

**POETICS, PHILOSOPHY AND
STRUCTURE IN THE POETRY OF
NORGE**

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by

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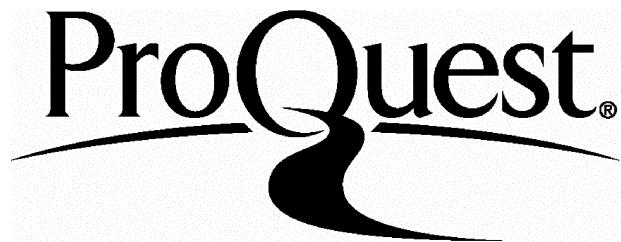
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the imagery of Norge's poetry in order to identify and analyse the writer's philosophy of art and of being. After an initial discussion of previous critical work on Norge and its failure to identify any underlying structure to the poetry, there is an analysis of Norge's poetics and how it becomes manifest through his imagery of the everyday. The poet's task, according to Norge, is to reveal to the reader the divinity which is on earth and in all things and which enables man to achieve a spiritual though not physical transcendence. There is then an exploration of how the four elements in Norge are crucial to the process of continual artistic creation. While each element represents a distinct aspect of that process (water symbolising solidity and being, earth the cyclical nature of creation, air or wind the state of becoming, and fire the effect that such becoming exerts on being), artistic creation is possible only when all four elements are present.

The next chapters consider how Norge, as well as producing his own philosophical constructs, takes as his source existing concepts and lends them new resonance and meaning in a poetic context. First, there is a discussion of how he explores two different paradigms of time: the Aristotelian, linear time of discrete units, and the pre-Socratic time of an indivisible whole which encompasses past, present and future. Then Norge's imagery of loss is analysed from the perspective of Freudian psychology, whose ideas are seen to pervade his treatment of this theme. Finally, Norge's notions of communion and humanity are shown to be grounded in the celebration of the Eucharist and to engage with its imagery.

The thesis concludes that Norge uses philosophy and structure in order to endow himself with the authority and authenticity both to inscribe himself in the literary tradition and to assert his sense of belonging to the human race.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Title page.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Table of contents.....	3
Abbreviations.....	4
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. NORGE AND THE EVERYDAY.....	23
3. NORGE AND THE ELEMENTS.....	98
4. NORGE AND TIME.....	149
5. NORGE AND LOSS.....	225
6. NORGE AND COMMUNION.....	286
7. CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR STRUCTURE.....	327
Bibliography.....	335

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in this thesis:-

JF: J. Ferlay, Norge, Marseille, Le Temps Parallèle-Editions, 1990.

NP: Norge, Poésies 1923-1988, Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

OP: Norge, Oeuvres poétiques (1923-1973), Paris, Seghers, 1978.

S: Norge, Le stupéfait, Paris, Flammarion, 1988.

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

A Summary of Previous Critical Work

Norge's life (June 2nd 1898 - October 25th 1990) and work span almost the whole of the twentieth century. He lived into his nineties and wrote more than thirty works of poetry, the last of which, Le stupéfait, was produced in his ninetieth year. Yet he remains largely an unknown figure, and his work has been analysed by only a few critics. Part of the rationale of this study is to contribute to redressing that unjust state of affairs, for his poems merit a much closer examination than has been the case hitherto. If he is known at all, it is as a poet of humorous but superficial work, or perhaps as one of many participants in the revival of Catholic values in an era of atheistic literary domination. Certainly his poetry is at times extremely humorous in content and in manner, but that does not detract from its profound gravity; and while he was, indeed, a committed Christian, his concern is more global and humanist than simply pious in a conventional sense. It is hoped that this examination of his work will at least prove that there is much more under the surface of Norge's writing than has previously been assumed.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of previous critical work on Norge is the diversity of approach. No two writers have viewed the poet in the same way, nor has there been any agreement on the fundamental characteristics of his work, except a general

consensus that his reputation as an 'amusing verbal gymnast, a trifle sentimental, egoistical, diverting'¹ was an underestimation of his worth. The sheer volume of literature that Norge produced has caused critics to reassess him, and, from a time when the reader was warned not to take him too seriously, it has become apparent that ~~there~~ exists a danger of taking him too seriously, in the sense of forgetting his innately humorous, smiling perspective.

Robert Sabatier devotes four pages to Norge in *Histoire de la Poésie Française*. Partly because it is a general history and a compendium rather than a major critical exploration, it concentrates on Norge's prodigious *curriculum vitae*, and sets him in the context of other writers instead of treating him as important enough to warrant individual, isolated treatment. For Sabatier, he has the mordant quality of a Jarry, the succulence of a Rabelais, the freedom of a Villon, the *bon vivant* outlook of a Desnos, and he is both a *voyeur* like Renard and a *voyant* like Hugo,² all of which leaves the reader more overwhelmed than enlightened, mesmerised almost by the references but unsure as to how they fuse to form a single man or poet. This is a trait not uncommon in those who write about Norge, endeavouring as they do to place this relative unknown in a more familiar context. He has a special kinship with e. e. cummings,³ an 'unabashed willingness to affirm [which] sets him apart from Ponge',⁴ a surprising way with words like Humeau,⁵ and finally his 'Cantique devant la mer' is half-way between Rimbaud and Lautréamont.⁶ Of course, such comparisons can be of great use if taken primarily as pointillist impressions and indications, for no one poet could represent all of Hugo and all of Rimbaud whilst also being a compromise between Jarry and Nietzsche.⁷ Indeed it is somewhat unseemly to bandy names about as if these poets

were monolithic unities and not, as they in fact are, subject to their own paradoxes and contradictions. What this tendency of critics of Norge does demonstrate is that, at least in the eyes of those who write about him, he has an indisputable if ultimately unlocatable place in the mainstream tradition of French poetry, neither unable to stand comparison with his peers nor such an oddity that his work is easily dismissed as an aberration. This is, furthermore, related to the importance of intertextuality in Norge, the relationship between what is directly in front of the reader and the correspondences and contrasts which bind the poetry to its antecedents and thus to its search for both newness and recuperation. Few of the scholars of Norge are even implicit about this link, but Michel Crine does tend towards such an approach in his 'Formes et Substances' chapter,⁸ and Seghers's discussion of the limits of individual expression undoubtedly touches upon intertextual concerns,⁹ while most of the other critics do appreciate that there is more to Norge than puns and his trademark 'sourire'.

The smile is, however, the major point of interest for many of the critics. It is seen as the serene answer to the metaphysical, 'Absurdist' questions posed in the poetry. Le sourire d'Icare particularly is held to be one of Norge's most important achievements, since it demonstrates man's simultaneous failure and success in the face of the infinite divinity, and his receipt of mortal and immortal truths which he accepts and acknowledges with a smile -- not a rueful, wistful smile but a smile denoting defiance and celebration. For Crine, Icarus and the poet are ultimately united in their inability to transcend.¹⁰ Rovini and Alyn view the work itself as a courageous departure for Norge, away from the 'beau mensonge' of previous illusory, formal language and towards 'le langage du coeur'.¹¹ The smile is a metaphor for the poet's discovery of his

task, which is to speak out, the culmination of his and Icarus' so-called dialectic of desire, by which Rovini means the metaphysical struggle between the attempt to transcend and the need to be on earth. The smile links the poet and Icarus to Prometheus and his pride for their synthesis of creative and destructive urges. The smile is also ambiguous because it represents both defiance of God -- the Promethean theft of the fire from Olympus -- and the act of getting closer to God.

Klinkenberg, in his essay in Remuer ciel et terre, is at his most interesting when detailing the importance of the stock images in Norge. In the chapter on 'La peur, la faim, et quelques autres morsures',¹² the essential Norgian images of hunger, darkness, walls, and biting are connected in a concise exposition of the poet's philosophy of man's estate, according to Klinkenberg. Time, distance and weight are daily limitations, along with knowledge, which is similarly finite. Thus knowledge imposes order on an otherwise orderless world. The fate of all perfection is nothingness because of the domination of finiteness. Such an overtly pessimistic appraisal of the human condition owes less to the Hegelian dialectic of the work of both Alyn and Rovini and Crine than it does to a purely Kantian view of duty and knowledge. Yet Klinkenberg identifies that this leads directly to Norge's existentialist vision, of man aware of his finite capabilities but bound constantly to create and recreate his world. As a poet, Norge uses his art as artifice, creator of the world as well as chronicler of its reality. For Klinkenberg, the importance of language is that it exteriorises perception, liberating and thus materialising the internal world of the mind.

Klinkenberg illustrates his view of Norge's existentialism with the help of various 'Contextes' at the end of his lecture, centrally Camus's Le Mythe de Sisyphe. This is used primarily for the theme of revolt in Absurdity, not within man or the world *per se* but in the confrontation of the two. Interestingly, recent critical work on Camus has insisted more on the themes of justice and morality than on the need to revolt, and this fits in well with much of what Norge has to say. Although not explicitly part of Klinkenberg's thrust, the ideas of justice and morality underlining Camus may have contributed to his choosing the Mythe in his discussion of Norge. Sisyphus is condemned to push a heavy stone up a hill, but every time the stone gets near the top of the hill it rolls back down again, and so Sisyphus must continue his labour until the end of time. For Norge, there is honour in revolt, even that which is doomed to failure on the very verge of transcendence. In Klinkenberg's opinion, it is possible to define 'la distance qui s'établit entre le texte de Camus et la sagesse de Norge qui, en même temps que son opposition, sait exprimer un scepticisme souriant' both in relation to the tragedy itself and to the grandiloquence that accompanies its discussion, thus highlighting the concern with defiance that both writers share while pointing out the differences between the two.¹³ Another of these texts called upon as comparisons is Queneau's Une Histoire modèle for its concept of history and the *Paradise Lost*, as well as the vain search for a *Paradise Regained*. Klinkenberg shows that Norge's existentialism consists in the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of a meaningless world, where revolt is noble but doomed to failure, where the very reason to exist and marvel at the universe is to experience hunger and thirst and mortality.

Opposition and mediation are important to Klinkenberg here as elsewhere. Norge is replete with opposites and apparent paradoxes -- materiality and spirituality combine in the poet's version of existentialism, nature and civilisation clash in man's image of his world, man is unavoidably mortal but seeks transcendence, and finally his endeavour is characterised by both vertical and horizontal movements. Moreover, Klinkenberg sees the reader as being of fundamental importance in this process of contrast and synthesis, for Norge's art constructs an internal rhetorical order to counter the external disorder of the universe, and so there arise constant and instantaneous intertextual links, reconciliations and mediations throughout the poetry. Only the alliance of poet and reader can accomplish the synthesis necessary to gain the utmost from Norge's work. Not all the critics attempt such a post-structuralist approach to Norge, which, it could be argued, is one of the reasons they tend to lack Klinkenberg's incisive and insightful quality as regards their critical work on Norge.

Crine on the one hand and Rovini and Alyn on the other both concentrate, in their sections on imagery, on the four elements. The direct language of Norge integrates man to his world, in the style of Michaux's 'Exorcisms'.¹⁴ By this different route they also touch upon Klinkenberg's analysis of Norge's existentialism, though Rovini prefers to call it a kind of poetic realism. This term may be a confusing addition to Norge criticism, implying as it does a poeticisation, and thus a subjectivisation, of reality rather than an actual quasi-objective creation of a new reality. Where the term 'poetic realism' does contribute is through its implicit juxtaposition of fantasy and reality, in other words the poetic, the exotic on the one hand and the everyday, the commonplace on the other. For it is true that Klinkenberg's potential danger is that it would have the

reader believe too much in Norge the philosopher and too little in Norge the poet.

After all, a poet may also be a philosopher and a philosopher may also be a poet, but there is a crucial difference in the use of language of the two. Whereas the philosopher conventionally requires his language to be precise and unambiguous, the poet needs that very ambiguity in order to infuse his words with the capacity for many layers of meaning and many possible references. To deny a philosophical element to Norge's work is to underestimate its power and value, but to insist upon it at the expense of the purely poetic is equally to neglect the richness of his language, the depth of the imagery, and the patterns and plays contained in the sound of the words.

Sabatier correctly points to Norge as a poet who, like Hugo, sees the void and darkness of life and fills it with the light of language, expressing his wonderment at the universe around him.¹⁵ Jean Tordeur's introduction in *Oeuvres poétiques (1923-1973)* attributes this to an instinctive spirituality in Norge, but there is little clear agreement about the provenance of this communion with the divine. Whereas Sabatier prefers to deal with Norge's representation of hunger and thirst in wholly positive terms, Tordeur insists that the poet's faith and hope stem from a journey through human desperation.

The article in *World Literature Today* goes so far as to call *Joie aux âmes* 'a humanist canticle asserting an unswerving faith in man's ability to transcend death and absurdity',¹⁶ while the very lack of transcendence is a cornerstone of Crine's argument about the relationship between the poet and Icarus on one hand and time and space on the other.¹⁷ It is evident, as Klinkenberg posits, that Norge is not as easy to understand as he seems. The fundamental difficulty consists in his regard to the divinity which he accepts but whose existence does not in truth affect his humanism. In other words,

Norge, like Sartre, presents a view of the world which is valid with or without the specific deity he recognises. The complexity lies in the dual reaction to God, a reaction characterised by both defiance and longing by a man both worldly and angelic. That is not to say this is the only reason why Norge's poetry is more difficult to comprehend than seemed the case previously. For instance, this very complexity of the world-view is presented in apparently simple, everyday language, a fact which creates its own paradox.

According to Daniel Leuwers in La Nouvelle Revue Française, Norge is 'Un poète qui croit aux anges mais sans angélisme'.¹⁸ Angels are specific, material embodiments of the sacred azure which Klinkenberg interestingly pinpoints as both positive and negative in its intertextual significance. Norge is an angel inasmuch as he rejects hatred and opts for love and so, in conventional terms, is a herald of God's message to humanity. He carries the burden of the gravity that ties the human spirit to the earth, but it is a burden that angels too must know. René Jacquelin, also in La Nouvelle Revue Française, refers in similar terms to the use of the metaphor of the fly in Le stupéfait.¹⁹ This creature is a perfect embodiment for Jacquelin of the being and art of Norge, in whom love and melancholy, angst and weightlessness dance together. The angel and the fly are envied for their capacity, in stark contrast to Icarus, to venture into and become part of the infinite void which surrounds men. They are both the epitome of and the barrier to the divine which man cannot touch. Yet for Norge this is true without the usual attendant 'angélisme' of which Leuwers writes -- the ethereal, immaculate essence of angels is anathema to Norge. He is concerned with what they

do, whom they represent, and thus they are as real as the mortals who inhabit the visible world and who search for the enlightenment angels appear to offer.

The act of creation is a crucial aspect of Norge's writing, and one which is analysed by most critics. The enlightenment sought by man can be found through language. To write is to create a world as well as to describe it. For Rovini and Alyn, this manifests itself in the spiritual unity that exists between the poet and his world.²⁰ For both the poet and his surrounding universe take many diverse forms, all the time achieving points of contact. The paradox is that spirituality transcends language, yet Norge's poetry is deeply grounded in what language is and what it can do. As with Mallarmé, Norge's search is for a language as real as reality itself, and his 'nostalgie' is to integrate imagination and truth.²¹ Because time is one of the constraints acting upon man, Norge endeavours constantly to create 'une durée qui dure',²² in other words an act of defiance against and communion with the immortal, unconstrained world. Rovini and Alyn associate this with the *Ut pictura poesis* argument, and the reduction of distance between subject and object to zero. This theory relies heavily on the spoken nature of Norge's poetry; it is speaking and not writing which is the poet's destiny, for his is an active, communicative task to imbue the darkness with light. Thus the idea of creating permanence is more than simply putting pen to paper. It is rather to construct a world.

An opposition is established by Rovini and Alyn between Gautier and his perfect world of poetic beauty and Norge's plunge into the Absurd to build a truthful universe which will stake its own claim to a more genuine and lasting beauty.²³

Crine also presents the poet's creative act as a banishment of darkness, but is more concerned with language's role in satisfying man's internal void. He gains grace, or frees the grace and honour locked inside him, by his creation of a world that will help him to acknowledge the reality of his earthbound ties. Crine looks closely at Remuer ciel et terre and discovers therein direct language and immediacy of contact which by their very creative force turn man's negative limits into positive images.²⁴ Death is followed by ascension, time has musical qualities, and existential love erupts into an orgiastic assertion of the present. This viewpoint has less to do with the creation of a new universe than it does with an acceptance of the existing one, albeit with an attempt to change it by writing about it. Nevertheless the energy of poetic inspiration is crucial to both notions. One of Klinkenberg's 'Contextes' is Le Quart Livre of Rabelais, used for its manipulation of language as a creative force.²⁵ Norge's language is, for Crine, to be taken at face value, neither the reductivist tool of previous Norge scholars, who sought only puns and verbal dexterity, nor the means to the reconstructionist model presented by Rovini and Alyn but instead the representation of that flight from the Absurd towards a transcendence which man finds so elusive.²⁶

There has been little written about Norge's own life and how it affected his poetry. The following is a brief summary of what biographical references there are. Most critics mention his Jesuit upbringing and the Huguenot ancestry, and the *grenier* he formed in Brussels in which he revelled in the company of other writers while externally remaining the perfect bourgeois. The interview in Le Figaro littéraire with the poet in 1962, conducted by Jean Chalon, is an exception because it deals with Norge's own recollections. He called his time in Brussels an exile, often went to Wallonie for

inspiration, and recalls with fondness his 'condisciple' Michaux, whom he says he always knew would be a poet.²⁷ Jean Tordeur in Oeuvres poétiques comments that the work itself is full of anecdotal references and *récits*, and refers to Norge's home in Provence, where he says antiques are collected and traded just as the words in his poems.²⁸ He is a collector of language and memories and is an eavesdropper on the everyday. This is presented as proof that Norge is spiritually and intellectually 'au monde'.²⁹ Tordeur charts the development of the man into a poet, his material changing gradually until the 1940s, from when he centred more and more on 'le sourire'. The climax of 'cette longue conquête de soi en poésie'³⁰ is cited as Joie aux âmes, published in 1941. This is clearly a far more personal journey than that documented by other critics, although Joie aux âmes is universally accepted as crucial in the overall corpus, not least by Norge himself.³¹ Crine is more typical when he refers to each page of Norge's poetry as 'un pas de plus conquis sur le néant',³² thus placing his evolution as a writer in a more universal, less personal context. His life is a metaphor for the cathartic struggle of existential humanity, not simply a single artist's journey of discovery.

Jacques Ferlay is the one writer who concentrates much more than any other on Norge's life, indeed his is a very personal exploration, by one poet observing another, of the subject's personal world. It is above all an extremely affectionate, anecdotal view of the poet, and the analysis which the author does concentrates on 'le sourire' and the 'cosmogonie du bonheur'.³³ He writes that Le sourire d'Icare is not only Norge's best work but 'le meilleur poème de son siècle. L'un des plus poignants et interrogateurs, en tout cas'.³⁴ The book contains a fascinating interview with Norge

and his wife, Denise Perrier, in which Norge laments contemporary poetry's lack of music and rhythm.³⁵ The contents of this interview and other critical works will be referred to selectively in the main part of this thesis. The essential point is that the affection and esteem in which Ferlay the man holds Norge tends to preclude a more detached and objective appreciation of his work, although Ferlay does, in his defence, make no pretence(as) to any such disinterested objectivity.

An uncritical reverence of almost sycophantic proportions has characterised analysis of Norge. This helps to explain the wide variety of poets held up as points of comparison, as if mention of Hugo, Rimbaud and other poets in reference to Norge's work implies his meriting inclusion in a putative roll of honour of French poetry. Notwithstanding the admiration of the few who have written on Norge, there is a risk that this apparently unconditional reverence of Norge will lead to research whose primary intention is a negative one, namely to prove him unworthy of such acclaim and thus in some way to remove him from the pedestal others have created for him. The facts that he lived to a venerable age and that he produced a very large quantity of poetry have perhaps also deterred critics from offering a more rigorous and detailed judgment of the highs and, more especially, the comparative lows of his *oeuvre*. Undoubtedly his only recent death has further contributed to an unwillingness to come to a more critical conclusion as to his lasting importance, his legacy. It would, however, be a mistake to be too severe towards Gaspar, Tordeur, Ferlay, Rovini *et al*, because at the very least they have brought Norge to the attention of a wider readership, and in any case one which would otherwise have seen him merely as an amusing but otherwise superficial writer.

Norge: Philosophy Through Poetry

This thesis will concentrate on the ways in which Norge explores metaphysical and poetic ideas through his creative work. From the very outset, certain points need to be made. The first is that Norge is a lyric poet and not a philosopher. That means that he echoes Mallarmé's comment to Degas when the latter told him he wanted to write poetry because he had so many good ideas: 'Ce n'est point avec les idées que l'on fait les vers. C'est avec les mots'.³⁶ This echoes Norge's own thoughts, expressed in the 'Glose' to La langue verte:

Mettez un peu d'ordre dans vos idées, insiste un aimable magister. Je veux bien, mais sur quelles mesures? Et pour habiller qui ce vêtement d'idées? Les idées, les mots n'en ont pas tant. Les mots qui ont des idées sont des mots de cuistres. Ou plutôt, les idées, ça leur vient comme au pommier la pomme. Les aventures du langage. (OP, p. 252)

And again, in a piece entitled 'La poésie' from Les quatre vérités, the would-be poet's failing is that he apparently has more ideas than words:

Je dis que les temps...
Je dis que les coeurs...
Je dis que les vents...
Je dis que les cieux...
-- Mais, dis-le, dis-le,
Dis-le, nom de Dieu!
-- Je dis que les hommes...
...Ciel, j'allais tout dire
Et me voilà mort. (OP, p. 376)

The point is that words must come first, and then ideas can live and grow through those words. An idea that is inexpressible is no idea at all, not only because that idea needs to be communicated verbally from one person to another, but also because the essence of an idea consists precisely in its verability. In Heideggerean terms, the idea is the *aletheia*, that is, the revealing of beings, while the words of poetry are the *techne*, that is, the bringing into unconcealment of what was previously concealed.³⁷ Without the words to convey an idea, the idea itself is as lifeless as the would-be poet at the end of 'La poésie'. In The Origin of The Work of Art, Heidegger relates art to the unconcealing of truth. The word *techne*, meaning 'art' or 'craft', does not imply creation so much as revelation.³⁸ If ideas are the truth that must be brought forth or unconcealed, then they have a vital part to play in art, but they cannot exist outside the art which articulates them.

Further, ideas are transient, immaterial, until they have been put into words. And, once expressed verbally, the fact that their conduit is words means that whoever receives the idea adjusts its significance depending on his own reading of the words used. The resonance of a particular word varies from writer to one reader to another reader. This is a source of difficulty for the philosopher, for whom the idea predominates over the word, but for a poet like Norge, for whom the word is paramount and the idea secondary, it is what justifies poetry and ensures it is reborn every time a new reader arrives.

