metamorphosis in the Cantos can also be explained as the constant preoccupation that Ducasse had with the animal aspect of his being and may represent his need at times to get rid of the symbolic part of himself. By changing into the complete animal in all its monovalent function, he was temporarily able to rid himself of the self-conscious duality that plagued him. In the text, he states that he considers metamorphosis the most sublime condition because in this condition, he was able to assume totally unreflective behavior. It is only when he had to return to his human condition that duality reoccurred and with it catalepsy and lethargy.

This duality between the self which is achieved and the body which is given can also help to account for the pseudonyms employed by Ducasse. He uses Maldoror as his protagonist and Le Comte de Lautréamont as his nom de plume. Ducasse is obliterated precisely because Ducasse represents the body and biological succession. In the Cantos, he states "mon anéantissement sera complet; je ne laisserai aucune trace." He seems to be acutely aware of the dilemma faced by man with the body of an animal which decays, but one who could achieve immortality through his fictions. The use of two pseudonyms could therefore be explained as the restoration

of the missing Ducasse as the famous poet Le Comte de Lautréamont as well as his immortalization as Maldoror in literature.

When in Canto V, Ducasse speaks of his desire for complete autonomy or total control of his being, he is also protesting the deterministic aspect of human life, the physical decay to which we are all subject. Now in the case of schizophrenia--and we believe that Ducasse fits into this category of mental disorder--there is generally a strong dissociation between the mind and the body: the body becomes a terrifying problem and the only way to transcend this is to create one's own personal meanings and thereby assure personal transcendence. Because the body creates such severe problems for the schizophrenic whose symbolic self is not firmly centered in his body, the protest over his dualistic condition is pushed to the limits. It becomes according to Freud a ballooning of the self in phantasy and an attempt at utter symbolic power in the absence of normally lived physical power. Maldoror's ubiquitousness, his combat with God and his arrogation of super-human powers, such as the ability to give death with a look, are all the cultural creation of symbolic power. Ducasse was able to give shape to his megalomaniac self-inflation by creating the character of Maldoror who

demonstrated these fabulous powers. Ducasse had the very strong ego and sense of self which is identifiable as genius. Based on the insight of Wilhelm Reich in Character Analysis, Ernest Becker makes an excellent distinction between the schizophrenic and the genius:

The schizophrenic is not programmed neutrally into automatic response to social meanings, but he cannot marshal an ego response, a directive control of his experiences. His own erupting meanings cannot be given creative form. We might say because of his exaggerated helplessness he uses his symbolic inner experiences as an experiential anchor as something to lean on. He exists reflexively toward them, comes to be controlled by them instead of reshaping them and using them: the genius too is not programmed in automatic cultural meanings: but he has the resources of a strong ego, or at least a sufficient one, to give personal meanings creative form.¹

There is no doubt that Ducasse possessed a very strong ego, which enabled him to give shape and creative form to his inner meanings and his view of the universe.

¹Ibid., p. 221.

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