Norge's tools are the same words that a philosopher uses, but the difference is that he seeks out ambiguity and resonance and the potential on the reader's part for

independent interpretation, whereas a philosopher's prime motivation is for clarity and logic. That does not preclude philosophers from using figural language. Indeed, many of the concepts to which Norge would subscribe can be found in, for example, Heraclitus, whose extant work is replete with imagery, or in Bergson, whose fluid and literary style is precisely one reason why many shun his writing as being anti-philosophical in the sense that it allows literary interpretation. The major twentieth-century philosophical preoccupation, although it has its roots long before then, is how language conveys or does not convey precise meaning, and whether language serves the needs of communication or rather defines them. The desire for specificity in language has always provoked philosophers to seek to define their terms precisely, and, if needs be, to neologise in order that the language is the servant and not the master of their ideas.

Thus Norge the poet approaches ideas from a different perspective. He does not strive for a language of accuracy and precision; indeed he revels in the ability of language to mean more than even the writer intends. What this means is that the philosophical concepts explored in his poetry are not his own, but are his version of the work of others. Nor are they intellectually or ontologically difficult: their difficulty lies in the manifold interpretations possible from the ambiguous language he uses. The result is that he invests old notions with a new life, gained through their existence in a new, figural context. For instance, his imagery of time covers much of the ground examined by, say, Aristotle and Bergson and Heraclitus and Husserl and Heidegger, but since his means is lyrical poetry he illustrates and connotes and speculates rather than explaining logically.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore Norge's poetics, through his imagery of the everyday. The poet and his words can be seen as divine, or as partaking of the divine, since he infuses commonplace things with God's presence. He is the *voyant* whose task is to transcend the visible world. The second chapter will examine the poet's imagery of the four elements, paying particular attention to the ^{metaphorical} ~~metaphoric~~ role of the elements in the creation of the circumstances whereby art may arise. The third section will treat his imagery of time, and how it illustrates the two main paradigms of time, the Aristotelian linear view, and the pre-Socratic model of all time in existence and interconnected at once. The fourth section will explore Norge's treatment of the theme of loss and reparation, from a psychoanalytical point of view. The essential thrust will be that man, faced with the loss of authority and control as well as personal loss, represses the knowledge of such loss in accordance with the pleasure principle. The fifth chapter will analyse, with reference primarily to Les quatre vérités, Norge's poetic notion of Communion, and its connection with the Christian Sacrament. Finally, the conclusion will seek to demonstrate that Norge's investigation through poetry of philosophical ideas has at its heart the need to inform himself, his poetry and the universe he creates in his writing with an authority and a structure that would otherwise be lacking. He takes the inherent structural quality of philosophy and uses it to invest his poetry, which is superficially apparently amorphous and elusive, with a structure of its own.

Although Norge is hardly unique inasmuch as a major subject of the work of any writer, even the most hermetic of poets, must be man's place in his world, the

metaphysical concepts seen in Norge, and most especially the confluence of spirituality and secularity in his writing, make him ideally suited for such an approach. The intention is not to exclude other points of entry into Norge's poetry. On the contrary, it is hoped that this thesis will, if anything, serve to refute those who have dismissed Norge as unimportant and superficial, and demonstrate that he is, above all, a poet who merits closer reading than that which has traditionally been afforded him hitherto. To this end, many of the more important works will be discussed separately in more than one chapter, each time from a different perspective, in order to demonstrate that in Norge's poetry there is a multi-layered quality and a wealth of possible interpretations which those who insist on its superficiality and simplicity would deny.

¹ World Literature Today, Norman, Oklahoma, winter 1980 issue, p. 71.

² R. Sabatier, Histoire de la Poésie Française -- La Poésie dans le vingtième siècle, III: Métamorphoses et Modernité, Paris, Albin Michel, 1988, p. 246. *du*

³ World Literature Today, op. cit.

⁴ ibid.

⁵ Histoire de la Poésie Française, op. cit., p. 271.

⁶ M. Crine, Norge, Brussels, Labor, 1986, p. 34.

⁷ Histoire de la Poésie Française, op. cit., p. 247.

⁸ Norge, op. cit., pp. 26-41.

⁹ Histoire de la Poésie Française, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁰ Norge, op. cit., p. 20.

¹¹ R. Rovini and M. Alyn, Poètes d'aujourd'hui: Norge, Paris, Seghers, 1983, p. 41.

¹² Norge. Remuer ciel et terre, Brussels, Labor, 1985, pp. 232-238.

¹³ ibid., p. 259.

¹⁴ Poètes d'aujourd'hui: Norge, op. cit., p. 78.

¹⁵ Histoire de la Poésie Française, op. cit., p. 246.

¹⁶ World Literature Today, op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁷ Norge, op. cit., pp. 20/21.

¹⁸ La Nouvelle Revue Française, Paris, October 1985 issue, p. 83, containing a review by Leuwers of Les coq-à-l'âne.

¹⁹ La Nouvelle Revue Française, Paris, July/August 1988 issue, p. 208, with a review by Jacquelin of Le stupefait.

²⁰ Poètes d'aujourd'hui: Norge, op. cit., p. 77.

²¹ ibid., p. 76.

²² ibid., p. 53.

²³ ibid., p. 71.

²⁴ Norge, op. cit., pp. 55/56.

²⁵ Remuer ciel et terre, op. cit., p. 263.

²⁶ Norge, op. cit., p. 19.

²⁷ Le Figaro littéraire, Paris, March 31 1962, p. 3. *Antiquaire* et poète Géo Norge fait le bilan de ses Quatre Vérités, article by Jean Chalon.

²⁸ Norge. Oeuvres poétiques (1923-1973), Paris, Seghers, 1978, p. V.

²⁹ ibid., p. VII.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. XII.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. XIII.

³² Norge, op. cit., p. 14.

³³ J. Ferlay, Norge, Marseille, Le Temps Parallèle-Editions, 1990, p. 27.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 105.

³⁶ P. Valéry, Oeuvres, Paris, Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957, p. 1324.

³⁷ M. Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art, translated by Vittorio Klostermann, in Basic Writings, San Francisco, Harper and Collins, 1977, p. 180.

³⁸ *ibid.*

Chapter Two: NORGE AND THE EVERYDAY

In defining what is meant by the 'everyday' or 'commonplace' as opposed to what is strange, exotic or mysterious, it is necessary to go to the very heart of the poet's task. Whereas prose writing is often, although not exclusively, intended to clarify, to explain, to rationalise the world and man's place in it, poetry relies upon the creation of ambiguity and inexplicability, that which cannot be reduced to prosaic terms and forms. The poet must broaden, not narrow, the reader's understanding and perception by making him aware of a greater range of possibility; in other words the reader should be led beyond his normal way of seeing himself and his universe, or even transported to a different universe entirely. This is not simply a matter of the imagery the poet employs, but the words themselves, which the poet places in unusual contexts, or to which he gives new layers of meaning and new nuances.¹ Simultaneity is also crucial in this regard, because it is the fact that these new meanings and possibilities occur at the same time which provides the ambiguity in a word or an image.² Therefore, the poet's craft is to expand the potential of language and meaning, to remove it from its everyday usage. In so doing, he engenders in the reader the same sensation, of displacement and of expansion of potential. And because a poet like Norge uses an essentially quotidian lexicon, such a sensation is made more surprising, and therefore more effective, than it would be if a more conventionally 'poetic' level of language and register were employed. The fact that Norge's poems are full of supposedly commonplace words in a way lures the reader into believing that the world within his

poetry is similarly commonplace, and so the feeling of displacement on the reader's part is all the greater.

When the reader is taken on a journey to a realm outside of his everyday experience, the danger is that he will be so unable to contextualise or relate to what he now perceives that he will reject the poetry which brought about his displacement. It will fit so uncomfortably with his sense of reality that it will have no meaning to him, and he will be unable to assimilate the truth of the poet's writing, that is to say the universal logic of emotion, existence and beauty which transcends individual circumstances and is true and authentic everywhere. The reader will be so bamboozled by the exoticism of the moment that its underlying correspondences with what he knows well will be lost to him. The poet therefore has to retain some link with the everyday, even when enticing the reader away from it. One way that Norge achieves this is the commonplace language already referred to. Having been shown to contain mystery and ambiguity previously hidden from the reader, and thus being precisely what opens up the new poetic world to him, this language also and simultaneously, by its very familiarity, keeps him attached to his known, usual sphere of existence. The language used thereby creates a distance from, and a closeness to, the world with which the reader is normally acquainted. It is a two-way process.

So the poet employs an everyday lexicon which, at one and the same time, connects and disconnects the reader to and from his familiar environment. In this situation the 'exotic' is essentially the poetic world into which the reader is drawn. It is an aesthetic far more than a geographical exoticism, in other words the poetic realm need not be set

in a far-away country merely to create the effect of unusualness. That is not to say that Norge does not write poetry using distant lands as his setting. But more often than not his point is that, just as familiar language and objects can lead to new perceptions, so, conversely, exotic locations can contain much that is equally true at home. Le sourire d'Icare, for instance, is naturally set on Crete and in the Aegean Sea, but its metaphysical authenticity is not confined to that area. In that example, the geographical distance is, in any case, countered by the reader's assumed familiarity with the legend of Icarus, and Norge takes this well-known myth as his starting-point in order to give it a new significance, and so displace it from its ~~cliché status~~ ^{status as cliché}.

Part of Norge's concern with the reciprocal connection between the everyday and the exotic or poetic lies in his Christianity. If he imbues the seemingly banal, the common-or-garden, with newness and poetry, if he therefore instils what is mundane and inanimate with aesthetic presence, he lends it a spirituality, a divinity, which it otherwise would not have. Norge's world is quasi-pantheistic. It is a mystical domain where there is divinity in all things, even the humblest, because that is a major function of his poetry, to show God's creation to his reader in an unusual, unfamiliar light, in order to render it even more wondrous and special. If his only task was to highlight exactly how run-of-the-mill the everyday world is, he would be both adding nothing new to the reader's perception of that world and denying the importance of its spiritual aspect.

This discussion will therefore treat Norge's and the reader's presence simultaneously in the everyday, non-poetic world and the exotic, poetic world. And this can be

illustrated initially by the poet's choosing of a pseudonym, as well as the pseudonym itself. The first question that Jacques Ferlay asks Norge in his interview concerns this strange word, which is in reality neither a Christian name nor a surname:

JF: Pourquoi Norge, comme un étandard de Neige?

Norge: Tout simplement parce que j'ai compris que la poésie ne nourrissait pas son homme et qu'il me fallut entrer résolument dans les affaires industrielles et commerciales. Ce fut dans l'industrie lainière. J'ai bien gagné ma vie et cela m'a beaucoup intéressé. Mais il n'était pas souhaitable qu'on sache que j'exerçais ce genre d'activité. La Poésie c'eût été mortel pour ma réputation commerciale et je dus masquer mon nom qui est Georges Mognin. J'ai pris Norge car ce nom me charmait dans ma collection de timbres-poste où c'est le nom de la Norvège. [...] C'est aussi une contraction d'éléments de mon nom. (JF, p. 99)

The poet is often characterised as an outcast from society, not least by Norge himself.³

As such, he is able to view society in a clear way, unfettered by the normal ties that bind a person to his class, his milieu. He is the visionary, who brings into unconcealedness that which is hidden from those who belong fully to the generality of men. He is the epitome of the exotic, rejecting orthodoxy and often rejected by that orthodoxy as a dangerous, de-stabilising influence. And yet Norge explains how he, a level-headed bourgeois, had to make a living somehow and quickly realised that poetry would not be lucrative enough. Furthermore, the knowledge of his artistic inclinations on the part of his clients would have caused his trade to suffer. Faced with the choice of whether to be open about his work, and thus be poorer, or whether to hide it, and so flourish in business, his decision was simple and financially based. This poet appears the antithesis of a Byron or a Rimbaud. His poetry is almost a hobby, perhaps on the lines of the stamp-collecting which delivered up to him the word that became his *nom de plume*.

Yet the whole truth is more intriguing, and sheds a more favourable light on Norge.

The name he chooses, being the Norwegian word for Norway, denotes northernness, the same North European bourgeoisie of Thomas Mann. In Tonio Kröger, for instance, the eponymous character has a South European mother, which is why he is christened Tonio, and a North European father, hence his German family name. His name is a symbol of the two extremes he inherited, the northern middle-class respectability and the Bohemian artistic side, and he is called either Tonio or Kröger analogous to the dominance exerted by either extreme at any one time. Only at the end, when he has reconciled these two polar influences, can he feel comfortable with his full name. For Norge, his name is not just plucked randomly from a stamp album because the sound is pleasing. It represents his acknowledgement that, as poet not trader, he nevertheless must pay tribute to the northern middle-class environment which bred him. In other words, even in the poetic world which is completely separate from his commercial one, he does not entirely eschew his bourgeois provenance, ironically the provenance which caused him to change his name in the first place. Perhaps the new name is a badge of guilt commemorating forever his decision to hide his poetry behind a middle-class façade. Eventually he would move from Brussels to the south of France and become a naturalised Frenchman, but the pseudonym would always ensure that Mann's north-south divide, between conventional respectability and Bohemian art, would continue, at least in name if no longer in fact. Thus, Norge sought not to hide his poetry with his *nom de plume* but, by the very northernness of the word, to link his poetry with his environment, his society.

A feature of Norge's work is his use of names, which will be discussed in greater detail later. His choice of his own name cannot be divorced from that process. So, in addition to the actual balance of society and art, of bourgeois and Bohemian in his name, there is an element of his relationship with the reader, and the reaction he intends the reader of a poem to have on seeing the name of the author. No doubt he would stand out by having only one name instead of two, and so attract attention that way. In fact he did initially call himself Georges Norge, thereby retaining his first name, but this sounded comical, presumably because of the rhyme, and so his Christian name was dropped. For him to make a conscious decision about adopting a name attractive to the reader suggests both that, even in the realm of art, the tradesman is still present, trying to pull in the clientèle; and also that his poetry is not a solipsistic self-examination, oblivious to any reader, but must on the contrary include the reader, even to the extent of advertising his specialness by his name.

From his very first published collection, 27 poèmes incertains, Norge approaches the dynamic of the exotic/commonplace conflict. In 'Poétique', whose title indicates it is a preliminary exploration into the nature of poetry, history lies side by side with mythology, reality with apparent unreality:

Icare et Prométhée
ont le nimbe
des anges rebelles:

mais c'est Orville Wright,
leur dernier petit-fils
qui le premier souleva
jusqu'à douze cents mètres
l'étendard blanc de la révolte... (OP, pp. 12/13)

By including Icarus and Prometheus in the same sentence as one of the Wright brothers, the poet accepts the historicity of the former and simultaneously elevates the latter to the status of myth for his extraordinary feat. The poet is not a historian, and it is the innate truth behind the experiences of both sorts of legendary figure that is of primary interest. Yet he humorously considers himself a lay genealogist inasmuch as he calls Icarus and Prometheus the ancestors of Orville Wright. This has the same, albeit here ironic, purpose as the dynastic line mentioned in the Bible, where the intent is to imbue the ancestors of Adam and Eve with divinity and authority.⁴ Clearly the poet's implication in 'Poétique' is that they share the same rebellious, adventurous spirit more than the same genes. Because Wright is only their grandson, the actual chronological gap of thousands of years is narrowed to two generations. For Norge this spirit of rebellion, which has borne fruit at last, is a unifying trend in humanity, and the time difference is irrelevant. After all, from myth to twentieth century the object of human rebellion is the same -- the gravity which God creates to bind men to the earth and which differentiates them from the angels. Prometheus was a demigod but, for stealing fire from the gods and returning it to earth, was punished by being tied to a rock and so is, despite his immortality, more terrestrial than heavenly. Icarus too tried to defy the gods by flying and, in failing, he too succumbed to gravity. Only Wright, in a purely clinical way -- symbolised by the exact measurement of altitude given -- succeeded. Norge transforms his flight into a spiritual conquest as well as a scientific one. Moreover, the juxtaposition by Norge of pagan heroes with Christian angels indicates that pre-Christian myth lies within the realm of God's truth, which exists beyond time.⁵ On the other hand, Norge mentions the exact distance that man is nearer to God than before, the two hundred metres to which the flag of revolt is raised. So

Norge combines what is scientific and modern and physical with what is mythological and divine and ancient. The classical heroes are surrounded by a halo, whereas Wright is enclosed in his flying machine, but the image is ultimately the same whether it is a matter of ethereal light or earthly metal.

That is not to say that contemporary society is entirely scientific, that it does not have its own mythology. The beginning of the poem refers to legendary heroism of a different sort:

Il faut bondir
comme Douglas Fairbanks
de l'une à l'autre bord
de l'abîme. (OP, pp. 12/13)

Hollywood provides modern man with his own role-models and heroes and myths, and goes to extraordinary lengths to do so. From the title of the poem, 'Poétique', it is evident that Norge is examining what makes a man outstanding, heroic, able to live on even after his act is finished. For Fairbanks it is celluloid that preserves his great feats, for previous great men the oral and written legends about them. For Norge it must be his poetry which gives him immortality. He seeks out modern-day greatness, transcendence from the everyday, and realises it exists now just as much as in ancient times.

Norge's first collection consists essentially in work like 'Poétique' that explores the tension and reconciliation between the poetic and the non-poetic, seeking a role for the

aspiring poet in this process. In 'Un échelon plus haut', the 'belle Inventeuse' dances her way to an existence beyond earthbound humanity:

Voilà: tu n'es plus
tout à fait un être en chair.

Mais déjà quelque chose
entre la femme et l'ange. (OP, p. 15)

Dance causes a terrestrial body to glide and assume new, unusual shapes, and so, albeit temporarily, break free from the gravity that conquered Prometheus and Icarus. Young and 'incertain' as the poet is in this collection, he hopes that his creativity will someday be able similarly to achieve an otherworldly, superhuman quality:

Ton corps ne pèse plus,
il flotte.

Tes gestes ne parlent plus,
ils chantent. (OP, p. 15)

The artist, whether a dancer or a pilot or a movie star, does something more than express himself through his creativity; he becomes that which he has created, he is his creation. The image of a dancer in 'Un échelon plus haut' is stronger in that respect than that of a pilot like Orville Wright, because the latter needs a medium through which to create -- his plane -- just as the poet needs his words, whereas a dancer only uses her own body. When she represents otherworldliness she becomes it, physically moving herself out of the non-poetic, the commonplace, into a new existence, a new configuration. Norge seeks a way in his poetry to be, rather than produce, his art.

To do this, like the dancer whose movements cease to 'speak' and instead now 'sing', the poet must reach an artistic 'échelon plus haut'. For, in 'Idylle', he is aware that he remains hitherto a non-poet in the sense that he is not yet a visionary. He still lives in a physical world and strives to see with more than just his eyes:

Miroirs stridents
les yeux de l'enfant
et son âme
béante aux reflets.

Plus tard,
on fait de grandes études
pour apprendre
à devenir aveugle. (OP, p. 21)

The powerful initial image combines mirror with reflection, but it is the soul not the eyes of the child which are receptive. The 'plus tard' may refer to a time when such childlike receptiveness is lost, when the poet's only sight is a visual, light-sensitive faculty. If eyesight has been developed at the expense of 'soul sight' in adulthood, it is necessary for the poet to become blind and thus restore the direct link between perception and soul. After all, inner vision is the ability which distinguishes the artist from the non-artist, and that is precisely what the poet is endeavouring to become, an artist who can see further than the commonplace.⁶ The fact that it takes 'de grandes études' to achieve blindness suggests the kind of rigorous, structured learning which the child would have undertaken in his formative years, and implies that so-called civilised society, with its institutionalised learning, takes an important element of wonderment and naivety away from its citizens. As the would-be visionary, the poet needs to cast off the restrictive mantle of civilisation and regain his 'âme béante', but to do so he knows no other way than the 'grandes études' instilled in him by that same

civilisation. He cannot as yet conjure up instinctively the art of inner vision, of unconcealment.

His desire is not solely an artistic one. For the poet revelation is a religious act as well, and to write of the apparently invisible truth of the soul is to reveal God's presence:

Ah! Seigneur, rendez-nous
le don d'étonnement
et nous exalterons le chef-d'oeuvre
de vos sept jours!

Nos yeux sont des noix hermétiques
qu'il faut casser
pour les ouvrir
à l'enthousiasme des images. (OP, p. 21)

God's creation of the universe begins with the separation of light from darkness, day from night, and the poet prays for a similar act towards himself. In turn he will be able to tell light from darkness though his eyes must in a way be mutilated first. Then his 'âme bâante' can gape in wonderment and amazement as it did when he was a child. The image of enforced blindness will recur in 'Les pensées interdites' from Les Oignons (OP, p. 326), but in that case the act was a brutal means of concealing the truth, whereas here it has the opposite effect. 27 Poèmes incertains witnesses Norge's search for the means by which a poetic level can be attained in a world of visual emptiness.

In Plusieurs malentendus suivis de La double vue, Norge's next work, he takes up this theme of finding the poetic in the everyday, but his style is more impressionistic than it is in 27 poèmes incertains. The first piece, 'Réveil', depicts a re-awakening into normal consciousness in a mood of drift and uncertainty:

Le petit jour poreux
qui effle,
réhabite
nos vitreuses pensées [...]

Et chacun trouve naturel
de n'être pas devenu
un autre. (OP, pp. 27/28)

It is as if the sleeping poet is more susceptible to the kind of eyes-closed vision which he is seeking, but, when awake, his senses, almost against his will, re-establish their contact with normality. The period between sleeping and waking is when poetic potential mingles with non-poetic frustration. Unlike the man in Kafka's Die Verwandlung who wakes up to find himself turned into an insect, and who then is able to perceive the world from a different viewpoint and with an enhanced level of awareness, the poet wakes up in the same physical state as when he went to sleep.⁷ He has not gained a new, visionary quality to his consciousness, nor is this anything surprising according to the masses, but for him it is a deep disappointment. He is unable as yet to echo Rimbaud's 'JE est un autre',⁸ he is confined to his non-poetic perspective.

The same process recurs in 'Lendemain', only this time the excesses of the night before are referred to:

Petit matin pensif et nauséieux.
Réveil prostre des fausses pâmoisons
et facile mélancolie d'après-boire. (OP, p. 30)

Perhaps Norge is trying to invoke the drunkenness of Rimbaud's 'Le bateau ivre',⁹ the journey of a 'voyant' to an exotic universe, but, rueful and almost ashamed at his failure to transcend the commonplace, he dismisses his swoons as false and his potentially poetic state of melancholy as easy. In other words his attempts to be a poet, to reach a heightened level through drink, are inauthentic and futile. All he feels the next morning is nausea. He is too firmly connected with his physical self, and the physical world around him:

Or, la vie perdure, ponctuelle
et multiple
comme l'horloge de Strasbourg.

Et les premiers tramways
sonnaillent le silence. (OP, p. 30)

His silence, an absence of poetic inspiration but also a strong feeling of estrangement, displacement as yet unarticulated, is mirrored in the silence outside, where a normal day is beginning. His feeling is the 'Désharmonie' of another poem in the collection:

Ce soir ne trouve pas les accords parallèles.
Les roues dentées se déboitent
Les bielles girent à vide.
Point mort.
Faux départ. [...]
Nous prenons conscience qu'il
devrait un peu pleuvoir -- par détente.
Trottoir, trottoir, trottoir, trottoir.
Ah! pas mourir:
Vomir. (OP, p. 34)

Norge's reference points are situated in the concrete world, machines, pavements, but his mind is apart, aloof, and, in the act of ~~vomiting~~^{vomiting}, unable to control his body. He

wishes that he could spew out some inner vision rather than the contents of his stomach, but as yet his creativity and productivity are non-artistic. He is just as much a machine as the one with the 'roues dentées' and the 'bielles', and he feels its same dislocation. Having to walk on the seemingly never-ending pavement he performs a machine-like act and is so much the automaton he strives to outgrow through art. Yet he cannot, for there is no mechanical way to achieve a poetic, extraphysical state.

Norge appears to accept that he must undergo the physical pain and convulsions that ~~vomiting~~ ~~vomiting~~ entails in order to create, but hitherto his displacement and estrangement have not produced transcendent art, merely malaise and discomfort. 'Spéculatif' examines his condition, to see if he has progressed on the road to becoming a poetic visionary:

Mes doigts glacés de pétrir l'air cave
se dorlotent aux moites replis de ton ventre
comme dans un gant tiède.

Des forces en moi s'arc-boutent
et je touche la gravitation atomique des corps.

Sensations, danseuses de corde
sur le fil hasardeux des mémoires.

J'ouvre la fenêtre
pour voir si le monde
s'est modifié.

Mais c'est le même gazon noir... (OP, pp. 39/40)

It is noticeable how many physical forces play on the poet, who experiences coldness, wetness, weight, as well as the strong but ambiguous pull of memory. But his psychic powers are unaltered, and the external world is similarly unchanged. His action has

been one of viewing himself in the mirror, in order to attain a more precise understanding of his own being. For a moment he is lost in stillness, but when he looks outside there is no trace that any transformation has occurred as a result of his meditation. If he is to create, transcend, transform, he must suffer the pain so vividly expressed in 'Madrigal', where 'mes mots sont en vitres cassées / et je m'y coupe les doigts' (OP, p. 35).

At this point in his struggle against the weight of the everyday, against the inability to become a 'voyant' and achieve a deeper perception, Norge plays a kind of game with the reader. He describes his lack of success in transcending through poetry, yet the means by which he accounts for his failure is the very poetry which he claims he cannot produce. Therefore, the reader must experience the visionary quality of his work, the fact that the poet sees his situation clearly, in order to find out how unvisionary the poet actually is, or pretends to be. It could be that Norge is simply revisiting his past, so exploring a time when he could only aspire to poetry. Yet one of the most powerful aspects of his work at this time is its immediacy, its concentration on the present. Moreover, his development in later writing to a more assured command of the poetic Muse implies that this early stage of his creative life was indeed one of struggle, doubt, and uncertainty. In setting his work firmly in the context of the artist's striving for transcendence, Norge views his poetry as descending directly from that of Baudelaire and Rimbaud and all his other antecedents who wrote primarily about the act of poetic creation. He sets the reader the problem of either accepting his work at the superficial level, of detailing a man failing to be a poet, or judging him on the means by which he

describes this failure, that is, his poetry itself; but either way he leaves the reader in no doubt as to his desire to achieve a literature whose principal subject is its own creation.

The exotic, the otherworldly, which Norge seeks is not to be found in the outside world. That is all as normal, as unchanged, as ever. His task must be to release the exotic within him and only then imbue everyday objects with it, thereby bringing into unconcealedness their true essence. In Avenue du ciel, the poet reaches out far more than before to the world of nature for these objects. This is most striking in 'XI', in which the reader is seduced by the serenity and simplicity of tone only to be surprised by the violence and complexity of the imagery:

L'immortalité d'un oiseau
donne encore sa chanson.
Au milieu des bois fermés
un très long silence devient
un fruit jaune et parfumé.

Si tu manges cette pomme
un enfant meurt à Zanzibar.
Au Cap-Vert un bateau sombre
si je coupe ce roseau.
Des mains, des bras oubliés
prennent racine dans l'ombre
et font signe à la pensée
effilée d'un peuplier.

Il faut beaucoup d'humilité
pour apercevoir ces choses. (OP, pp. 53/54)

It is not so much the physicality of natural things that interests Norge as their inner resonance and significance. The song emanates from the immortality of a bird, not from the bird itself.¹⁰ The apple has obvious echoes of the Garden of Eden in its power to bring about mortality and suffering to the farthest corners of the earth. Norge

discovers that, individually, the apple and the bird and the flowers have a latent, invisible force. Their mysteries are unseen, hidden behind their outward mundaneness and apparent simplicity. The last lines suggest the poet's new-found capacity to go beneath the surface, and interestingly he attributes this to humility. By adopting the same humble, simple status as the apple he is able to connect his inner visionary power with its similarly hidden destructive power. By assuming a position of superiority over nature he would have missed this connection. The arms and hands are discreet, not showy, and they insinuate themselves into the darkness of the ground. In this way they take root like the apple tree and attain a closer understanding of nature. Man's sensibilities are more attuned to those of the natural world and he can correspond with it. Gone is the separation that the poet felt when looking through his window at the unaltered world of 'Spéculatif'. At that stage the 'pensée effilée d'un peuplier' would be entirely inaccessible. The poet also implies a deeper link between man and nature: the life-cycle. As the child dies, so roots symbolise birth and growth. Man's involvement in this process, as a fundamental but not controlling element, illustrates his subservience to nature. Furthermore, there is a divinity in nature which would not be apparent if it were an equal or subordinate partner of man's. It dominates, and allows the poet his more profound faculty of vision only if he accords it the respect, even adoration, it warrants. The evocation of the Biblical apple means that a Christian God is not entirely excluded from the divinity of 'XI', but the strongly mystical imagery in this piece is, for once in Norge, not wholly dependent upon His presence.

'XI' could be said to be fulcral to the whole of Avenue du ciel: it brings together many of the images used elsewhere. There is the 'ombre' of 'XII' (OP, p. 54), the 'silence' and

the life-cycle in 'XV' (OP, p. 55), the birdsong touched by immortality in 'VI' (OP, p. 51) and the helpless child in 'XXXV' (OP, p. 63). On the other hand, references to a Christian God are less explicit in 'XI' than, for instance, in 'XXVI', where the setting is cosmic and God is called to by name:

Des marées de comètes
dans les filets d'un grand magnétisme
le courant de Dieu lui-même.

Les mouvements
les échanges
les forces des univers.
A chaque pas le ciel
me manque sous le pied
mais je lis les signaux de mes ravissements
 ô Dieu
ô toi la seule solitude
qui ait la forme de mes joies. (OP, p. 59)

This is as powerful as 'XI' but in an entirely different manner, for it mixes the intensity of prayer with the gigantic nature of the cosmos. As such it marks a kind of apotheosis of Norge's attempts to transcend the everyday, since it concentrates so markedly on the divine, the cosmic, the extraordinary. And yet it is supremely personal, a prayer from a would-be visionary to the object of his creative aspirations.

In poem 'XXX' of Avenue du ciel, Norge commences with that same cosmic setting, but goes on to relate it more explicitly to the earthly domain:

Planètes,	saisons,
	métamorphoses
chute d'anges	
	et chute de feuilles
chute d'hommes	
chute de Dieu	

Oiseaux perdus
drapeaux perclus
agités sur des formes
(on voit sourire des pays
gentils comme la mort)
Terre terre
Chère terre des hommes. (OP, p. 61)

The poem's appearance on the page reflects the separation then reconciliation of heaven and earth. Elements of celestial order are on the left, terrestrial characteristics on the right. As the half-lines merge, so the distance between heaven and earth is decreased. At the end of the poem, there is the impression of an untidy stack of phrases, like the falling leaves of the piece which float down alone but amass on the ground at the foot of a tree. But the leaves are not the only thing to fall: the movement of angels and men may signify a state of being *déchu* as well as merely a submission to the earth's gravitational pull. God's fall is ambiguous. It evokes the benignly divine impetus behind the leaves' falling, an autumnal process that connotes death, implying that the poet accepts the concept of man's mortality -- the 'chute d'homme(s)' -- because it comes from God. The seasons of one year are a microcosm of nature's greater life-cycle, which necessitates death in order to enable re-birth to follow. The 'chère terre' on which this takes place is unavoidably human and therefore imbued with that mortality which the poet celebrates. However, in addition to the downward motion, there is man's ability to aspire to the heavens, because, unlike in 'XXVI', the celestial and the terrestrial are connected. God has fallen from His distant heights down to earth, where the lands reflect His presence in their smiles redolent of death. There is thus a reciprocal movement between the earthbound and the divine which inspires the poet both to seek to achieve divinity and to seek it on earth amongst the birds and the leaves. At last his quest to perceive the divine poetic in the everyday is bearing fruit.

In Souvenir de l'enchante, Norge's next published work, the same theme is developed, but with the poet exploring more closely the dynamics of the conjunction of everyday and exotic. God's role is in the background, notwithstanding the fact that, for Norge, the poetic is inseparable from the divine. Momentous events are presaged by the unusual juxtapositions of the imagery:

Tambours de soie
fifres de miel
clairons migrateurs des tempêtes
Belles chansons de prisonniers [...]
Communion toujours renaissante et vaincue. (OP, p. 67)

As exotic instruments herald the advent of the 'enchante', the atmosphere is both joyful, in the singing and the luxuriant beauty of the silky, honey-like music, and ominous, in the references to storms and confinement and defeat. Indeed the actual birth is such a portentous event that cosmic and earthly environments react alike, and interact with disturbing force:

La naissance de l'enchante
avive le feu d'une étoile
mais un aigle frappé
dans son vol meurt à ses pieds
un fleuve remonte son cours
on voit le roc porter des fleurs de pêches
mais un nuage parle aux hommes
une cloche tremble et se fêle. (OP, p. 67)

The eagle's death is brutal and untimely, not so much a symbol of the commonplace of nature's life-cycle, which the poet celebrates elsewhere, as resonant of a violent sacrifice performed to please the gods. Nature is submissive, gravity overcome because

of the birth. There is no doubt of the otherworldly quality of the 'enchanté', which recalls the new-born 'poète maudit' in Baudelaire's 'Bénédiction'.¹¹ His inhumanity becomes ever clearer when

il ouvre comme un fruit l'écorce de la terre
il devine les jeux concertés de l'énigme
et ses mains, ses doigts sans surprise
quittent son corps,
(avec la plus grande facilité) (OP, p. 67)

The richness of the imagery is contrasted with the slight slippage of register in the poet's aside in brackets and the almost comical 'sans surprise', with the result that the reader is disorientated. Of course he must be surprised to read that the enchanted one has lost his arms and fingers. Yet he has been prepared for such unearthly happenings, and so is being encouraged to accept strangeness as almost a commonplace to be expected, arising naturally out of the appearance of the mysterious new-born. Yet if the fact of his enchantment is established, the reason for it is still unknown, until Norge introduces the crucial word 'poésie':

Haute vertu
secrète sève, saison
dangereuse à aimer,
poésie. (OP, p. 68)

He has prepared the reader for the appearance of the word 'poésie' by creating, through poetry, an understanding of poetry's potential for surprise, unease, portent, juxtaposition and reconciliation of opposing ideas, and transcendence beyond mortality. Poetry is the life-blood and the purity that the enchanted being brings to earth, not for the benefit of all men but only for the seer who senses even that which is

secret. But poetry is two-edged: it is enlightening, enriching, but it is also 'dangereuse à aimer'. To love is to accept a state of vulnerability and dependence; to love poetry is to be similarly submissive, like the once-proud eagle that drops dead, sacrificed at the feet of the enchanted.

In Souvenir de l'enchante the word 'poésie' provides resolution and a form of serenity to the poem, symbolising the capacity of 'l'enchante' to bring synthesis and harmony to the world, for those who are receptive to his power and love. This messianic figure provides

Un sourire pour la terre
un baiser pour les pauvres
une étoile pour les amis
un verre d'eau pour l'incrédule [...] (OP, p. 69)

He has acknowledged his calling, but only after the senses of the flesh have fully connected him with the earth and the people amongst whom he walks. He is in the midst of nature and humanity but is spiritually apart. His art is authentic and true because he will produce it, not as he lives, but rather afterwards, as he returns to his ethereal state:

Il a connu le vin des hommes,
les douces lisières du temps
et la tiédeur des femmes
au goût de vent et d'océan.

Il cueille pour son Dieu
le méditant bouquet de ses fidélités
et respire déjà l'odeur du haut séjour. (OP, p. 70)

His unworldliness means he continues to dwell on earth 'mais ne laisse plus aucune empreinte / sur le gravier de nos jardins' (OP, p. 70). He is possessed of enchantment, but equally the physical world enchants him. He is therefore not only a superior being, an immortal messiah, the epitome of the divinity of poetry's transcendence, but also a poet who looks in wonderment at his world. He is both poetry and poet, and Norge underlines the fusion of the two. The characteristic of being 'dangereuse à aimer' continues to shadow this fusion, however. To submit himself to creation is the poet's vocation, and as such it drives him. It is futile to resist.

La belle endormie sees this process continue, although the tone is less portentous. Norge's Sleeping Beauty is never woken, unlike in the conventional fairy-tale, since the handsome prince is overcome with fear for a future that should witness the pair's living happily ever after:

[...] rien ne le sépare
qu'~~une~~ vitre de sommeil.
(Il suffit d'un geste mince,
fût-ce d'un simple sourire)
Mais si près de l'avenir,
voici qu'il tremble à l'élire
au destin d'un monde lourd.
Quel dommage de fêler
un si délicat séjour,
un scintillement taillé
dans les gammes du grand vide.
C'est un fil d'éternité
qui tient ces paupières closes.
-- Cher prince, il faut l'appeler,
les cent ans sont écoulés.
Il hésite, il n'ose, il n'ose
pas encore l'éveiller. (OP, p. 89)

Whereas the enchanted one crosses the boundary between mortality and immortality, the prince does not dare. He is trapped in a temporal, terrestrial world of flux, and cannot communicate with the Beauty who inhabits a serene but unstable infinity. As the artist, she has her eyes closed but is receptive to a greater existence. She dwells in an eternity of all time at once, past, present and future. Over the course of a hundred years her appearance has not changed, and so corporeally she is without time. The prince is bound to the present moment, and neither brings the sleeper into his life nor enters hers. He is a non-seer, a non-artist, unable to transcend. Yet *Sleeping Beauty* is art as well as artist: she is the result of artistic creation, she is, after all, not merely beautiful but Beauty itself. This unity of art and artist is a quality she shares with the 'enchante', though the latter is referred to by way of the poet's 'Souvenir', whilst here the prince is tied to the present-day. The tone of the two works gives the reader a clue to this difference: Souvenir de l'enchante is more akin to one of the Old Testament's books of the prophets, a recalling of past deeds and words of one of God's messengers (although the 'enchante' himself is viewed messianically rather than as a herald of the messiah); La belle endormie, on the other hand, is presented in less epic, more personal terms, detailing a specific moment in time. The other difference, of course, is that in the case of *Sleeping Beauty* the act of witnessing and experiencing artistic transcendence is arrested, unfulfilled, because Beauty's world remains a mystery to the prince, whereas the 'enchante' is only too visible to the masses.

In these works the question of absence and presence is linked closely with the conflict between the everyday, the worldly, and the exotic and poetic. *Sleeping Beauty* is present in the sense of lying in front of the prince, but only her body is tangible. Her

infinite world remains inside her head, inaccessible and incomprehensible. She is corporeally present but spiritually absent. Even the 'enchante', who experiences human physicality and emotion, is distant from the rest of the world in his connection with timeless otherworldliness, the source for his poetic being. Norge implies that the woman can be removed from her sleeping state by a kiss, since that is how the fairy-tale goes. Only the prince's hesitation appears to stop him. But, even dormant, she exerts an influence on him, whose inaction is not an arbitrary flaw in his character but the direct result of Sleeping Beauty's nature. The references to how seemingly easy it would be to wake her -- 'il suffit...', 'rien ne le sépare que...', 'fût-ce d'un simple sourire' -- increase the force of the invisible compulsion he feels. Nothing, so it seems, can stop him, but that is only the obvious reaction, based upon what can be seen. Far more important is the hidden presence of the greater power which keeps her asleep. For all the poet's futile cajoling of the prince, there is an absence of free will in his inertia. He simply cannot separate the artist from her transcendent state. Perhaps the prince acts out a kind of test for Norge, who asks himself if the possession of poetic wisdom and perception is a permanent fact, or if it can be wrenched away by the lure of the everyday, the mortal, the earthly. The answer, in the prince's failure to wake Beauty, is negative. Once art has entered a soul, it cannot leave. It truly is a curse, though, unlike the curse inflicted upon Sleeping Beauty in the conventional tale, this is not one to be annulled by a kiss.

Norge's initial works, then, follow the progress of the poet through his early questioning and doubt, on to a realisation of the distinction between the commonplace and the exotic/poetic, and finally to an attainment of the visionary quality that enables

him to bridge the gap between these two poles. All the time his writing highlights the absence and/or presence of those characteristics which define existence in poetry, and the reader accompanies him on this quest by experiencing, through his creation, what it means to be able to create. In Le sourire d'Icare, he revisits this poetic journey. The son of Daedalus, the designer of the Labyrinth, eschews the everyday world of men and seeks to come close to God. At the start, his reaction to the earthbound generality of people is scornful, contrasting strongly with 'l'enchante' who mingled in wonderment with the adoring masses:

Or, s'il marche dans leur foule, personne ne l'ose affronter, et l'on s'écarte, et l'on baisse la tête comme au passage d'un dieu [...]

Icare les épiait. Il ricane: -- J'ai vu vos coeurs, dit-il, tout desséchés comme la langue du muet...J'ai vu vos coeurs, dit-il, et plus petits que noyaux d'abricots! Il va, raillant ses frères mêmes. (OP, pp. 100/101)

He has no time for the mundane, filled as he is with dreams of flight. Predatory birds perch on his arms, and he hopes their apparent overcoming of gravity will transfer to him. They are 'ces bêtes immondes' (OP, p.101) whose example he yearns to follow. For Icarus, adoration by others is no proof of existence and worth: he must express his differentness by some act by which he will both assert his being and achieve immortality. And his desire is not a fleeting adolescent urge, it comes from his soul and is compelling beyond his capacity to stifle it:

Il est en moi ce dieu d'ombre et de feu, que je n'apaiserai point par la mort d'un chevreau, un dieu qui se détourne si je l'lace pour son front la couronne de lauriers. (OP, p. 103)

So this deity within is more powerful and more elusive than the normal gods whom he may pacify by a sacrifice here and a gift there. His search for transcendence is simultaneously a rejection of the lares and penates and an embracing of a more omnipotent entity which dwells in the sky, thus he both strives for his own personal immortalisation and also recognises, in a pre-Christian era, the potential existence of a religion based on monotheism and redemption through individual action. He sees in the distance 'les palais blancs de quelque royaume ancien' (OP, p. 103), indicating again the spiritual goal to be attained, that of communicating with a glorious sovereign of whose nature he is as yet unsure but for whom he feels a sense of nostalgia, as if he longs to return to this ancient state. The ritual life his people lead at the moment, symbolised by sacrifice and obedience, contains no such distant goal, nothing in fact but an eternal, ignorant subservience. If he were to be 'l'ouvrier d'une merveille' (OP, p. 104) he could reach beyond the simple mundaneness of the present towards an enticing, immortal, distant world. Crucially, however, even a wonder like this requires a modest 'ouvrier' to bring it about, so Icarus should be warned not ~~to~~ have such grandiose ideas that he loses sight of the humble nature of his position and his essential humanity. To communicate with God, the poet implies, does not necessarily take great and superhuman feats. An 'ouvrier' too may know the Almighty.

Icarus ignores the need to remember he is only a man, and he sets off. The commencement of the flight is described in a banal fashion, as if the deed itself were so extraordinary as to preclude the need for poetic embellishment:

Maintenant il vole. (OP, p. 106)

The concision is indicative of more than the poet's desire to let the act speak for itself. This sentence is the focal point of the whole work, and it contains, in each of the three words, the essence of its message. Firstly, 'maintenant' illustrates that, despite his attempts to achieve immortality through flight, Icarus is stuck in the 'now'. When he eventually crashes down to earth, the smile on his face denotes his acceptance that he belongs in the world of mortal men, whose existence is temporary and temporal, unlike the God he endeavours to emulate and touch. Secondly, and at the heart of the sentence, the personal pronoun stands enclosed as if to emphasise how isolated Icarus has become, in his rejection of the men around him and his complete concentration on personal transcendence. Finally, of course the verb 'vole' describes the action on which his aspiration is centred. It underlines Icarus' belief in bringing about existence and transcendence through deed rather than word, which makes him ultimately unpoetic in nature. And it shows up the futility of his idea, because it is the one action which he cannot perform for more than a fleeting moment. If indeed he must find spiritual redemption through doing rather than being, he has chosen the wrong act, because he fails. In a way, though, it is appropriate that he should elect to fly, and fail, because it symbolises the fact that he fails, and furthermore must fail, in his attempt to gain knowledge and immortality. In addition, the 'vole' of stealing is implied, for, as he tries to fly, he tries equally to rob God of His uniqueness and separation from man, just as Prometheus tried to steal fire and was punished.

The concentration on Icarus is total. Few other people are mentioned, once the decision to fly has been made, for it is not to humanity but to divinity that he aspires.

Once the flight begins, Norge imbues Icarus with a language which reflects his exotic aspirations. It is, however, an inauthentic language, a non-poetic language in the sense that, like the speaker himself, it does not see the deeper truth of the situation. This contrast between grandiloquent, would-be immortal untruth on the one hand, and simple, humble truth on the other, is clearly visible when the flight fails and Icarus' fatal descent begins:

O site sans ouïe.

O longs sables sans zones!

O ténèbres sourdement baignées de lueurs.

O masque de reflets multicolores sur le sombre infini. [...]

Perdu, perdu! (il n'y a que le vide qui est immense et très sec) (OP, pp. 106/107)

The first four lines are exclamations assumed to be from the mouth of Icarus, who thinks he can see wondrous things but is deluding himself. The last line, and particularly the sentence in brackets, is Norge's simple and accurate foil to such false poetry. Icarus desires poetic transcendence, but his words are illusion. As Icarus learns the lesson of his inability to attain divinity, so Norge illustrates his point that poetry is not achievable through great acts. The poet finds his inspiration on earth, amongst the everyday of human life, rather than in the exotic, extravagant events of an Icarus. It is the poetic vision, the divinity of the words, and not man's physical deeds, that lead to transcendence. Thus an object only achieves a spiritual quality when it is described in words. Put another way, Icarus' heavenly journey should have been not literal but literary.

When Icarus is found dead, he wears a smile. For Norge, the smile is crucial. It is an everyday action with profound meaning, and represents not so much fleeting happiness as the presence of a deeper joy within the soul. Those who find Icarus feels he smiles 'd'avoir si follement défié Dieu ou de l'avoir adoré de si près' (OP, p. 108). In failing to touch the divine, he has realised that his place is on earth, amongst ordinary men, not in the clouds where he does not belong. Therefore his fall to the ground is physically destructive but spiritually rewarding: it returns him to his appropriate habitat. But because it also kills him, the fall has, indeed, brought him closer to God if he is now to enter the kingdom of heaven. In death he appreciates the true nature of the relationship between God and man. In life he failed to find wisdom and certainty, and, *qua* poet, he failed to transcend, whereas now at least he knows the meaning of human mortality.

The ambiguous quality of a smile is present in much of Norge. In poem 'XXIV' of Avenue du ciel it is the chief ~~characteristic~~ characteristic of a meeting atop a pyramid:

A la point d'une pyramide,
un souvenir rencontre un sourire.

Comment se voir,
s'entendre? -- disent-ils.

M'aperçois-tu?
-- M'écoutes-tu?

C'est inutile, c'est inutile! (OP, p. 58)

This piece has the hallmarks of the later Oignons in its concision and surrealism.¹²

Because the setting is a pyramid, the reader is reminded of the mysterious, smiling

Sphinx which watches over Giza in Egypt. Like smiles, memories are commonplace events but profound because they emanate from deep within the soul. Spontaneous memories often cause a smile. Here their association is arrested, for neither can communicate with the other. In other words, their existence is separate, and they happen to encounter each other as they float in the ether, having been created and then released by a human, possibly but not necessarily the same one. If smiles and memories can survive (but apparently not communicate) independent of man, they assume an importance not previously accorded. Like a poem, to which the poet may give birth but to which he has no claim of possession after it has been born, the smile is the result of poetic creation and therefore free to be embraced by anyone. Man's role in this is firstly to provide the means by which a poem/smile/memory gestates, then, once it has entered the world, to analyse it. Further, if a memory and a smile meet, they have no point of contact, because there is no man present. Norge deliberately sets the encounter on top of a pyramid, so that it would be as far away from humanity as possible. Thus poetry enjoys an existence independent of man, but needs him to be present to achieve fulfilment, that is, to be aesthetically and intellectually appreciated. What the fishermen who found Icarus were doing when they looked at his smile, then, was nothing less than exploring poetry. Interestingly, because Norge believes in the capacity for poetry to mean more than one thing at any one time, the fishermen-cum-critics found two opposite and simultaneous answers to the question of why Icarus was smiling. Norge's poetics turn on the relative presence and absence of those two independent but interactive elements: on the one side, man, on the other, his creation. Once both exist, they lead separate but symbiotic lives. Without one, the other cannot be truly fulfilled.

Separation of apparently integrated aspects of humanity is a theme which Norge pursues in L'imposteur, in the story of Hélène and Balbuth:

Hélène, songeuse Hélène, tes songes t'ont perdue!

un jour, tu rêvais, si hautement appelée par ton rêve, que ton âme un instant t'a laissée, pour tenir ces palais, ces mirages.

Qui a sauté dans ta forme charnelle, et refermé les serrures ténues?
C'est Balbuth, le perfide, c'est Balbuth, le démon vigilant! Il se vêt de tes gestes, habite ton sourire et ta marche légère! (OP, p. 118)

Norge fills his poems with exotic names, whose resonances are not always easily definable. If Hélène is Helen of Troy, and Balbuth a corruption of Beelzebub, the Prince of Darkness, then the relationship between them becomes clearer. Helen is the epitome of beauty, Balbuth the epitome of evil.¹³

As with the separate smile and memory and poetry, Helen's dreams are so potent that they call her soul to part from her body, which is then usurped by the evil Balbuth. She has neglected the oneness, the unity, of her being by following Icarus' example in chasing the illusory distant palaces, but, unlike Icarus, who ends up dead but with an enhanced awareness of God's true nature, Helen is alive but occupied by Satan:

Pure Hélène, pauvre Hélène, tu erres, tu te débats, tu n'as plus accès dans ton corps.

Comme tu es seule! (OP, p. 118)

Those around are unsure of what has happened, only that 'elle n'est plus la même' (OP, p. 118), since they can recognise in her outward appearance the manifestations of her lost inner purity and wholeness -- her gait is altered, her smile corrupted. In the comment about her being 'seule', the poet is ambiguous. Perhaps she has no more friends, since, possessed by evil, she has abused and rejected those around her. Perhaps it is her soul which is now alone, isolated and suffering a spectral existence like the smile and the memories that float freely in the atmosphere waiting for a human body to enter in order to achieve fulfilment. In a sense, she is not alone at all, for she is comprised of two contradictory beings, one which personifies death and horror and darkness, the other which stands for mythical beauty and thus righteousness and light. And the struggle between the two, a contest which Balbuth seems to win, is externally manifested only by simple, everyday actions, that is, by changes to how Helen walks and smiles, and how she appears unsure of herself. While there is here a stark contrast between obvious internal schisms and far from obvious external nuances of behaviour, this is no surprise with Norge, because the example of the smile demonstrates how apparently commonplace actions are symbolic of profound spiritual activity, even, as in this case, the quasi-Manichean conflict occurring in Helen's soul.

Norge's creative career does not follow a strict linear progression. Particularly in the middle decades of the century he experimented with different styles and voices, and each work must be analysed in isolation before being routinely allocated a place in the global Norgian *oeuvre*. One such work is Joie aux âmes, which continues the theme of linking the everyday with the divine through poetry, but does so in a vatic tone unusual to Norge. The humour and subtlety which characterises his writing seems absent, the

poet's voice is almost too overbearing to appeal to the reader accustomed to a more cajoling, coaxing poet. However, it should not be ignored in a study of his poetics, for, while the voice is different, the subject is essentially the same.

The poet is a divine who uses his inner vision to see the spiritual in the commonplace.

Nature provides the imagery that abounds in his sermons and declarations:

Vous disiez: "l'arbre de vie se dessèche et va mourir. Voilà venu le jour des commentateurs et des pointeurs de balance, voilà des hommes armés d'engins de mesures et de verres grossissants. Ils auscultent les écorces, ils scrutent le chemin des sèves et les lois de la divine floraison.

L'arbre meurt et se dessèche et nous voulons rejeter le pacte ancien."

Je vous réponds: l'arbre est mort en vérité, mais sa graine portée en terre nutritive a déjà brisé l'enveloppe.

Et tout est contenu dans ce germe, peuplades, et pour toujours. (OP, p. 145)

As poet/divine, his purpose is to infuse his flock with a love of God and an acceptance of His will. Nature's cycle is perfect proof of the work of God in its life-giving, its symmetry, and its potency. The ungodly see only death in the moribund tree, while the poet has the capacity to perceive new life. He is the true 'ausculteur', examining like a doctor the internal workings of a thing and able to diagnose a truth which the outer essence may hide. The 'pacte ancien' between man and God and nature will, in his hands, survive the doubts of those unendowed with sight. His knowledge has saved his people, he has given them new life and hope:

Et sans moi, vous étiez perdu, ô peuple d'impatience et de colère. (OP, p. 145)

In 'Les oiseaux', Norge revisits the themes of Le sourire d'Icare. Birds have wings and fly in a purely physical sense, whereas man must 'voler avec le coeur' (OP, p. 142), in other words use his soul to soar towards the spiritual and intellectual divine rather than repeat Icarus' mistakes. Nature's cycle is rewarding to those who seek God on earth, in nature:

Avec le coeur aimer ces changeantes années et les visages d'un grand ciel bien fondé sur ses quatre saisons. (OP, p. 142)

The heightened tone of Joie aux âmes is the same as that of Icarus during his flight before the fall -- declamatory and vatic. The difference is that, in the latter case, it contrasted with the rest of the work and clearly reflected his, and not the poet's, mood. In Joie aux âmes, on the other hand, the tone is constant throughout, with the exception of the 'Choral' at the end. Because that last poem's register is different, like Icarus' declarations it contrasts with what has gone before, and this means it stands out in the reader's mind. The effect is deliberate, since 'Choral' is an important summative poem. In it the basic idea is repeated, that divinity is attained through poetry. Further, grandiose ideas are most effectively portrayed by simple imagery: the tree, the lily, the bird, and the sand represent God far better in Norge's view than the exotic distant palaces and suns of Icarus' dreams. This is because the poet's words are imbued with the same divinity as is contained within the objects they describe, for, if, say, the word 'tree' represents the thing 'tree', that word must not only stand for the physical object but also for the God within it. While God creates a physical world, the poet creates a parallel poetic world, in which each word depicts all aspects, including the spiritual

element, contained within each thing. Therefore the poet does not need to be too demonstrative to convey spirituality and truth -- the words do that by their very presence on the page. Thus, the tone in *Joie aux âmes* may be ironic, like Icarus' voice, implying a distance between the poet Norge and the 'Je' in the work. However, there is no indication that the content is meant ironically, because there is no internal contrast set up by which Norge could show that what the prophetic figure says is mistaken, merely that the way he says it is not Norge's own way.

'Choral' explores this theme, that the poet and his words are separate entities, and that those words are divine in and of themselves.

Il oublie un nom qui n'est plus le sien,
sa bouche, ses mains lui sont étrangères.
Fut-il un grand arbre, un champ plein d'épis?
Il n'est qu'un brasier où Dieu se prononce. [...]

Forêt de musique où roulent des fleuves,
les arbres, les eaux confondent leurs hymnes.
Le Verbe déplie un azur vivace,
Le Verbe est Dieu même et Dieu c'est le Verbe. (*OP*, pp. 162/163)

The poet, then, is a conduit through which God speaks, and this process occurs in two ways. Firstly, as in *Joie aux âmes*, the poet is a prophet whose divinity allows him to tell his followers how to approach the divine. Secondly, by using words which do not simply 'mean' things but 'represent' those things, and thus contain the essential worth and spirituality intrinsic to those objects, the poet reproduces God's work on the page and in the mind of the reader. The obvious reference to the Gospel of John, in that last line cited, sets up the poet as a John-like witness to the light of God, who made the word flesh.¹⁴

Moreover, by drawing the reader's attention to everyday nature, the poet allows him to achieve a more spiritual understanding of the world. It is vital to Norge's poetry that those mundane, widespread objects visible to all non-poets are just as divine as any more obviously exotic, ethereal, mysterious world, indeed there is more divinity in the everyday because it is the humblest, most commonplace features of the universe that attract the greatest attention from Norge, as if to imply that God is all the greater for being present even there. In other words, it would be less of a surprise for the reader to learn of the godliness of far-off heavens; it is more important to Norge to reveal God here on earth.

Having written Joie aux âmes in 1941, Norge did not have another work published until eight years later, after the Second World War was over. This comparatively long interval between works is accompanied by a re-examination on the part of the poet of the nature of the everyday/exotic contrast. From the overt religiosity of the previous collection, he returns to a subtler style in Les râpes. Here the spirituality which emanates from the commonplace is still in evidence, but it is more implicit. In 'Jean-Baptiste décollé', the subject is clearly religious, but the situation has more to do with John the Baptist's physical status, of having his head separated from his body. As with the myth of Icarus, the poet begins with a famous, almost clichéd incident and gives it new life by interpreting it in an unorthodox manner. In this case, the story is of Salome's request to Herod Antipas to bring her the head of John the Baptist so that she would agree to dance for him. The poem takes the form of a dialogue between John's head and body.

Le corps: Que suis-je, où est ma vie? [...]
Mes bras cherchent en vain la clarté de mes yeux.
Désir, anime-toi d'une forte veille
Que je parle sans bouche, écoute sans oreille! (OP, p. 175)

Thus the body finds it has lost all purpose to life, and only its hands and arms are able to perceive the world and 'donner à boire au coeur qui m'est resté' (OP, p. 175). The head has no time for the body, wishing to concentrate for all the moments it has left on the death which only it can foresee:

La tête: Moi, tête de venaison
Sur le plateau de bombance,
D'un oeil mi-clos et brumeux
J'épie encore la danse
D'une fille au ventre heureux.
J'attends pour fermer ma bouche
Qui sait déjà plaire aux mouches
Ce baiser d'ombre et de sang
Que je n'ai pas eu vivant. (OP, p. 175)

While the body cannot reason, the head cannot act physically. The body cannot therefore explain what accident has befallen it. The head, on the other hand, experiences an unexpected new sensation in the erotic image of bloody lips. The clear sexual overtone of the 'fille au ventre heureux', patently referring to Salome and her dance of the seven veils, adds to the confusion which John the spiritual leader feels on encountering base carnality. When the mind was attached to the body, when it would seem more appropriate for corporeal desires to weigh upon John's holy mind, no such temptations were present. Ironically, it is only when the body, that part of man which should be stirred by sexuality, is gone that the head 'feels' aroused in a way it cannot rationalise. Unlike Salome, John has no loins with which to make merry.

A tragic image is rendered comic in this dialogue, as a deeply important Biblical figure is shown up for his lack of wholeness, and, espying Salome 'd'un oeil mi-clos', assumes a leering, voyeuristic pose. Yet perhaps the greatest surprise is that the reader is entered into a situation where the separation of a man's head and body, and, further, that the body can talk independently, are treated as established facts. No explanation is provided other than some allusions to a legend of which the reader is assumed to be aware. Norge banalises John's physical condition because the primary subject of the poem is not decapitation *per se*, but rather man's need to be a whole entity. The reader must proceed from his initial amazement and accept John's condition as a *fait accompli*, so that he can then better appreciate its metaphorical sense of spirituality and intellect as being isolated from the body. And this is why John the important religious figure is used, and not some other historical character who was beheaded. For even the most spiritual of men need a physical side, as John realises when he is aroused, too late, by Salome's erotic presence, a sexuality so unknown to him that he cannot articulate or define, but can merely sense, its existence. Moreover, John's renown is based in physicality, although he was a priest and therefore dealt primarily in matters of the soul. First, he baptised his followers and then Christ, as a bodily symbol of spiritual purity and repentance. Second, he was imprisoned for his denunciation of Herod's incestuous marriage to Herodias. Third, he was born of a woman in barren old age. So it is highly appropriate for Norge to describe John's decapitation, since he of all men should be aware of the coming together of mind and body. But John is too neglectful of the needs of the flesh, and, his mind on higher, spiritual matters, he forgets or forswears carnality. Similarly, the poet, the prophet through whom God

creates, needs to remember that the physical world, from the most luxuriant 'bombance' to the humblest 'mouche', is his domain. In death, John's 'clarté de mes yeux' is lost, not only by the body which utters these words but also by the head, which was previously so sure in its ascetic faith but which now has an undefined physical craving. Norge has normalised John's detached state in order to defamiliarise the reader from the commonplace character of one of the most important early Christians. In so doing, he has taken an exotic story and used it to illustrate the importance of the earthly, basic elements of life.

In Famines, Norge takes another cliché, the rose, and similarly defamiliarises it. The poetic commonplace is of a rose connoting love and nobility. In 'Jamais contente', however, the rose is a profoundly unhappy object:

Dans le vent, la rose a soif,
Dans la main, la rose a froid,
Dans la nuit, la rose a faim,
Dans le jour, la rose a peur.
Sur le sein, la rose est bien,
Sur le sein, la rose meurt. (OP, pp. 195/196)

Although, in Gertrude Stein's Sacred Emily, 'Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose',¹⁵ this rose is constantly changing as a result of human contact, which disturbs the flower: the hand that would be expected to provide warmth and affection brings coldness, and the breast kills it. Daytime normally causes flowers to bloom, but light here denotes fear. If 'le sein' is the womb, life and death mix uneasily, unlike in previous works when Norge celebrated the life-cycle as a means to give solace in death. Any well-being the womb furnishes is illusory and transitory. The environment, particularly man's involvement in

and control of it, is what kills the rose, and unsettles the reader whose preconceptions about the interaction between man and rose are undermined. This process is continued in 'Noble rose' and 'Rose fouettée', the next two poems in Famines. In the former, the flower is a symbol of France's glory and faith, associated with Joan of Arc who goes into battle with 'une rose entre les dents' (OP, p. 196). However, the image is more evocative of a dancer than a warrior. Further, the rose is the symbol of France's enemy England, so either Joan of Arc is attempting psychologically to demoralise the English by capturing between her teeth the emblem of English nobility, or she is casting doubt upon her legendary and inspirational belligerence with an irenic act bringing together sworn foes, metaphorically clasping the flower of England. Either way, France's heroine is casting off her reputation as a leader driven by purity and God, since the image of a dancer with a rose in her mouth is overtly sexual in nature. 'Rose fouettée' presents a world similarly turned upside down, where

douceur devient colère [...]
rose devient vipère. (OP, p. 196)

Norge takes the rose, an object overloaded with cliché, and transforms it from a symbol of love and nobility into a metaphor for confusion, conflict, death. And this violence is only enhanced by the calm simplicity of the form of the poems. If a rose is a rose is a rose, then it is physically constant but able to assume whatever metaphorical resonances a writer desires. If the rose in these poems is France itself, then this post-war work carries the echoes of death and violence in its lines, as it posits the re-birth of France, the rose, and its restoration to a time of glory and potential, a process

requiring the famines of the title, years of hunger and discomfort and spiritual purification, but eventually heralding:

Rose et rire, fleur et lance,
Noble rose et noble France. (OP, p. 196)

The France 'fouettée' in the past can be the rose which ^{becomes} ~~becomes~~ a viper, harmless when pacified but lethal if aroused. The juxtaposition of 'fleur' and 'lance' echoes this combination of beauty and belligerence which is the poet's model for a new, noble France.

However, the reader must be suspicious, because such fanatical patriotism is alien to Norge's poetry, even if post-war reconstruction and nationalistic optimism were prevalent at the time and would understandably influence the poet's writing. Indeed, the lack of subtlety which accompanies the jingoism of Famines is only comparable in Norge's opus with the vatic language of Joie aux âmes. But that work has been seen to be more than just a prophet's sermonising: it was about the nature of the poetic word. In the same way, Famines is not simply some prophetic paean to a future France: the real subject is not what the rose connotes, but the very poetic process by which the image of the rose is manipulated. Therefore, Norge is again exploring poetic creation through his poetry, how an object, and the word that represents it in language, can be not static and commonplace but dynamic and subject to transformation by the poet. The final 'rose' poem, 'Rosa, Rosemonde', sustains this examination of the word and its figural world:

Rosa, Rosemonde,

Nulle part au monde,
La rose consent
Au prix de ton sang. (OP, p. 197)

Rosemonde, like her name, is split, shared by both the rose and the world. Yet she is nowhere on earth, so has a divinity which sets her apart from humanity despite the fact that she is a person with blood in her veins. It is the 'rose' side of ~~herself~~^{herself} which controls her, putting a value on her blood. Better than 'Rosemonde', then, she could more appropriately be said to belong to the 'Monde de la rose'. Perhaps 'rose' is also the colour of her blood. The rose that was formerly a flower which symbolised beauty and nobility, a poetic commonplace, has been turned by Norge into an active character in the human drama, not so much personified in the conventional sense but an element in the mortal-immortal dynamic:

[...] sa main qui veut,
S'armait de quel feu,
S'armait d'une rose.

Et toute sa peur
Et toute sa force
Donnaient à ma soeur
L'épine, l'écorce,
La fleur. (OP, p. 197)

Investing her emotions into this rose, and clutching it so tightly that she bleeds, the girl of the title prays:

Et ne parlant guère
Fait notre prière
Méchante et logique. (OP, p. 197)

The rose is a conduit through which she may contact God in prayer. But her prayer is impure and unspiritual, and her blood has been spilt by her bodily desire. The ransom of blood accepted by the rose cannot let her attain a religious level, the rose may come from a rosary in the garden but is not a rosary to hold when praying.

Norge uses language, the word 'rose', to imbue the object 'rose' with potential significance and meaning.¹⁶ Orthographically, a rose is always a rose is a rose, but the interesting point is how linguistic resonances can lead to figural associations, and this, rather than the superficial jingoism of the poems, is the essential subject of Famines. Norge takes as his starting-point the verbal link between rose and rosary, and makes the flower become Rosemonde's rosary, a spiritualisation of the object only possible through the divine poet's creation. It is, furthermore, crucial to the effect he wishes to produce that the object used is a rose, both physically and poetically an everyday cliché with such apparently obvious overtones already that it would seem impossible to reinvent it in any new and meaningful way.

Having established the poet's earthbound credentials, his need to seek out and represent divinity in the ordinary world around him, Norge duly concentrates, in his next few works culminating in Les oignons, on the nature of existing in the present. His objective is to define the reality and specificity of the here and now. In Le gros gibier, the poem 'Elle existe' contains the command 'Vas-y, réaliste!' (OP, p. 214), an instruction as much to himself as to the character in this piece about the existence of love. To be a 'réaliste' is to be a chronicler of what is real, rather than the conventional meaning, of someone who rejects fantasy and fatalistically accepts what is possible. A

Norgian 'réaliste' includes fantasy in what is real. In 'Orgie', whose title suggests commitment to a physical reality, there is exoticism and wildness but the focus is firmly on the here and now, whereas the exotic is more commonly associated with otherworldliness and mysticism:

L'éternité, c'est demain,
Demain l'orgue et ses courroux,
Ma légèreté.

Mais aujourd'hui, c'est le vin
Qui ne dure et c'est ton goût
De fougère. (OP, p. 215)

Extreme sensual pleasure can be achieved today. The poet does not have to transcend human mortality, aware as he is that his transport will not last. Indeed, he takes pleasure in his *Dasein*, his 'being there' or 'indwelling':

Louange à tout l'éphémère,
Au vin bref et à l'amour
Temporel. (OP, p. 215)

Exoticism here is a willingness to indulge the flesh in gratifying and fleeting moments. Such abstractions as pure love, which in 'Elle existe' is 'fragile', are eschewed in favour of the sexual, instantaneous 'amour temporel'. Even in a piece entitled 'Idylle', in which the reader would expect to find a more distant and intangible exoticism, the poet emphasises immediacy:

Mettons que je n'ai rien dit.
Mettons qu'il n'était pas l'heure,
Mettons que sonnait midi
Pour les pitances majeures. [...]

Bon poids, bon goût, bon aunage,
Ni enfer, ni paradis.
Soyez heureux en ménage,
Mettons que je n'ai rien dit. (OP, p. 223)

It is as if the poet, by an act of forbearance and denial, forces the reader to accept existence in the everyday, and refuses to cede to an unarticulated desire for Icarus' far-off palaces. The young hero is referred to in 'Idylle', and so is Merlin the wizard, but in terms which reinforce the terrestrial at the expense of the heavenly or magical:

Le ciel est plat comme un lac;
Juste un souffle pour Icare.

Merlin dort dans son taudis
De glaise et de feuilles mortes. (OP, p. 224)

If the sky is flat, it lacks the depth needed for those distant kingdoms Icarus seeks; heaven is near earth, and indeed compared to a feature of the earth. Merlin too may be able to conjure unworldly acts and spirits, but his home is all clay and leaves. Icarus and Merlin cannot be divorced from their unworldliness, but here it is only implicit. The reality of Le gros gibier, for once in Norge, consists in what can be seen and felt on earth in the present. There is a concentration on physicality for its own sake, and, in 'Maternité', the instinctuality of motherhood:

La famine a peu de cervelle.
Mordre encore au lait vaste et sourd,
C'est ça, vivre, petits vautours.
La mère est fleuve et femelle.

C'est la vague et la déraison
Humide et profonde comme elles --
Et nourrice à bout d'horizon,
La mère est mer et femelle. (OP, p. 223)

The striking bodily image of the mother giving milk is enhanced by her being situated in mother nature. The fluidity of the poem is an elemental force which moves humankind all the more powerfully and instinctually because it is based in the physical world around. In 'Mouches', the flies' abundance contrasts with God's physical absence:

Mouche à miel et mouche à sang.
L'une puise et l'autre puise.
Mais Dieu reste en toute église
Absent.

Tant de mouches pour les fous,
Pour les sages, tant de mouches;
L'amour mon frère est un touche-
A-tout. (OP, p. 231)

Although God created flies as well as humans, He is not to be seen. The whole point about Norge's poetics is that the poet's vision perceives the divine even when it is invisible to the non-poet, and he does not cast doubt on this in Le gros gibier by claiming that God does not, after all, exist. His focus here is on physical presence and absence. If God is absent from church, moreover, that could have many interpretations. Perhaps it is the churches themselves and the congregations which are ungodly, and only outside the walls of a church can true divinity be found. But essentially it is man's physicality that is the subject of this work, and not his spirituality. The former resides in the visible present, the 'vin qui ne dure', whereas the latter looks to the 'demain' of eternity. Thus love, that abstract, unphysical, divine love, is eschewed as an interfering 'touche-à-tout', while in 'Le cri' the same love is an irrelevance when describing an elemental, deeply physical cry:

Pierre ou cuisse,
Coeur, esprit,
Rien ne puisse
Mieux qu'un cri.

(Qui te dit,
O grand sourd,
que ce cri
Est d'amour?) (OP, p. 224)

On the other hand, sexual love, the 'amour temporel' that is applauded in 'Orgie', is welcome because it is born of physicality and irrationality. Despite its 'raison souriante', the flower in 'Une rose' is helpless to arrest its mortality (OP, p. 228). It protests, but such a conscious, rational act is futile in the fiercely mortal, instinctual world of Le gros gibier. After all, the big game of the title are wild animals with no capacity for reason. Man should hunt them down, not so much in order to kill them, but to learn from their example of how to live a day-to-day, instinctive existence. They inhabit a world uncursed by that intellect which makes man turn mistakenly away from his body and seek only to cultivate his mind. In Le gros gibier, the intellect is characterised as false, unable to ask and answer the questions that matter regarding truth and existence. For instance, in 'L'avenir', the question at the end shows confusion and will not result in a meaningful answer:

Mais notre âme, ah, notre âme
Immortelle ou pas, l'est-elle
Pour finir? (OP, p. 233)

Similarly, the repetition of 'Mettons que' in 'Idylle' implies a logical series of assumptions that in fact owes nothing to reasoned thought, and in 'Les chiens' the poet philosophises with ironic ambiguity:

Il fait si noir dans le noir.
Il fait si chien dans la pluie.
Ça vous colle aux dents, la suie,
Ça désespère, l'espoir. (OP, 242)

The nature of everyday existence, then, lies in man's instinctuality rather than his intellect. Whereas the former provides truth, the latter leads nowhere, concerned as it is with ~~theoretical~~ reality as opposed to experienced reality, the kind which the 'réaliste' chronicles and which is founded in elemental action.

Les oignons is the work that most clearly demonstrates Norge's role as 'réaliste', and yet paradoxically appears at first sight to be filled with such outlandish characters and events as to bear no relation to real humanity. This is the crux of the dynamic that exists in Norge between the everyday and the exotic. The exotic is the representation of that poetic divine to which only the poet has access. It is attained not by bodily action but through the creation of poetry. In other words, the poet is not the Icarus figure who seeks physically to approach God, but rather the man who stays on earth but who achieves a spiritual transcendence through his literature. On the other hand, the manifestation of the exotic to be found in Les oignons, that is to say, the extraordinary and otherworldly events and characters in these prose poems, is invariably set in a mundane human context, and is intended less as a key to the divine so much as an insight into ordinary human nature. The poet reveals the truth about how people interact with one another by taking as his starting-point a bizarre situation and then searching for the intrinsic logic behind what happens thereafter. Only by presenting a strange, unexpected *point de départ* can the poet explore how men really

behave, and the reader can test the authenticity of the poet's characterisation. If, for example, the original setting were an everyday one, behaviour would be tied too closely to ~~mechanistic~~^{mechanistic}, unthinking ritual. Given an unusual context, the people at least have the opportunity to reveal their individual humanity. If they then still 'choose' ritual, that in turn says much about the human condition.

In contrast, the everyday is the non-poetic, that commonplace reaction to the world which characterises non-artistic, non-visionary human activity. For Norge, to dwell in the everyday is to be blind to the divinity inherent in the humblest of objects, to see only the surface. It is more a state of ignorance than of conscious rejection, and it is the poet's task, therefore, to reveal the depth of existence and significance of things, to open the non-poet's eyes by challenging his ~~clichéd~~^{clichéd} ritualism. Once this is achieved, the everyday becomes poetic, exotic. For Norge's intention is not to destroy the everyday, but to renew and re-invigorate it. Moreover, it is the process, not the end result, which is of primary interest to the poet. The conflict between the everyday and the exotic is the backdrop to Norge's more fundamental theme, poetic creation itself, manifested in the dynamic movement, rather than the static relationship, between the two.

Perhaps the most shocking piece in Les oignons is 'Au sot, au sot', in which a fool is chased and brutally murdered by the village mob:

Le sot venait de s'échapper et tout le village mit la fourche au vent. Rien dans les froments, rien dans les luzernes, rien au Croix-tordu, rien dans la grange aux dîmes. Quant au Bois Chaban, oui encore un veau à deux têtes, mais de sot? Pas l'ombre. C'est comique: à la fin, on le retrouva chez lui; il ronflait sous la paillasse. Chacun put lui donner un petit coup de fourche et il rendit l'âme sans discuter. (OP, p. 306)

Not only do the villagers kill him while he sleeps, but he is back home at the time, and so there appears no need to punish him after all, since his initial crime seems to have been to escape. What is more disturbing than the act is the cheerful tone the poet adopts in detailing such meaningless violence. The reader is forced to adapt his reaction to the story, from disgust to delight at the comedy. And the impossibility of the scene absolves the reader from feelings of guilt: in the 'Bois Chaban' there is no idiot, but there is instead an obviously ridiculous two-headed animal, so this tale cannot be real. Moreover, even if the killing is true, a village fool is somewhat less than human and so would not feel the same sensations as a proper person. After all, he dies while asleep and would have felt little pain on his 'paillasse', which as well as denoting his straw mattress means 'clown', reinforcing the comic tone and echoing the supposed character of the 'sot'.

This poem, then, is artifice, an invented humorous story of no consequence, a 'sotie' even. And yet the reader must return to it because the poet leaves clues which point to a more authentic interpretation of human behaviour. The man who dies 'rendit l'âme', signifying that he did have a soul and was, after all, no less human than the other villagers. Then again the society is one in which the 'veau à deux têtes' is accepted as normal -- there is no surprise when it is encountered in the wood. This is a community which belongs to the middle ages, from its unsophisticated life and its village idiot to its 'Croix-tordu' and the idea of profanity and witchcraft which that connotes. Perhaps the 'sot' is a sub-human because he is possessed by an evil spirit, and thus the

chase became a witchhunt concluded by a ritual slaying. In the minds of the community, he is a dangerous and unnatural sub-human. In the reader's view it is the murderers who are possessed of evil. They are overtaken by the hysteria of the mob, which will destroy what it does not understand and therefore what it fears and is threatened by. This mob mentality has the ring of authenticity. Thus, 'Au sot, au sot' may be an improbable tale shrouded in comic tones, but it is authentic when describing human behaviour, in this case that of a group towards an outsider.

The same process recurs in 'Le fou rire'. Once again the action is extraordinary, and the poet plays with the reader's sensibilities by infusing the piece with comedy, but the deeper truth about human conduct remains:

Le juge fut pris de fou rire. C'est communicatif, ça. Et l'accusé ne résista point. Le jury, le public, les huissiers s'engouffrèrent dans un tourbillon de rire. [...] Mais la victime? La victime seule demeura sérieuse. Quel sale caractère! (OP, p. 326)

Norge takes a courtroom, that most staid and grave of settings, and fills it with laughter. Interestingly, the judge is the first to laugh, and, as if in deference, everyone else imitates him, like courtiers only reacting when a tyrannical king has shown them how to. The 'rire' is indeed 'fou', for it spreads wildly and with no apparent cause. Only the victim resists, presumably because he or she is more pre-occupied with the crime and its personal consequences. However understandable this concern is, the victim becomes the villain, the culprit of a crime against society, by manifesting the 'sale caractère' that rejects both obedience to the judge and communion with his or her fellows. Sympathy for the victim is transformed into scorn.

The poet is not only depicting human behaviour in the courtroom, a milder form of the mob mentality shown by the villagers in 'Au sot, au sot'. He displays it himself. The final sentence ironically places him alongside the people laughing, in their dislike and distrust of the outsider who refuses to follow the majority. Logically, that role, the part of 'sale caractère', should be filled by the accused, but in fact the well-defined roles of a courtroom are less important than common human attitudes. For whatever reason the judge starts laughing, the ease with which the others follow illustrates that it is simpler to be a member ~~of~~ of the majority whose action is unjustified or inappropriate, as it surely is here, than it is to be a lone figure who retains his integrity and dignity. The reader accepts the conduct of all those in the court as authentic, despite the twin distracting factors of a strange setting and a comic tone. This is the crucial difference between poetic truth, the revelation of human character which it is the job of the 'réaliste' to perform, and contingent realism, whether a situation is likely or not. No matter how extraordinary or exotic a scenario may be, it is its deeper poetic truth or untruth which prevails.

Of course poetic truth does not preclude contingent reality, and in some of the pieces in Les oignons both are present. In 'L'émigré', the world presented is entirely one of everyday but precise events, as the man recalls his former life before emigrating:

Je m'habituerai. Evidemment, ils font les pommes de terre frites tout de travers et je ne comprends pas encore l'australien. Mais je m'habituerai. Ce qui me manque, c'est l'odeur d'électricité brûlée, -- quand sautait le plomb de la motrice, tramway no. 7 conduisant à la Coopérative de la Hestre. (OP, p. 327)

The implication is that it is the minutiae of life that he misses. Even in his new country he mentions above all one specific dietary habit of the Australians, and in a manner that reveals his unfamiliarity with it: he uses a long-winded term to refer to what would more commonly be called 'pommes frites' or even just 'frites'. He appears unused to the food, or at least to its obvious popularity and commonness in meals, and the impression is that, far more than simply moving from one country to another, he has changed to a completely different culture, one in which he feels he is an outsider. This in turn leads the reader to suspect he belongs to the uneducated working classes, for, not only is he at home amongst the trams and the factories, but he views culture not from a broad perspective but in terms of his own, limited experience. When he states he does not yet understand Australian, he should more accurately differentiate between the English language and the Australian accent, and it is not entirely clear to which he is referring. Perhaps he cannot speak the language, but is unaware that the language of this new country is, indeed, English; this would corroborate the idea that he is not highly educated. He is from a land of producers and has settled in a land of consumers, he has left his working-class milieu for a better life in a brand new, classless nation where he must learn to appreciate the opportunity for change and achievement inherent in the culture. His is a major step, and, perhaps awed by the unpredictability of his new life, he craves the routine and simplicity of his old one.

The section on 'La peinture écrite' is centred on the specificity of sensation. As in 'L'émigré', the senses perceive precise objects, but the deeper interpretative art of the poet allows a more universal reading. The introduction to this section gives the example of the lark:

On veut énoncer ici ce que l'oeil voit. Une alouette, c'est du chant, mais l'oeil peut voir une alouette. (OP, p. 329)

When Norge refers to what is seen, he includes far more than non-poetic superficial impulses. Where a normal person sees a bird, the poet finds song. This is as much a comment on poetic creation as on the enhanced faculties of the poetic creator, for, when a non-poet writes the word 'bird', he simply means the living thing, whereas to a poet the word 'bird' resonates with metaphoric significance. Similarly, the apples in 'Les pommes' have far greater weight than might be expected:

Trois pommes dans un panier. Simplement trois pommes, et l'on doit se rendre à l'évidence: le monde n'a plus qu'une heure à vivre. Les pommes n'en savent rien. Elles disent cela, mais sans comprendre. Heureusement, une feuille morte (on ne la voyait pas tout de suite dans l'ombre) empêche l'irréparable de s'accomplir. (OP, p. 336)

The gravity of the situation is contradicted by the ease with which the danger is averted, leading the reader to speculate on how serious the poet's artistic interpretation is intended to be. Nevertheless, it is entirely consistent of him to imbue everyday objects with a grander significance. After all, biting the apple in the Garden of Eden caused the destruction of a perfect world before. In 'L'oeuf', the egg is the only object on the canvas, and 'on se demande pourquoi cet oeuf est si émouvant' (OP, p. 330).¹⁷ The reader's inference must be that, as in the case of the apples, the poet is not always capable of explaining the intrinsic quality of a thing that he alone may perceive. He goes on to contemplate the meaning of the egg while continuing to communicate his uncertainty:

Est-ce que ça dort, les oeufs? Enfin, rien à faire, cet oeuf est terriblement tragique. Le peintre s'est peut-être dit: l'univers, c'est grand, mais c'est bête. Il commence par un oeuf. Bah, il finira peut-être par l'univers. (OP, p. 330)¹⁸

The reader cannot enter into a dialogue with the poet, in the same way that the poet cannot discuss possible interpretations with the painter. Both must, in their turn, accept the artistic creation presented to them and be willing to trust their eyes without being able to articulate or rationalise the deeper sensation that accompanies their view. The poet clearly senses portent in the apples and pathos in the egg. The reader is invited to follow the example of the poet's nebulous acknowledgement of an inner truth to the paintings, and apply that to his reading of Norge's poetry. He must therefore be open to the metaphoric, representative, figurative content of the poet's work, even if he does not immediately recognise its precise significance. The poet of 'La peinture écrite' is, thus, entirely different from the poet in the rest of Les oignons. Before he was wholly the creator, now he has assumed the role of interpreter, and as such he seeks to instruct the reader by example, showing him how to be receptive to the art in front of him. To this end, he speculates and analyses and infers, but never rejects the strong but hitherto unarticulated feelings he has about a work.

Norge's relationship to his work has changed since he first sought to transcend mortality and attain an inner vision unavailable to the non-poet. Having attempted physically, in Le sourire d'Icare, to come closer to the divine, the poet has arrived at a joyful acceptance of his bodily limitations, and of the fact that his words alone lead to his immortalisation. In the works culminating in Les oignons, he has gone a stage further, and endeavoured to reveal the nature of everyday, mortal existence. In so doing, he has come closer to the reader, and demonstrated how the world of the poet

may be accessible to him. Thus, Norge first sought distance and detachment from that which was non-poetic, now he seeks to reverse that process. The 'oignons' are poems, small objects that cause those who come into contact with them to cry, that is, to express emotion, to be moved. Like an onion, a piece of poetry is multi-layered, and the reader or onion-peeler reveals new aspects every time he takes off one of those layers, hoping to reveal an irreducible essence at the core. In fact, the centre too is just another stratum to be peeled away, no more or less fundamental than the surface, only less accessible and therefore requiring more effort to attain. The onion metaphor is valid in itself irrespective of the particular context, but it is especially instructive in another sense, as, whereas earlier in Norge's creative life poetry was a wholly metaphysical act, now it is additionally compared with a humble, everyday object. That does not detract from the importance of the divine; rather, it enhances the force of Norge's message that the divine is inherent in even the most apparently insignificant of things.

The poet's next published work, Les quatre vérités, has a section called 'Insectes et mouches'. The reductionism intrinsic to the onion metaphor recurs in these poems about flies, which, in his interview with Jacques Ferlay, Norge describes as

[...] très intéressantes par diverses qualités qu'on ne leur reconnaît pas souvent. D'abord qualités physiques de pouvoir voler, monter au mur, marcher au plafond, comme l'escargot qu'on néglige souvent, même sans pattes ni bras il peut arriver au plafond, et pas vous. Les mouches ont aussi la faculté de jouer [...] Même avec nous elles jouent à ne pas s'enfuir jusqu'au dernier moment [.] (JF, p. 122)

Possessing abilities men would regard as superhuman in each other, flies are superior to us, even toying with us. They appear to defy the gravity that binds mortals to the earth. Norge clearly endows flies, those simple and forgettable creatures, with that same divinity that is present in the onion/poem. As a poet he sees his task as to celebrate and articulate his spiritual cosmology by means of its smallest element. What Ferlay calls the poet's osmotic relationship with the world (JF, p.123) consists in his recognition of God and poetry in all things, and his consequent figural use of, for example, the onion and the fly to illustrate the true nature of God and of poetry.

In 'Elsa la mouche', the dying Elsa is compared favourably with the universe's most immense entities:

Lunes, soleils, petites galaxies,
Monstres tourneurs, globes inopinés,
Quelqu'un de votre race a perdu vie:
Elsa la mouche a fini de tourner. (OP, p. 390)

Unlike the named, and thereby humanised, fly, these vast objects have no character, show no emotion, and do not mourn the speck of creation that is now dead. For the poet, a fly that is full of life emits a greater light than the brightest suns, and indeed he asks them whether 'vos lueurs savent briller autant' (OP, p. 390).

In 'Rosa, Rosemonde', the rose became a rosary in a figural echo of the verbal connection between the two words. The same effect is being produced in 'Elsa la mouche', because the dominant characteristic of the fly is its light, and the fact that this light is snuffed out, or 'mouché', like a candle. Norge has taken the word's sonority and

used it to create a metaphor symbolising the fly's lost vivacity. He then compares the fly favourably with other, more conventionally luminescent objects. Without the verbal resonance of the word 'mouche', such a comparison would not have so great a force.

In 'Fourmi', from the same section of Les quatre vérités, the ant is invested with human emotions and qualities. The poet emphasises its ordinariness precisely in order to underline how the humblest of creatures has a soul, and how we should take more account of this commonality, since it proves the divinity in all things:

-- Et ta fourmi,
Taille ordinaire.
Qu'en as-tu fait?
Que devient-elle,
Crois-tu qu'elle é-
Tait amoureuse,
Crois-tu qu'elle a-
Vait faim ou soif,
Crois-tu qu'elle é-
Tait vieille ou jeune
Ou triste ou gaie,
Intelligente
Ou bien quelconque?
Pourquoi, pourquoi,
Pourquoi, pourquoi,
Ça n'a-t-il pas
Plus d'importance? (OP, p. 388)

The common quality is not matched by the appearance of the poem on the page.

Words have been cut in half, in terms of their syllables, in order that they may fit into a rigid tetrasyllabic meter, like a combination of the quatropedic nature of ants and the regimentation of their society. Elsa's name humanised the animal, but its physical qualities were decidedly non-human. Here the ~~fly~~^{ant}, conversely, has no name but the poet tends towards a belief that it shares the same emotional faculties as man, and has

a consciousness which was never certain in Elsa. The fly's life was joyous in an instinctive and unquestioning way, unclouded by the ambivalence and nuance inherent in human emotion. Although the potential feelings and sensations tentatively attributed to the ant are stark and simple -- 'triste ou gaie', 'avait faim ou soif' -- they are no less valid for their lack of subtlety. The important factor for Norge is that ants are, in the human canon of belief, not conscious or sentient beings at all, and so even simplistic feelings would be astounding. Yet it is logical that the poet would in some way seek to humanise the tiny, mundane animals he describes, for if they are proof of the divinity in the universe they must possess the spiritual faculty, be it the soul or some other instinctual aspect, to enable them to be receptive to God. Certainly, since the nineteenth century at least, ants have been compared with people because of their structured societal existence. Even the inanimate onion has a 'pensée', a consciousness, of his poetic and spiritual worth (OP, p. 350). But conventional Christianity would have it that man alone has a soul. Norge's questions about the ant are, therefore, more than the product of a poet's enquiring mind; nor do they solely illustrate his poetic cosmology. They evince a doubt as to the capacity of orthodox religion to embrace the spiritual essence of his work. Admittedly he is a creative poet and not a literal-minded theologian, for whom the orthodoxies of the church are the primary source of interest, but his Christianity so infuses his writing that any divergence from the church's conventional teachings is not insignificant. Moreover, to endow even inanimate objects with a soul and a consciousness is not a minor deviation, rather it touches upon an element fundamental to both Norge's poetry and traditional Christian beliefs.

On the other hand, Norge does not always find himself simply contradicting those tenets. In 'L'âme du boulanger', there is reference to the Holy Communion, and it is not invalidated so much as transformed by the context:

Mon âme et moi, nous nous voyons très peu:
Elle a sa vie et ne m'en parle guère.
Je connais mal ses loisirs oublious,
Moi, je n'ai pas le temps; j'ai mes affaires.

Un boulanger, ça ne dort pas beaucoup;
Toujours le four qui ronfle et la levure
En mal d'amour dans la pâte au long cou.
Pâte et pétrin, voilà mon aventure.

Ma pâte est chair que j'engrosse des mains,
Ma forte fille au ventre chaud et grave,
Ma femme lisse et ma pliante esclave,
Tous mes élans aboutis jusqu'au pain. (OP, p. 371)¹⁹

The baker's attitude to life is straightforward: he leaves his spiritual side to take care of itself, while he concentrates on making a living. This recalls Norge's own quasi-schizophrenic life in Brussels, when he remained a wool-trader and kept his poetic life a secret. The figure in the poem acknowledges the role of an unconscious in his make-up, but considers it bears no relation to his conscious existence, which is mundane and overtly physical in nature -- the kneading of the dough, the stoking of his furnace. And yet, particularly in the final strophe, the baker's unconscious comes into its own. In describing with delight the pleasure he gains from his work, he reveals to the reader, apparently unintentionally, the unconscious motivation which compels him to bake his bread. Initially there is a clear allusion to the Holy Communion in 'Ma pâte est chair', and his routine assumes a ritual, religious quality. Then his baking takes on unmistakably sexual connotations with the image of a woman caressed, a slave he

manipulates and controls. This is how he achieves sensual pleasure, since, if the dough is his 'femme', the reader can infer that he has no real wife. Indeed he is wedded to his trade. Further, the woman is not always a 'femme': in its first appearance it is a girl with a sensual 'ventre' similar but not identical to Salome's in 'Jean-Baptiste décollé'. She is 'forte', implying the need for physical effort on the baker's part to subdue her before she resigns herself to the role of 'pliante esclave'.

This juxtaposition of the religious and the carnal renders the baker artistic. He both adores spiritually and caresses sexually his female subject, like a Baudelaire. Although he claims to have no time for the workings of his soul, in fact it comes to the fore in all he does. He is far more than a common tradesman: he is as much the divine poet as any self-proclaimed writer, only his creation is bread, his words dough. Yet he is ~~an~~^{unaware} of the effect of the soul upon him, and considers that, in getting down to work, he overcomes her preposterous ideas, whereas in reality he is putting them into practice:

Moi, ruminer ses conseils saugrenus,
Moi l'écouter, faisant la bête ou l'ange?
[...] laisse-moi. La farine m'attend. (OP, p. 371)

In contrast, the so-called poet of 'La poésie' cannot express what he feels so strongly, and fails in his art (OP, p. 376). The baker is both 'bête' and 'ange', for he acts physically and instinctually and thereby becomes divine through the baking, the poetic creation to which he is driven:

[...] Et l'instant est venu
Que je me plonge à fond dans ma boulange. (OP, p. 371)

Hidden verbally within his ‘boulange’ is perhaps the ‘boulot-ange’. Unbeknownst to him, it is his job to be an angel, to strive for angelic divinity through his baking. The soul he scorns is more compelling than he could imagine. He may treat it as an outsider with whom he can converse, but it is actually the dominant aspect of his character, one which he misunderstands and undervalues.

Once again, Norge has returned to the idea of the interaction between the everyday and the extraordinary. The baker is an archetype for the common-or-garden worker, whose trade involves skill but of a physical rather than intellectual nature. He sleeps little, works hard, and in his speech is earthy and blunt. His product is the most ordinary and widespread of foods. He is conscious of the existence of a more profound side to his nature but has no inclination to devote energy to it. On the other hand, the images he employs to describe his work, while admittedly centred on the physicality he knows best, evoke a religion and a sexuality far removed from the quotidian world he inhabits. And the very fact that he experiences some kind of dialogue with his soul, albeit unwillingly, suggests that even this supposed paragon of normality and simplicity cannot exist in a spiritual vacuum. This may be why the poet chooses a baker for his exemplar of the everyday who is in fact a poet. For Matthew 4:4 tells of Christ in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. When the devil asks Christ to prove he is the son of God by turning stone into bread, he answers that it is written that ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’, a reference to the passage in Deuteronomy detailing Moses’ words to the people of Israel. Moses reminded them that they survived their forty years in the wilderness:

And [God] humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not. (Deut, 8:3)

The baker wants to live by bread alone, in other words he has a job to do, and any time spent dwelling with his soul would be a distraction. In fact, his bread-making is not primarily the result of any financial needs, but is an unconscious compulsion to create divine sustenance, his poetry, his manna. Moreover, he 'knewest not' of the spiritual driving-force behind his actions. He is a modern-day child of Israel in the deserts of Egypt, desirous of bread and unknowingly given manna to sustain him. Thus Norge uses the baker as an example of how even the humble and the commonplace not only contain the divine but create it, because bread carries profound Biblical resonances, both in the Holy Communion and in bread's contrast with heavenly manna. Bread represents the body of Christ and highlights by opposition the spirit of God.

One aspect of 'L'âme du boulanger' which should not be overlooked is the namelessness of the baker. Speaking in the first person, there would be no reason for him to announce his name. But it does give this unknown divine the status of an everyman, which in turn enhances the growing conviction in Norge that all men can be poets, contrasting his earlier belief in the poet's ~~difference~~ ^{difference} and isolation. The baker's anonymity is also highlighted by the fact that names are very important to Norge. His own *nom de plume* has been seen to symbolise the conflict between the non-artistic and the artistic. And, especially in the prose poems of Les oignons, Les cerveaux brûlés, and Le sac à malices, the poet frequently gives his characters, at least the human ones, first names. Thus for the baker to remain nameless is a feature in itself.

Norge's intention is firstly to underline the ordinariness of the people, whom he duly christens with common names, and then to convey in these people a sense of the mysterious. An example of this effect is Clément in 'On ne sait jamais', from Les oignons:

Clément saluait les arbres. On ne sait jamais. Clément baisait les statues. On ne sait jamais. Clément souriait aux oiseaux, respectait les insectes. On ne sait jamais. Clément était parfait, et même avec les hommes. Pas de chance, vraiment: un chêne cent fois salué lui tomba sur l'épaule un beau soir. En somme, Clément avait raison: on ne sait jamais. (OP p. 312)

The comic intent is evident and paramount. But that does not negate the sense of a simple, ordinary man who is touched by the extraordinary. And his having a name personalises the story while making the subject more accessible to the reader: if he has a normal name, the character is instantly more credible. Any common first name would provide this effect. Conversely, where the poet uses a name associated with a particular Biblical or historic or mythical figure, for instance Jean-Baptiste or Icare or Alcibiade (in the poem of that name from Les oignons), the resonances associated with that figure automatically accompany his name in the work.²⁰ Norge starts with the reader's preconceptions about, say, Icarus' legend, and subverts them in order to give a new gloss, an original interpretation to the tale.

And yet, even the common names employed by the poet are not chosen at random, but are picked for a specific reason. Clément is depicted as a man who is gentle and friendly towards all of his environment, and so it is appropriate that his name should mean 'benevolent', 'compassionate'. However, it is also a name taken by many popes,

who wish to reflect in themselves God's clemency, His mercy. The name, then, is apparently simple and innocuous, but in fact it carries echoes both of human kindness, like that displayed by Clément himself, and of divine Grace. Clément's purpose in being friendly to trees and birds is to manifest his belief in a pantheistic world where all things are connected and all contain God. So it is God's own work when a tree falls on him. In other words, God shows no clemency when Clément is hit by the tree. Perhaps God exacts revenge for the man's audacity in having assumed, by way of his name, the cloak of divinity. It can be seen that even the most innocent of names conveys a potential importance.

In 'L'attente', Auguste waits for years until he asks himself why he is waiting:

[...] Les saisons allaient leur bonhomme de train, et la main sur les yeux, Auguste, l'attentif, guettait leurs long cortèges. Sable des nuits, vents et marées, jus dans les vignes, Auguste et son attente. (OP, p. 313)

His name describes his dignified demeanour as well as the stately passing of time which he serves. Indeed, the name is an echo of the Roman emperor who named a period of time after himself. Only at the end does he question his inaction, and he thereby sheds doubt on the august regality of time. Although there is no explicit decision on his part to stop waiting, such an act of defiance against the sovereignty of time would undermine its dominance over him, in other words it would destabilise its Augustness. By doubting the reason for his wait, he doubts the appropriateness of his name and by implication the authenticity and integrity of his character.

The use of names in Les cerveaux brûlés is similar to that seen in Les oignons, except

that there is an additional element in Les cerveaux brûlés: the names are far more abundant. In poem after poem a character is named, and the effect is to create in the reader's mind an entire community of named people, all of whose lives are in some way ordinary but touched by the mysterious or divine. In 'Ah! connaître', the poet emphasises the man's humanity despite his exotic composition:

Les pieds de Fabrice étaient des gueules de crocodile, ses mains de pinces de homard et ses yeux crachaient des laves, des venins. Mais c'était un si brave homme, il fallait le connaître. (OP, p. 524)

Despite the menagerie that is his body, Fabrice is a man, whom it is worth getting to know. Here again his name implies he is 'fabriqué', put together from spare animal-parts which cannot, however outlandish, detract from his human personality. So in one sense he is fabricated, but in another he retains the integrity of a real person. In 'Le dépendu', 'le petit Oscar' hangs himself, is persuaded he has much to live for, and then hangs himself again (OP, p. 533). His personality is authentic, that is to say it cannot be swayed by those around him but rather is unique and true for him. Just because the unnamed 'on' say he should be happy does not make it so. Perhaps the word Oscar is as near as Norge could come in a name to the 'au secours' that his inner self cries. Not that his first attempted suicide is a cry for help in a conventional sense, but rather his personal integrity unconsciously pleads for the right to fulfilment and self-expression against the will of those around, which in this instance means he must be allowed to carry through the logic of his unhappiness. The last statement of 'Ah! connaître', 'il fallait le connaître', rings true for Oscar as well. Indeed, the poet's dominant intention in the named characters is to make the reader overcome the urge to reach a superficial and incomplete knowledge of them. The very fact that the mystery and divinity in men

is often hidden means the reader must delve all the more deeply and consider all aspects, including the name.

On the other hand, when a figure is left unnamed, as with the baker in 'L'âme du boulanger', it may be because the most crucial facet of that character is his quality of everyman, his universal applicability and symbolism. This is also true even when the piece is not in the first person or is not given a more general label, such as 'boulanger', although it is interesting that, in Les cerveaux brûlés, there are almost no poems about specific but unnamed characters which are not in the first person or where the subject has no generic label, for instance 'les peintres' or 'le martyr' or 'le bon bourreau'. One of the very rare exceptions is 'L'époux', and it could reasonably be argued that even this is a label of sorts, though it is certainly more general than those usually employed. The husband marries a dead woman, but only notices after she begins to smell. By then it is too late, and 'il meurt à son tour pour arranger l'affaire' (OP, p. 491). Clearly the characteristic Norgian components are present: an everyday context overlaid with a highly unusual element. Once the reader has accepted that bizarre aspect as a premiss, that the man does not notice his bride is dead, then everything that follows possesses its own logic. If he is blind to the woman's demise, it is reasonable to conceive that only the growing smell of her rotting corpse would awaken him to reality. The universal applicability of this poem, the quality which renders the unnamed husband an everyman, is the lack of communication between two people, manifested in several ways. First, she does not tell him she is dead, not because she cannot speak, being dead, but because 'on cache bien des choses quand on veut se marier'. Second, he does not notice it for himself. Third, the man does not regard the lack of conversation as

unusual. Perhaps all he wants is her body, perhaps he is only marrying as a social convention, not for love, and so has no desire to discover more about his bride. Finally, after the wedding the dull routine of married life takes over, and so he does not expect any change in the situation. In fact there is a change, in the condition of her body, and presumably the husband is as much surprised by the fact of change itself as by the specific reason for it.

So the unnamed man is representative of the absence of communication between people, and as such, he needs no name because he is all men at the same time. Additionally, since the subject is the inability of people to communicate and connect with other human beings, it is appropriate that even the reader should be denied any knowledge of the man's character and personality, including his name.

Norge's final work, Le stupéfai, contains a section of eight poems under the heading 'Je, c'est qui?' In these pieces he explores one final time what it means to be a poet. The first poem, 'Je', revisits the question of distance between subject and object in a clear reference to Rimbaud's 'JE est un autre' letters. Norge objectivises his poetry by de-personalising the self:

Je, c'est qui, c'est moi, c'est eux...

[...]

Je, c'est amour ou c'est Dieu

Et tout ce qu'il y a d'ange

Dans JE! (S, p. 35)

He is the *voyant* not by intellectual choice but because he is the channel through which the divine expresses itself. However, the question is left unanswered as to whether he can be of the earth yet still a messenger of God:

Sable et ciel, mais quel vertige
Si tous les JE tout en feu
 Si JE,
JE moi seul ou JE nous deux,
 Si JE,
Si JE n'est personne au monde! (S, p. 35)

Throughout his creative life he has constantly retained the humanity which would place him firmly among other men, emphasising a spiritual rather than a physical separation from the rest of mankind. However, it is one of the features of Le stupéfait that the nonagenarian who wrote it is looking to return, as he sees it, to God in death, more conscious than ever of his own mortality. Thus he seeks to loosen the grip of gravity that binds him as it bound Icarus. In other words he strives for a lack of certainty in his own physicality.

The second and third poems in 'Je, c'est qui?' treat the nature of the poet's creative soul. In 'Si tu savais comme j'écoute', each dialogue contrasts the superficiality of the physical senses with a more fulfilling inner perception:

Tu dis: j'y vole et t'as pas d'aile.
-- Je vole du cœur, dit Adèle. (S, p. 36)

On the other hand, Norge seems to reverse that process in the final dialogue, overcoming inner feelings by means of a specific sense. But the final line, which echoes

the title of the poem, makes it clear how certain he is that he perceives in a different way from the rest:

Tu dis que tu crois et tu doutes.
-- C'est vrai, dit Norge, mais j'écoute.

Si tu savais comme j'écoute! (S, p. 36)

His point is that, whereas for the non-poet, the supremacy of the soul over the senses is a matter of faith and imprecision, for the poet, the visionary, it is only with the soul that he can be certain of his senses, since it is the very power of his inner perception that is the defining characteristic of the poet. So he listens with his soul rather than with his ears. Further, the act of listening is passive compared with the imagining and flying and guessing that the non-poets do. For he is not the sole protagonist in the creation of his art, rather he is the receptor, the conduit by which the divine comes to self-expression. 'L'habitant', the next poem, goes on to personify that divine presence which prevails over the conscious side of the poet. The latter is able neither to name nor to describe this essence, which he misses as soon as he demands its departure, and which 'se prend parfois pour moi-même' (S, p. 38).

In 'Je pullule', the fifth poem in the series, he struggles with action and presence, searching in vain for the inactivity and nothingness of death:

J'ai beau m'annuler, inutile:
[...]
Le néant ne veut pas de moi
Et je lutte à mort avec la
Difficulté de ne pas être. (S, p. 40)

The abundance of the pronoun 'je' in this poem enhances the futility of his resistance to a precise sense of self, as if he becomes 'je' despite his best efforts. He wants to know more about the non-physical side to his constitution, but always ends up 'au fond du fer, / Du bois, de l'air et de la chair' (S, p. 40), that is, he cannot eschew his materiality. Only in the final poem, 'Rien', does he experience a disappearing sense of concrete being:

As-tu jamais écouté
Le bruit d'une goutte d'eau
Qui tombe au fond d'un puits?

As-tu jamais regardé
Une feuille de platane
Qui vient toucher la terre?

As-tu jamais caressé
Le dernier mot d'une vague
Qui meurt sur le rivage?

Mais as-tu jamais compris
La fabuleuse parole
Qui couve le silence?

-- Je n'existe pas assez
Pour être et pour caresser! (S, p. 43)

Norge's last work, then, witnesses the poet's efforts to slough off the physical existence which he considers holds him back from death and a consequent return to his divine essence. Yet even at this stage it is to the mundane aspects of the physical world that he turns. For, as he seeks a retreat from the external senses, he tests the success or failure of his dematerialisation by his ability physically and sensually to commune with the 'goutte d'eau' and the 'feuille de platane', as he used to do. Only once the everyday, commonplace world around him recedes can he be convinced of his approaching death.

The everyday for Norge is, in conclusion, more than just a source of poetic inspiration in the conventional sense of providing experiences and images with which to fill his poetry. On the contrary, it is proof itself of the existence of a distinct and divine poetic reality. For the everyday is where Norge the *voyant* resides; it is where he looks for and finds God. But this was not always the case. Initially he sought entry to another, superficially more exotic world in order to free himself from the constraint, as he saw it, of the mundane, non-poetic world. The lesson of Icarus is that that poetic world is to be found not amongst the stars and distant palaces but here on earth. Once the poet accepts this, he is infused with divine creativity. Further, as the channel through which the divine is expressed, the poet becomes a part of his own creation. And, as the everyday assumes a new-found existence, supposed commonplaces and clichés are revisited and imbued with fresh resonance and significance. Ultimately, the poet must detach himself from the divine dynamic of the everyday in order to be persuaded of his approaching demise. Only then is he released from the role for which he has been chosen, so that he may re-connect with God in death.

¹ That the words themselves are the starting-point of all poetry is illustrated, as already cited on p. 17 of this thesis, in Mallarmé's comment to Degas, and quoted by Valéry, when Degas bemoaned his own inability to express the ideas he had in a poetic form: 'Ce n'est point avec des idées, mon cher Degas, que l'on fait des vers. C'est avec des mots.' (P. Valéry, *Oeuvres*, Paris. Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957, p. 1324)

² The juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory resonances was a vital aspect of the Surrealists' view of literary creation: 'Tout porte à croire qu'il existe un certain point de l'esprit d'où la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d'être perçus contradictoirement'. (From Breton's Second Manifesto of Surrealism, in A. Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris. Pléiade, Gallimard, 1988, p. 781)

³ The nature of the poet's life in Thomas Mann, for instance, is incompatible with the bourgeois society around him. Clearly this is not always the case: the Northern French 'trouvère' and the troubadour of Provence were essentially members either of the courtly society or that of the masses, while many of the European Romantics like Schiller and Goethe were deeply pre-occupied by social reform.

⁴ The genealogy of the Patriarchs in *Genesis* IV onwards is echoed in *Matthew* I, where the forty-two generations from Abraham to Jesus are listed.

⁵ Apollinaire's 'Zone' deals with the same convergence of ancient myth and religion on the one hand and technology and aviation on the other: 'Les anges voltigent autour du joli voltigeur / Icare Enoch

Elie Apollonius de Thyane / Flottent autour du premier aéroplane' (G. Apollinaire, Alcools, Paris, Gallimard, 1920, p. 8).

⁶ Rilke too devoted himself to 'das Werk des Gesichts' ('the work of seeing'), in which he strove to see beyond the merely superficial world that the non-artist saw. His 'Dinggedichte', 'thing-poems', the first of which appear in Neue Gedichte in 1907/8, seek to distil the essence of single objects in the process of poetic representation.

⁷ Having turned into an 'Ungeziefer', 'vermin' or 'pest', Gregor Samsa begins to adjust to his new situation: 'Gregor war aber viel ruhiger geworden. Man verstand zwar also seine Worte nicht mehr, trotzdem sie ihm genug klar, klarer als früher, vorgekommen waren [.]' (Die Verwandlung, in F. Kafka, Das Urteil, Frankfurt, Fischer Verlag, 1952, p. 29). This can be translated: 'However, Gregor had calmed down greatly. Certainly no one understood his words any more, although they had seemed to him clear enough, indeed clearer than before.'

⁸ From his letter to Georges Izambard (A. Rimbaud, Poésies complètes, Paris, Livre de Poche, 1984, p. 200).

⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 88/91.

¹⁰ This image has echoes of Heidegger's concept of art as being the unconcealment of the true essence from within the artist, as described in The Origin of the Work of Art, in Poetry, Language, Thought and Holzwege, translated by V. Klostermann in M. Heidegger, Basic Writings, San Francisco, Harper and Collins, 1977.

¹¹ C. Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, Paris, Pléiade, Gallimard, 1961, pp. 7-9.

¹² Norge was never a member of the Surrealists' inner circle. However, his works began to be published at the height of the Surrealists' period of activity in the 1920s, and his poetry displays obvious signs of their influence in his amorphous imagery and deliberate illogicality.

¹³ In fact, Helen's reputation is not only for beauty, but also for evil: at the end of the Odyssey, 'Penelope, in apologizing to Odysseus for her extreme caution in recognizing him, invokes Helen's evil reputation in her own defense [...] The Trojan War is barely over, but already Helen is encoded in the epic tradition as [...] the woman who disgraced herself and betrayed her family and people. In the post-Homeric literary tradition Helen is again and again reviled, whether as the treacherous wife or as the libertine who preferred pleasure to honor.' (N. Austin, Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom, New York, Cornell University Press, 1994, pp. 1/2) The idea of Helen being inhabited in L'imposteur by an evil soul is therefore entirely consistent in this context.

¹⁴ 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' (John 1:1) The final line of Hugo's 'Suite' is very similar: 'Car le mot, c'est le Verbe, et le Verbe, c'est Dieu.' (Les contemplations, in V. Hugo, Oeuvres complètes, Paris, Club français du livre, 1968, Volume IX, p. 81)

¹⁵ G. Stein, Geography and Plays, New York, Haskell House, 1922, p. 187.

¹⁶ In his book Vision of Genet, Coe analyses this writer's use of the rose: 'The Rose -- the symbol of symbols -- is one of the eternal platitudes of poetic poetry; but in Genet, instead of signifying beauty, honesty or pure unsullied maidens, it symbolises violence, war, betrayal and ignominious debauchery' (R. Coe, Vision of Genet, London, Peter Owen, 1968, p. 73). As well as sharing Norge's aim of subverting the cliché image of the rose, Genet combines word and image to provide meaning, according to Coe: 'The truth is Figure plus Image, genuine plus fake, rose-flower plus rose-symbol' (*ibid.*, p. 203).

¹⁷ Norge's concentration in such poems on the attraction of small and inanimate objects is reminiscent of Ponge's Le parti pris des choses, for instance the 'passion' of 'La cigarette' (F. Ponge, Tome premier, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p. 45) and 'l'admiration que mérite l'enveloppe du tendre, fragile et rose ballon ovale' in 'L'orange' (*ibid.*, p. 47). Sartre was an early admirer of Ponge for what he saw as Ponge's attempt poetically to reconstruct the *en-soi* in objects, the inherent unchangeability of things that resulted in their not requiring any external influence for them to 'be'. In another context Sartre praised the poet's existentialism with regard to people, rather than things: 'Ponge a dit, dans un très bel article: 'l'homme est l'avenir de l'homme'. C'est parfaitement exact.' (J.-P. Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme, Paris, Nagel, 1946, p. 38)

¹⁸ This can be compared with Yves Bonnefoy's 'La poésie française et le principe d'identité', in his Un rêve fait à Mantoue, in which he writes that, whereas it is said that English poetry begins with the flea and ends with God, French poetry begins with God 'pour finir par l'amour de la chose la

plus quelconque' (Y. Bonnefoy, L'improbable, Paris, Mercure de France, 1980, p. 267). Previously he writes, in an echo of Norge's 'L'oeuf', that 'le poète diversifie la Présence en bâissant son poème, pour retrouver la raison, la place dans l'Univers des réalités les plus humbles' (ibid.).

¹⁹ Supervielle's poem 'L'âme proche' (Le forçat innocent suivi de Les amis inconnus, Paris, Gallimard, 1991 edition, p. 145) also treats the subject of a feminine soul and a masculine body in disharmony. The soul resents the body's ability to see and touch beauty. Here, however, the first person of the poem is separate from both body and soul, whereas in 'L'âme du boulanger' the first person is, at least superficially, the baker himself.

²⁰ Cf. M. Riffaterre's chapter 'Compulsory reader response: the intertextual drive', in M. Worton and J. Still (editors), Intertextuality: Theories and Practice, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990. The piece concentrates on the reader's influence over a text and the fact that intertextual references are often ~~known or discerned~~ before they have been specifically identified by the reader.

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Chapter Three: NORGE AND THE ELEMENTS

If the imagery of the everyday provides an insight into Norge's overall poetic philosophy, his use of the four elements -- earth, fire, water, and air or wind -- is no less instructive, but in an entirely different way. For Norge, the elements are not simply aspects of nature, the world around us, but active participants in the unconcealment of art. In pre-rational civilisations, the presence of all four elements signified the creation of the world; Norge takes this process as a metaphor for the creation of poetry.

Norge's poetry is above all concerned with poetry itself, or rather how poetry comes about. The poet is a divine, who serves as the conduit for God on earth, and whose task is both to undergo and to express creation. And, since his art emanates from God, his poetry is divine too. His insight and his divinity teach man how to transcend spiritually. So when he writes of earth, air, fire, and water, his initial preoccupation is above all to remind the reader not that nature is everywhere, but that these elements are the building blocks of life. In other words, what they are in a static sense is much less important than what they actively do, and what they do is nothing less than create the world. Further, and more crucially to this discussion, the creation to which Norge devotes his literature is of the poetic kind. The aim of this section will be to demonstrate that his reference to the four elements is, accordingly, symbolic of poetic creation itself.

The four elements have distinct essences and characteristics, and perform different functions. The importance given to the four elements derives from their relevance in the speculative and mythic thought of the earliest Western civilisations, in Mesopotamia and Egypt, out of which the later religions and philosophies all grew.¹ It can be seen from this that divinity and creation have always been closely linked, and, moreover, that this connection between the two exists and consists in the elements. But it is equally true that the representation of the elements varies depending upon the respective society. By the time of the pre-Socratics, fire, for Heraclitus, was alone amongst the elements in being permanent in an ever-changing world.² Fire was the most fundamental thing in nature because all matter grew out of it. The mother earth of the Mesopotamians, which stood for fertility, and the creative power of water, were thus reduced in importance. The image most associated with Heraclitus does admittedly centre on water, but it is of a stream which is always moving and therefore always changing existence, and into which one cannot step twice.³

The first man philosophically to construct a cosmology based on the elements was not Heraclitus, however, but Empedocles, although he himself did not use the word for 'element'.⁴ He considered that each of the four elements was everlasting, but could be mixed in different proportions. They were combined by Love and separated by Strife, which for Empedocles were primal substances like air, fire, earth, and water. At different times, Love or Strife would prevail, though overall the world had fallen from a golden age when there was only Love and when man only worshipped Aphrodite.

Crucially, his view of the elements is essentially static, with Love and Strife the active protagonists in the universe, and nature's development fundamentally a matter of chance. As a proto-scientist and precursor of atomism as well as a self-appointed miracle-worker, who is said to have jumped into the crater of Mount Etna in order to prove his divinity, he illustrates the powerful nature of the concept of the elements, for he bridges the two domains of religion and myth on the one hand, and science on the other, and is proof of the enduring quality of a belief in the elements as a driving-force in creation and existence.⁵

For Norge, the elements are similarly distinct yet inextricably connected by the theme of creation. Out of the four, water is the most prevalent in his poetry, and, as with the Mesopotamians, the most elusive. It appears to have a consciousness of its own, for example in 'La souffrance du bleu', from 27 poèmes incertains. Adrift at sea with no wind to propel his boat, the poet is at the mercy of the infinite blue. Yet the title indicates that the suffering belongs to the water itself:

Le bleu pleure l'absence du vent
qui si bien sculptait des corps. (OP, p. 14)

Water creates water as the sea cries, and so this self-procreating element exists and multiplies with no outside influence. The blue stretches out as far as the poet can see, trapping him in its infinity:

Tout ce bleu ne laisse aucun espoir
d'évasion. (OP, p. 15)⁶

It is oppressive for the poet who, having lost his physical freedom by being imprisoned in an apparently endless sea, also senses a spiritual incarceration that prevents him from creating for himself. The self-creating sea is a barrier to poetic human creation.

The poet is forced to revert to the legend of the sirens, and subordinate the modern civilisation of human endeavour and knowledge, symbolised by the man-made boat which is powerless in the sea:

Ne plus croire qu'aux seules légendes
et désapprendre la vie! [...]

Ecouter le choeur fatal des sirènes;

et mourir,

d'avoir entendu chanter
les sirènes! (OP, p. 15)

Although the sirens produce a song, and are thus creative in one way, they are primarily destructive with regard to human life and creation, appealing to a *primaev* force within men and obliging them to eschew their conscious authority, luring them to death at sea. Certainly the poet has lost all his creative urges and inspiration, despite the presence of the 'vision *béatifique*' (OP, p. 15) of the beautiful blue which might in other circumstances have provoked sensations of wonderment and impulsion to write poetry.

In 'La mer', in Les oignons, Norge addresses this inability to create when faced with the enormity of the sea:

Il est difficile de peindre la mer, mais il est simple de peindre des vagues. Toutes les couleurs conviennent, elles sont toujours justes, car il existe des vagues de toutes les couleurs. Voilà pourquoi l'artiste dessine beaucoup de vagues, puis il étend des jaunes, des bleus, des verts, des gris, des bruns mêmes. Enfin, il peint le sentiment. C'est le plus important pour la mer. (OP, p. 330)

The poet who protests that he cannot experience the liberty to create, in 'La souffrance du bleu', is nonetheless creating the very poem which describes his creative impotence. 'La souffrance du bleu' is, after all, a poem, albeit one whose subject is lack of creativity. In 'La mer', on the other hand, the artist encounters the same problem but solves it by a kind of atomism of his own. He reduces that enormity of the sea to its individual elements, and paints those elements, the waves, one by one. The colour of the sea, which it is impossible to capture immediately, consists in a pointillist confluence of many colours, even those, like grey or brown, that are not normally associated with it. Ultimately, the artist paints the emotion, which, because the sea is humanised -- it can cry, after all -- is not monochrome, but a mixture of many different nuances. And, because the sea has human characteristics, the emotion is 'le plus important'. This again has resonances of the Mesopotamian view of water, as sentient and thoughtful.

Man's creativity is bound closely to the existence of water. In 'La souffrance du bleu' and 'La mer' the creation is artistic in nature. In 'Le torrent', also in Les oignons, it is biological. Clarisse is prohibited by her father from marrying the stream of the title, but he cannot prevent her relationship with it:

C'est bon, c'est bon, l'épouser, l'épouser pas, mais on peut l'aimer, n'est-ce pas?
D'ailleurs, c'est déjà fait. -- Un peu plus tard, Clarisse accoucha d'une petite
source, la plus charmante du monde. (OP, p. 321)

The conventional relationship of man to nature, which is increasingly to seek to control it while still marvelling at its passive beauty, is overturned. The attraction of the poet to water is centred on its very active, physical, dominant role in human life, even to the extent of sexual intercourse. The sensual pleasure man gets from water is always assumed as being one-sided and therefore of no consequence for the unfeeling water, but the stream in 'Le torrent' not only causes pleasure but physically reciprocates, creating the 'petite source' with Clarisse.

'Le torrent' is in a sense so unlike Norge's other poetry about the everyday, inasmuch as it takes a simple object but invests it with a fairy-tale aspect, whereas normally the poet's infusion of the exotic into the commonplace centres on a divinity, an otherness, that is bizarre yet for him no less real than that which is everyday. Here that otherness is pure fantasy, along the lines of a princess kissing a frog which then turns into a handsome prince. Yet the exoticism and strangeness, whatever its form, is typically Norgian in the sense that it does not exist for itself but rather is juxtaposed with banality and ordinariness, in this case the poetic commonplace of a mountain stream.

Water's ability to control the actions of man is again seen in 'Une goutte', from Le stupéfait, in which the poet claims a drop as his own, but which the ocean not only passively lacks but actively misses and dreams of recovering:

[L'océan] ne songeait qu'à cette goutte.
L'eau de ce monde, il l'avait toute,

Sauf cette goutte dérisoire.
Je la lui donne enfin à boire.

Il l'avale si goulûment
Qu'il m'engloutit également

Mais est plus assoiffé qu'avant. (S, p. 22)

The poet returns the drop to the ocean, although he leaves unexplained whether he is moved emotionally by the sea's desire, or whether the water has physically compelled him to act in this way. The fact that he too is eaten up by the water indicates that he is ultimately as 'dériosoire' and powerless as his drop compared with the ocean, implying that his will to possess and control water is overwhelmed. Either way, it is clear the ocean has the same capacity for desire and activity and interaction with humanity as in 'La souffrance du bleu', and that it possesses creative and/or destructive impulses which man is unable to counteract.

In 'Cantique devant la mer', from Le vin profond, the poet contemplating the sea realises its creative capacity. He sees gardens and sculptures formed on the surface of the water, and bows down before its life-giving potential:

Races changeantes de la mer! O mer, c'est toi qui es peuplée et moi
je deviens désert devant toi. (OP, 459)

One day, the poet proclaims, the sea will rise up and touch 'le trône du verbe' (OP,

p. 460), although for the moment it too is a prisoner in its physicality. In other words, it will transcend spiritually, and create the poetry with which God will endow it. The water that, like man, is incarcerated in a physical prison for the present, will serve as a powerful creative force, imbued with emotion and vision and divinity like the water of the Mesopotamians and also the Norgian poet-figure.

Fire is the second most commonly used of the four elements in Norge's poetry. For the Mesopotamians it signified destruction and judgement, while for the Egyptians it symbolised the life-cycle and for Heraclitus it was the permanent creator of life. This tension in the role of fire is the most prevalent image in Norge's use of the element, for instance in 'La tour de feu', from Le stupéfait, in which an unknown 'il' keeps building a tower from fire, only for it to be destroyed on each occasion:

C'est la millième fois
Qu'il érige une tour
Aux dieux de ses amours
Et les dieux la foudroient
Pour la millième fois. (S, p. 120)

So fire is not in itself a destructive power, but rather a monument to love and worship. The use of 'foudroyer' connotes bolts of lightning, and so there is an implicit sense of fire's causing destruction, which is underscored in the explanation given for the gods' action:

[Il] ne comprend pas mieux
Que ces farouches dieux
N'aiment pas qu'on les aime. (S, p. 120)

These gods, then, are like the Old Testament divinity that must be feared above all, and their loveless deed reinforces their paramount desire for obedience to their will. The tower of fire would itself destroy, or at least threaten, the dominant position of the gods in relation to 'il', for if he were to be encouraged in his love of the gods their status would be undermined, as would the maintenance of an appropriate degree of separation between gods and men. There is a strong suggestion here of Empedocles' vision of Love and Strife controlling the presence or otherwise of fire and the other elements.

Love is again the catalyst for fire in 'La boule de feu', from La langue verte. The poet asks if 'tu' has this mysterious ball, whose true nature is never revealed explicitly but whose effect is to imbue the owner with forceful emotions, both of creative and destructive urges:

Ça vrombit, ça fait du bien,
La boul' de feu.
Parfois, ça vous tourne à rien,
La boul' de feu. (OP, p. 260)

The specific association of fire and love appears more implicitly than in 'La tour de feu', but the colour of love mentioned here surely refers to fire:

La boul', ça râpe et ça bouge,
L'amour, c'est beau quand c'est rouge. (OP, p. 261)

It is interesting that of all the elements fire is seemingly the most polymorphous. In one instance it constructs a tower, like a solid mineral from the earth, while in another it is a ball, like a drop of water. In 'Couronnes', from Famines, it ultimately becomes a crown. This is not insignificant, because fire is the only element that not only has an existence in its own right but changes the appearance and existence of everything with which it comes into contact. The 'couronne de flammes' was earlier a 'couronne de cendre' (OP, p. 205), and that ash was, after all, previously a solid object, either animate or inanimate. In 'De la flamme', from La langue verte, the poet wishes to die, but in his own manner:

Pour finir: finir flambant!
C'est tout réfléchi, la flamme
Broute encor plus proprement
Et n'en laisse pas un gramme.

Rien ne vaut, mes bons vivants,
L'honnête feu qui sait rendre
Notre coeur au vent, au vent,
Tel qu'on le reçut: en cendre. (OP, p. 275)

Fire here interacts with other elements: the wind which blows away the last vestiges of the man, and the earth, as in the funeral service to which the last lines are an obvious reference: 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'.⁷ The relationship between the elements will be discussed later in this section. For now, the involvement of fire in the life-cycle, and its consequent dual essence of creative and destructive impulse, is what is most important.

In 'D'un feu', from Les quatre vérités, fire's changing shape and its associated capacity to change the appearance of all it touches are again emphasised:

L'homme est un feu et ce feu est un homme;
Tout ce qu'il aime est aussitôt poussière,
Tout ce qu'il voit s'écroule dans la cendre
Et son amour fait un printemps mortel. (OP, p. 364)

There is immense pathos in the image of fire here. On the one hand, fire cannot survive without something to burn, and this renders it unique amongst the elements, all the rest of which have an independent existence. Yet to burn is to love, and so this personified fire needs to come into contact with what it loves, yet it knows its love is fatal. Either it must continue to exist, and therefore to transform and kill what it loves, or it must subsist without love, in which case it cannot remain alive because it has nothing left to burn. Fire turns in on itself, in order literally to self-immolate, but there is nothing to burn in fire alone:

Mais dans lui-même, il n'est rien à brûler.
Ne peut brûler le feu qui brûle tout
Et cependant le feu, l'avide feu,
Le feu n'a soif de brûler que lui-même. [...]

Le feu martyr, torturé par le feu. (OP, p. 364)

Fire cannot burn itself, it can only burn others, and, conversely, only others can extinguish fire, which may intellectually rationalise the need for its own destruction but whose elemental compulsion is to love, and therefore to burn, forever. Once again

Empedocles' concept of the combat between Love and Strife, to decide the amount and strength of fire present, is clearly visible.

If water and fire are alike inasmuch as they both represent the competing creative and destructive urges in nature and man, they nonetheless do so from different perspectives. Whereas water is essentially external to man, but influencing him from a position of dominance, fire is above all an internal impulse. Water requires distance between subject and object, while fire feeds off emotional as well as physical contact.

Air or wind for Norge is that element which most symbolises change, carrying resonances of both the Mesopotamian image of violent action and the Egyptian depiction of a moderating force. In Le sourire d'Icare, Icarus, having constructed wings in order to fly and approach God, extends them and waits for flight:

Il est au bord du gouffre (ah! comme un coeur peut battre!) Il étend toute l'envergure de ses ailes.

Et se sent arraché tout à coup dans les airs comme une grande feuille qu'emporte le vent. (OP, p. 105)

The image is of violent transformation as well as helplessness in the face of a power greater than himself. The 'gouffre' is the physical precipice where he goes to gain the most effect from the wind, but equally it is the gulf between Icarus the mortal, terrestrial being and Icarus the immortal angel. Everything he did before this change was founded in the material world, including the workmanlike task of building the

wings. Now his most prevalent sensation is of entering an immaterial world. Yet he attempts to negate the very immateriality he has encountered:

Maintenant il vole. Il exerce son art périlleux de dompter les monstres du vide.
[...]

Je possède, je vois des pays sans contour et des fleuves sans rives.
J'habite seul des neiges plus lisses que la pensée. (OP, p. 106)

This is why Icarus fails to sustain his flight, because he wishes to transcend, but does not understand that to apprehend God he must soar spiritually rather than physically. Therefore, in endeavouring to cross the boundary between the physical and the spiritual, he nevertheless retains in this new realm all his old material preconceptions. He seeks to tame the void, and to possess the earth below him, instead of allowing the void to control him and marvelling at the enormity of God's creation. The wind has taken hold of him corporeally, but his transformation into flier is not accompanied by any concomitant transformation of the soul. When he does fall to earth, the description lacks any reference to the air or the wind, although surely the most striking sensation would be of air rushing past him as he plummets. Indeed, the portrayal of the falling Icarus is noticeable for its stillness. That agent of transformation, the wind, has disappeared, as Icarus recognises in death that he is, after all, a terrestrial, mortal being who can transcend the earth only through his soul.

Wind as the catalyst for change is seen in Le bal masqué, in which the ball of the title is for the dead. The first appearance of the dead is heralded by a powerful wind:

Un vent souverain se leva, un de ces typhons qui vous enlèvent un navire dans le creux de leur paume.

Et c'était quoi? Que diable, c'était les âmes! Oui, les âmes, les âmes! On les avait lâchées comme une meute [.] (OP, p. 561)

These souls then proceed to inhabit different bodies from when they were alive, hence the masked element of the ball. Identity is confused, because nobody's body matches his soul. So the wind is a metaphoric one, but still the image of the world turned into chaos and disorder by the wind is unmistakable. The poet's friend's death in 'Robert', in La belle saison, is accompanied by the phrase 'Quel mauvais vent!', hardly an original expression but here followed by the realisation

Que nous tournons à la cendre
Et que Robert est vivant. (OP, p. 591)

In other words, the wind blows in the revelation that Robert is dead, that all men must die, but that in fact Robert lives on in spirit, and specifically through his writing, as the poet states at the end.⁸

In 'Un mur me suit', from Le stupéfait, the wall that follows the poet is a barrier to his memories of the past, but the most poignant image of loss of clarity and vision comes from the wind:

Je me débats sous les ronces,
J'appelle au secours, j'appelle
Et toujours pas de réponse!
Le vent souffle ma chandelle,
Je ne vois plus rien du tout [.] (S, p. 18)

The poet was previously a *voyant*, who could reach beyond the visible in order to touch the truth. Now his sight is dependent upon external light, which is no match for the darkening power of the wind, which pointedly needs no violence to achieve its ends. The fragility of the poet and his candle-flame contrast with the certainty of purpose and direction of the wind.

Yet there also arise situations in which the wind, while still retaining its symbolic significance as a force for transformation, loses this sense of singularity of purpose. But the force the poet chooses when he wishes to depict a weakening of the wind's conviction is, interestingly, another wind. For, while the other elements possess strong characteristics in themselves, their domain is essentialist, whereas the wind is fundamentally an existential concept. In other words, the wind's task consists in the 'becoming' of people and things, their transformation, from mortal to immortal, from light to darkness, from death to life. Even fire, which requires the presence of other matter in order to exist, only has a transformational quality when it turns what it touches to ash. Wind, on the other hand, is constantly moving, forever entering and leaving situations in order to bestow its change upon the world. Thus, only another wind can assume its dynamic dimension. In 'Un vent sourd', from Les cerveaux brûlés, the collision of two winds leaves an irrevocable mark:

Enfin, le vent se coucha. Croyait dormir, le pauvre. Mais un autre vent se leva et lui perça les oreilles. Pauvre vent sourd qui se promène tristement désormais et n'entend plus son propre chant. (OP, p. 508)

Wind needs to move continually, otherwise it is no longer wind. Like Sisyphus, it is condemned to an eternal task, but, unlike that mythic figure, it is able to take its own life, by stopping to rest. For the sleep that the poor wind craves will kill it, so preserving until its very last action its force for transformation: having spent its entire time changing everything else, its final act is to change itself into still air. And once it has stopped, the former wind becomes as vulnerable as any other static essence to the effects of another wind, which in this case pierces its ear-drums and leaves it deaf. The inability to recognise its own song is symbolic of its loss of identity *qua* wind.

For the wind, life consists in constant change, death in stillness. In 'Les dix commandements', from La belle saison, the poet compares the two from the point of view of obedience to law:

Un mort est facile à vivre
Sous l'oeil du législateur.

Mais les vifs, mais les vivants,
Les viveurs, les vivandières,
Tout aux fièvres viagères
Sont vivaces fils du vent. (OP, p. 579)

The wind is elusive, vivacious, and full of life. It is capricious, since it avoids the commandments of the title in a continual search for freedom and independence, but it is also a 'vivandière', the ^{woman} ~~man~~ who trails behind an army and sells provisions to the soldiers, in other words, an entity that feeds off violence and subsists from its relation with others. As soon as it stops its furious transforming role, it ceases to exist, and

thereby becomes as susceptible to another wind's imposition of 'becoming' as any object.

The earth is the least commonly mentioned element in Norge's poetry, which in itself is interesting because his art centres on the unconcealing of divinity on earth, and the terrestrial belonging of man while he soars spiritually. The reason for this absence may be that, while the earth itself is not referred to all the time, it is everywhere implicit, since it forms the backdrop for the poet's chronicling of the human story.

The earth represented fertility for the Mesopotamians. In 'La graine', from Joie aux âmes, the single seed that falls to the ground is nurtured intensely by the earth which is sentient and active:

La terre pauvre honore une graine tombée par hasard et la porte à sa germination,

La nourrit jalousement et jusqu'à l'épi mûr qui se balance entre les herbes folles [...] (OP, p. 138)

The earth is a mother, proud of the single seed in the midst of a greater harvest, and determined to see it grow irrespective of the negative involvement of those humans that encounter it, a farm-hand who passes it by and a gleaner who would not deign to bend down and pick its meagre shoot. Only the poem's 'je', an omniscient poet who watches mother earth's activity with admiration, is aware of the worth of cultivating a single seed. It represents the purity of solitude, and the value of individual faith. When the seed comes to fruition, it produces nine grains of its own, all of which are replanted

except for the last and best, which is given back to the wind to be carried in the same way as the original seed was brought by chance to this patch of ground. So mother earth is an individual being but also the earth in its entirety, able and committed to preserving the sanctity of all life, no matter how humble, indeed rejoicing in the humblest life of all.

In section VIII of Le sourire d'Icare, even as Icarus is building his wings in a specific attempt to leave the earth, the instincts of mother earth to nurture its offspring are unaffected:

Que tous les oiseaux inventent ce parfait oiseau: Icare le rusé!

C'est la glaise qui assemble les pennages et la salive d'Icare la pétrit, la mélange. Ainsi la terre nourrit même ce qui voudrait s'éloigner d'elle. (OP, p. 104)

Therefore the earth assists Icarus, and in the image of the saliva Icarus is almost nourished by it, yet it will in a more crucial sense accompany him on his journey to the sky. Despite his best intentions, he cannot fully escape the terrestrial destiny that is his. He believes himself sustained in flight solely by the feathers of fellow fliers, but that plumage would be worthless were it not held together by the earth he despairs. And, to take the analogy of the original Icarus legend, travelling too near the sun causes the wax to melt, whereas here the attempt physically to encounter God could be said to provoke the disintegration of the clay adhesive, as if the earth belongs on earth just as much as Icarus himself, although Norge's version of the myth never mentions the specific physical dissipation of the wings.

When Icarus' antithesis, the enchanted divine in Souvenir de l'enchanté, comes to the world and rejoices in the presence of mankind, his contact with the earth is supremely physical:

Joue à joue il écoute le pouls de la terre
il ouvre l'écorce de la terre. (OP, p. 67)

Earth is once again a living body with an inside like the womb of mother earth in 'La graine'. When he peels off this bark, the 'enchanté' finds

Haute vertu
secrète sève, saison
dangereuse à aimer,
poésie. (OP, p. 68)

The 'sève' is of course both sap from the tree and the life-blood of mankind, a metaphor used for instance by Gide in L'Immoraliste when Michel is recovering from his tuberculosis in Africa:

Cette terre africaine, dont je ne connaissais pas l'attente, submergée durant de longs jours, à présent s'éveillait de l'hiver, ivre d'eau, éclatant de sèves nouvelles [.]⁹

The relevance to Norge is that L'Immoraliste, if it does anything, surely traces the spiritual and physical rebirth of a man by means of the natural elements.

Thus when the enchanted one searches inside the earth for its life-blood, he finds poetry. The fertility of the earth in producing material crops by which man achieves sustenance is symbolic of a more spiritual harvesting. This image is important for the Heideggerean concept of art as being not so much the creation from nothing of work, but rather the unconcealing of that which is innate. The 'sève' discovered is secret, after all, and the divine 'enchanté' has as his task to walk amongst mortals and reveal to them the poetry that is hidden within their earth. With this insight, it is possible to reappraise the gestation that mother earth performs in 'La graine', and the effect of the clay in binding Icarus' wings together. For the earth does not create its life-giving food, it only nurtures it until man is ready to reap the fruits of the earth's labours. And the wings of Icarus are not created by the earth, inasmuch as the feathers themselves come from a variety of birds, but without the ultimately invisible and neglected terrestrial component flight would be impossible. The earth is the symbol of fertility, a concept rooted in the most primitive of civilisations, but fertility is not the same as creation. Fertility is the capacity to convey that which has already been created from concealment and isolation to birth and communion.

Once what has been created is born, and comes into light and unconcealment, for it to have to return to the earth is a negative compulsion, since it involves a renunciation of life and light. In 'C'était quand?', from Le gros gibier, the unknown soldier dies in a war in which images of light and life and elevation contrast with this return to earth:

Etais-ce Monsieur Renan,
Etais-ce Monsieur Calmette
Qu'on allait porter en terre?

Il faut dire maintenant
Qu'un soleil visionnaire
Paris comme une alouette
Montait dans la lumière. (OP, p. 235)¹⁰

The bayonets are almost obscured in the midst of this language of hope and progress, but the pull of the earth cannot be resisted. In 'Orgie', from the same work, pleasure and excess are similarly tainted by the looming presence of the earth, which reminds the poet of man's mortality:

Louange à tout l'éphémère,
Au vin bref et à l'amour
Temporel.

Beauté, vignoble, ô ma terre,
Louange à notre séjour
Temporel! (OP, p. 215)

Death must follow life, and so the earth's task is twofold, to nurture and disclose life but no less to embrace death. When Icarus dies, he falls to earth, not only because of gravity but because the earth which spawned him must accept him back, at least physically. In contrast, the poetry that is to be found at the core of the earth, once unconcealed, does not need to return. In 'Robert', the dead poet still lives on in his verse according to Norge (OP, p. 591). It is characteristic of poetry that it enables a spiritual detachment from the earth, even if the body must ultimately submit. In other words, it transcends the life-cycle of which the earth is the prime symbol.

Thus the four elements each have a unique character in Norge's poetry: water, notwithstanding its conventional image of fluidity, symbolises solid yet infinite unity; fire represents the creative and destructive impulses of interaction with another; wind stands for existential becoming; and earth signifies both the life-cycle and the revelatory, unconcealing aspect of artistic creation. Although Norge's use of the elements clearly dwells in the figural domain, it goes beyond simple metaphoric materialism, and treats the artistic process itself. Moreover, for a work of art to come about, all four elements must be present, in an analogy with the physical creation of the world, where the absence of one or more of the elements results in an incomplete and unfulfilled existence.

The combination of some but not all elements in Norge is invariably concomitant with an image of disharmony or lack of equilibrium. For example, in 'L'eau, le feu', from Les oignons, the result of the union of fire and water is disastrous:

Le feu voulait bien, mais l'eau ne voulait pas. Une autre fois, l'eau était pour, mais le feu était contre. Un beau jour enfin, le feu et l'eau voulurent ensemble. Catastrophe! Il faut dire que cette idée d'atteler le feu et l'eau à la même charrette... (OP, p. 311)

Superficially, fire and water cannot mix, because the latter's impulse will always be to destroy or quench the former, and indeed vice versa, as fire and heat evaporate water. In terms of artistic creation, the solidity of water, the conscious end-product of creation, does not mix well with the interactive fire because there are no other elements present to complete the productive equation. In other words, fire's artistic

purpose is to associate subject and object, rather than to actually be either subject or object in its own right, and so, if water is one side of the interactive process, there is no corresponding other side. In Hegelian terms, water may be the synthesis of art, or even the initial thesis, but there is no antithesis, only the synthesising process (fire).

The difference between the material and artistic essences of the four elements is that, materially, they are things, whereas, in their artistic role, they are primarily stages in a process, a development. So all the elements need to be present for the development to the complete. In 'Glose', from Plusieurs malentendus, the poet wishes to make love, but never progresses beyond the desire into the action. Only earth and sea are present: it is an evening by the sea-shore, where earth and water meet. The two more existentially founded elements, wind and fire, are absent, except for 'un oxygène palpable' (OP, p. 32) which by its very palpability is characterised by stasis rather than movement. What this means for the poet is that his concreteness, his being, never enters the realm of becoming, and he never interacts more than intellectually with his potential lover. His attempts at bodily interaction are thus unfulfilled:

Nos deux corps en marche font des incisions
flasques [...]

mon esprit d'analyse
est gourd comme la lune. (OP, pp. 32/33)

In 'La souffrance du bleu', the oppressive and infinite water and the burning sun stifle the poet. There is no land, superficially to give him hope of escape but equally to indicate artistic unconcealment. And 'le bleu pleure l'absence du vent' (OP, p. 14), that

element which is characterised by transition, transformation. Everything, from the poet's need to write to the ship at sea, is stagnant, and the creative process cannot begin because not all of the elements are present, only water and fire. The wind in 'Zéphyr', from Le stupéfait, spends the night in constant and mischievous motion, listening to 'le récit d'un ruisseau' (S, p. 67). However, its spirit of interaction and becoming is unconsummated because it acts alone, and so its ephemerality will continue and its creativity will remain unfulfilled:

Mais au matin, ce fôlatre vent,
Avec son petit air innocent,

Avec son joli nez de fillette,
Ne parlera pas de ses cueillettes.

Il a l'air d'avoir tout oublié
Au sommet de son haut peuplier

Et pareil au chat repu d'oiseaux,
Il viendra nous aimer du museau,

"Pour toujours" dira ce jeune vent
Qui ne va plus durer qu'un instant. (S, p. 68)

The stream's story cannot be developed, perhaps because some of the elements required for the creative process are absent, or perhaps because, as the element which embodies solidity and unity, water is the end-product of artistic becoming, and so the tale is the work of art completed, enacted when earth and fire and wind were all present at the same time. In that respect it is appropriate that, of all the places the zephyr travelled on its nocturnal journey, it was the stream that gave its 'récit'. Water in this poem both is and possesses poetic creation. In 'Cantique devant la mer', in

which the poet watches as the sea produces sculptures on its surface, the only element that is missing from the poet is the air that will some day free the water to touch 'le trône du verbe' (OP, p. 460). So here again water both epitomises and possesses artistic achievement, yet because the wind is absent in the present, those achievements are from the past. What this means is that the interaction of the four elements is continuous, both in Empedocles' vision of the constant and changing conflict between Love and Strife to create the physical world, and in Norge's process of poetic creation. If the day arrives when the sea attains the Word, 'Passé, présent se mêleront' (OP, p. 460), in other words, the continuum of artistic creation will become manifest. This can again be witnessed in 'Cantique du désir', from Le vin profond, in which the poet details both what he was and what he wanted to be:

Oui, ce fut beau d'être un fleuve, mais, en vérité: ce ne fut point assez. Je voulus être une forêt. Il y avait eu du fleuve en moi, il y eut de la forêt! (OP, p. 431)

He then became love, and now he is desire. His hunger for transformation, for becoming, is eternal. The absence from the poem of the totality of elements means that his existence as water, in the form of a river, can only be in the past, and that in the present tense of the poem he strives for but cannot attain artistic creation. For there is a qualitative difference between his being the result of change, be it love or a forest or a river, and merely the impulse, the desire, for that change. It indicates that his art is no longer fulfilled.

Thus the presence of some but not all the elements implies lack of completion of the artistic process for which the coming together of those elements is a metaphor. And invariably Norge's work describes such situations. There are, however, poems in which all the elements are present. It is in these instances that the entire course of the creation of a work of art is evinced. In Joie aux âmes, 'Le poète' followed by 'Les écoutes' describe how the poet hears voices which lead him to artistic consummation. Being a *voyant*, he perceives what is beyond the senses of the non-poet, in this case the spirits of would-be creative souls who seek divinity in the world but are unsure of its true nature:

Mon Dieu! Ils ne prononçaient pas ton nom. Ils le gardaient trop jalousement dans leur coeur.

-- Alors, c'est bien vrai, dites, saisons et routes, c'est bien vrai que nous sommes maudits?

Et ces bras qui nous furent donnés s'épuisent à de vains travaux. Vous nous disiez: "Coeur à l'ouvrage", ô pays de triste ouvrage! (OP, p. 143)

Their *techne*, in the Heideggerean sense of art and craft as a mode of knowing rather than a creation out of nothing, is unfulfilled, since they have been called to work, but their hands toil in vain:

Ainsi commence un dur apprentissage. Nous avons regardé la terre et n'avons pas reçu de besogne à la mesure de notre noblesse. (OP, p. 143)

They think that to produce divine art means to look to the skies, but in fact it entails unconcealing that which, like the seed in 'La graine', is already germinating in the soil.

The poet, listening to their questioning, enlightens them:

Je vous réponds: l'arbre est mort en vérité, mais sa graine portée en terre nutritive a déjà brisé l'enveloppe.

Et tout est contenu dans ce germe, peuplades, et pour toujours. (OP, p. 145)

So the earth, that element which represents the life-cycle and the unconcealing of art, has been transformed for the despairing souls, with the help of the listening poet, from barren land into fertile ground, the site for poetic development. Further, water has been brought to a previously dry place, and nourished the minds of the 'peuplades':

Sans moi vous étiez perdus: vous chérissiez l'aride connaissance [...] Qui s'est abreuvé de vins ardents, il ne peut plus savoir l'innocence de l'eau pure. (OP, p. 145)

The wines burn, hence the appearance of fire. The wind, the last element to appear, is the domain of the poet who has come to help the people but who must dwell apart from them:

Mais pour moi: j'appartiens à tous les vents du ciel [...] (OP, p. 146)

It is appropriate that his master is the wind, since he has enabled the lost people to exist, to become fruitful and productive, and thus he is performing the task of the

wind, which is constantly to move and become, and to endow others with this property. The poet cannot lose that existential dynamic by living with the souls he has saved.

However, his own task is not complete, for, although he has helped others to appreciate their artistic potential, his is still stagnant. Therefore he continues to listen, and hears the voices of a group of women. Their conversation is characterised by the fire of interaction:

J'écoute longuement leur vivace querelle, ces lèvres de beauté parlant avec du feu, les flammes grésillant autour de ces cheveux -- les visages plus purs après chaque incendie. (OP, p. 147)

The preposition 'avec' is intriguing here, since it connotes both using fire to speak, as if the flames were their tongues, and actually talking to fire, the symbol of subject-object communion and communication thus both causing and participating in the conversation. In addition, their faces are 'cinglés ~~par~~ des vents qui vivent loin d'ici' (OP, p. 147), while their talk sets 'le sang de la terre [...] encore une fois en mouvement' (OP, p. 148). It is evident to the poet that the women possess the force to incite all the elements of the world into motion by their words, as if they are the embodiment of Empedocles' Love and Strife. Certainly one younger woman describes 'mon amour' (OP, p. 148) as being her dress, and announces that one must love men, while another, 'une soeur plus sauvage', exclaims repeatedly 'je souffre' (OP, p. 149) and describes her life as like the struggle of a heart infused with hostile blood. The poet calls the conversation 'cette guerre de filles' (OP, p. 150).

The arrival of the fourth element, water, to join the fire of their talk, the wind that brushes their faces, and the earth whose blood is set in motion, heralds a confluence of the creative forces and the consequent presence of that divine artistic awareness which the poet was seeking when he began to listen to the voices:

Cette guerre de filles, ô filles que vous êtes (ô divisées, ô méditantes) je la possède et suis le lit rocheux qui mélange les eaux discordes.

Le poète unira, le poète fera le grand accordement de vos eaux partagées. Puis elles monteront comme un fleuve stellaire. (OP, p. 150)

The water that was confused will now have a clear and unified direction because of the poet. So, whereas the overall causal relationship in Norge is one of the elements uniting to create the possibility of poetry, and therefore the poet, here the poet himself is active in a process of unification. Moreover, that direction will be heavenwards. As the poet bids farewell to the women, he knows that, with the controlling of water, that element which symbolises solidity, material unity, he has accomplished his artistic feat, and enabled himself to touch the divine by means of that same element:

Salut! et je boirai de ton eau sainte.

Je boirai ton eau vive et j'aurai connaissance. (OP, p. 151)

This is followed by the simple 'J'ai bu' (OP, p. 151), the consummation of his art, the communion of the elements. There is, therefore, a coincidence of the poet's completion of his mission on the one hand, and the unification of all four elements on the other. He

has been able to apprehend the divine in his poetry, as well as imparting it to those competing and despairing voices whom he hears and who guide him unintentionally on his way. Furthermore, the fact that the last element to appear in the poem is water, the one which most represents sentient solidity, indicates that the process of poetic creation is indeed complete. The earth stands for the unconcealing of art, and with its blood roused into motion it becomes alive to the processes under its surface, while the air that travels from afar in order to lash the faces of the women, and the fire of their conversation, symbolise becoming, transformation. As the poem continues, the poet, now in a state of artistic fulfilment and achievement, is also in a sufficient state of enlightenment -- following from his declaration '*j'aurai connaissance*' -- to appreciate explicitly the unification of poetry and the elements:

Témoin de l'eau, de l'air, du feu et de la terre; poète par l'amour, poète par la foi. (OP, p. 151)

The poet works through the elements to produce art, yet he is also a man dwelling in a universe composed of the elements, witnessing their omnipresence and the presence of God within them. As has been seen elsewhere, Norge's faith and his poetry are united, the one necessarily accompanying the other. Therefore, there is a reduction of the distance between subject and object to zero, since he both is and witnesses those elements which make up both the world and his art. He dwells inside but also sees from the outside the composition of the universe. From an atomistic point of view this must be the case, for men too are comprised of the elements, and Norge, for all his

divinity, is human. The importance of the elements in the creation of art demonstrates that it is equally true from a poetic viewpoint.

The rest of 'Les écoutes' addresses this theme of unity. The by now fulfilled poet is crowned as such, and receives the symbol of both humanity and divinity:

Je reçois la couronne d'ombre. Je glisse à mon doigt l'anneau du sang et de l'esprit. (OP, p. 151)

The crown and the blood carry the resonance of Christian iconography: his 'couronne d'ombre' could be Jesus' crown of thorns, since it represents an ambiguous supremacy, while the blood, particularly relating to the 'j'ai bu' that begins the final section of the work, evokes the sacramental wine that becomes the blood of Christ. The poet's ring, indeed like any ring, symbolises above all eternity and union, in this instance of body and spirit, which in itself connotes both the unification of the corporeal and cerebral facets of one man as well as the joining together of earthly and divine.

The notion of oneness continues, interestingly in the elements themselves, which admittedly unite to form universe and art but are conventionally viewed as irreducible. They exchange identity, or at least position, for the poet:

Mais le feu et l'eau, j'en parlerai encore; ils deviendront l'eau et le feu, les deux ailes d'un seul oiseau.

Et moi je serai la pointe de son cri décochée dans le grand sommeil que font les siècles. (OP, p. 151)

Although a bird has two wings, its shape is symmetrical but not identical. So for fire and water to become water and fire implies that these elements have lost their sense of uniqueness in the process of artistic creation, which involved a linear relationship within a broader cyclical framework. Although the precise order of the elements in that linear shape was never defined, it was clear that fire, with its necessary interactive existence, was part of the becoming, while water, symbolising material solidity and being, was both the beginning and the end of the constant and cyclical creative process. So these two elements, in the image of the bird, have lost for the moment their artistic role and enhanced their physical presence. They remain distinct but form part of a greater unified whole, with the poet whom they helped come to fruition.

The artist, then, has been formed, although earlier 'le poète unira', so he is object and subject of the unifying action. The unity and order of the universe is the elements' next objective. For, while the poet is now fully able to exploit his faculties -- 'Le poète sera écouté, car seul il fut vraiment aux écoutes' (OP, p. 151) -- the world he sees is in spiritual chaos. He preaches with his now powerful and resonant voice to the people about the oneness of existence:

Mais voici l'alliage;

Et sur la main du jour; la nuit croule en cascade. Le jour a bu la nuit d'une seule gorgée.

Le sourire de l'univers est dans cette fusion définitive. (OP, p. 152)

In a sense he is reversing the process of God's creation, by reunifying day and night which were separated in Genesis 1.¹¹ However, this seeming defiance of God's work does follow a logical pattern, since it parallels his unifying of the heaven and the earth whose creation and separation was the first act of God. Later he speaks of being 'les battements du coeur et les bouches mélangées de deux amants' (OP, p. 153), reuniting man and woman in a symbolic combined whole which counteracts God's creation of woman out of man in Genesis 2.¹² The poet seeks to revert to the unity of existence before creation, in order to recommence the process ensuring that the chaos and disharmony he sees around him are transformed into divine order and reverence. At the very end of the poem, man sees his son 'qui trouve la bénédiction dans la prière, ô Dieu' (OP, p. 154). This voice in prayer can be compared with 'la voix d'hommes rudes' at the beginning of 'Le poète' (OP, p. 143). There has been a clear development from ungodliness to godliness, and the only way in which the poet has felt it possible to instil in man with this new divinity is by first reversing creation, to regain the state of oneness and purity which existed before the fragmentation of the universe, and then by recreating a new world infused with that sense of pure, divine unity. Thus he re-separates night from day and invests his remodelled man with constructive impulses of his own and the image of woman emanating from him:

J'invente la lumière dans la cécité, je moissonne des aurores dans la nuit massive.

Et par les lueurs de la cinquième saison venue vraiment pour sa lignée, l'homme s'avance très seul et très rieur,

La truelle à la main, le lourd mortier sur l'épaule (sa femme est dans son ombre). (OP, p. 154)

The poet's destructive-creative dialogue most identifies him, as far as the elements are concerned, with fire, and indeed he states:

On parle du feu, mais moi j'ai été le feu, et j'ai aussi été celui qu'il dévorait jusqu'au os. (OP, p. 153)

This is both literally and metaphorically the case, since fire was one of the elements whose convergence caused his revelation and artistic enlightenment, thus enabling him to be a poet able to preach to the world, and so fire is part of his constitution, but additionally he carries within him the characteristic interactive, creative and destructive urges of fire.

In 'Le poète' followed by 'L'écoute', then, the reader is witness to the wholeness that comes from the presence together of all of the elements, in contrast to those poems like 'L'eau, le feu' and 'La souffrance du bleu' in which the absence of one or more elements causes confusion and lack of poetic fulfilment. There is a double cycle of creation and unification: firstly, the confused poet, hearing the conflicting voices, gradually becomes enlightened as to his existence and his role; secondly, that same poet unifies and reshapes the world around him. In a way, the poet does not just reflect God's divinity, but he is God, for his existence must and does predate the existence of the new, ordered world. However, his addressing God at the end implies that he is God's messenger rather than God Himself, infused with the divine Word with which, through the elements, to transform first himself and then the rest of humanity.

‘Affaire’, from Le gros gibier, is another poem which contains all four elements, although, crucially, the references to water are implicit not explicit. This tangential appearance of the water indicates that, while all the ingredients for artistic fulfilment are available, the poet’s task is not yet complete. This is indeed the case in the poem, in which he searches for spiritual satisfaction in the midst of the hubbub of physical human activity.

At the start, he seeks separation from the madding crowd:

Laissez-nous tranquille, hommes de vent,
Laissez-nous tranquille, amis de neige,
Un peu moins d’éclat dans vos arpèges,
Un peu moins de bruit, jolis vivants.

Les clameurs que font bugles et drames
Ne sauraient ici nous retenir;
Parlez-nous demain des avenir,
Nous avons affaire avec notre âme. (OP, p. 230)

The men of the wind, drawing from the wind’s attributes, are in a constant state of flux, both physically and spiritually. The poet, on the other hand, seeks calm and an awareness of being rather than becoming. For that reason he also eschews the future.

The friends of the snow are those ‘jolis vivants’ whose games with nature are the antithesis of the poet’s needs. He requires not a subject-object relationship with the world founded on control of nature but a oneness, in which the elements, those aspects of nature whose metaphoric purpose is to create poetry, actually enter his soul.

His business, then, is not one of subjective perception of the elements, but of communion and feeling:

Si tout est mal dit dans ces détours,
C'est qu'on vient aimer et non comprendre,
Nous avons affaire avec l'amour
Et c'est vous qu'on aime, enfants de cendre. (OP, p. 230)

Since fire causes ash, these children are the offspring of the interaction, the intercourse, between fire and its interlocutor. They are simultaneously the issue of fire's creative potential and the orphans of fire's destructive capacity. Whatever bore them into the world has been burnt to ash by fire the father. The poet then assumes the role of foster parent, taking in the orphans as his own progeny. And in accommodating them in this way, he mixes his own divine blood with that of fire. Once again his business is to join the family of the elements. This process continues in the following quatrain:

Car c'est vous qu'on aime, enfants de terre,
Avec tout ce feu dans vos poumons,
Avec tout ce coeur lourd de démons,
Avec tout ce tout qu'il vous faut faire. (OP, p. 230)

What is repressed within the heart and lungs of the children of the elements, these psychic demons about which they must not speak, is their biological provenance, their fact of being created directly from nature. The poet loves this unconscious truth as much as the external essence of the children, since it is that very genealogy which he strives to acquire for himself.

By this stage of the piece, the poet has acknowledged the presence in man of wind, fire, and earth. Certainly he has shunned the jollity of the ‘hommes de vent’ because of the bustle in their presence when he wished for peace enough to meditate, however the difference between them and the children is that they have assumed the physical quality of wind, whereas the poet is primarily concerned with the artistic potentiality immanent in the elements. Nevertheless, his overriding emotion is clearly one of love for that humanity endowed with elemental characteristics or lineage, for he wants to be of such stock as well. What he lacks is the completion of the artistic project, the answer to his introspective ‘affaire avec notre âme’. In terms of the elements, that absence is symbolised by the lack only of water.

Water is around him, but its proximity is not expressed directly:

On connaît ton vide au ras des plages,
On sait ton silence au fond des os.
On voit brûler vifs les matelots
Quand Dieu reste au frais dans ses feuillages. (OP, p. 230)

Air is implied in the ‘au frais’, fire in the ‘brûler’, and earth, at least tenuously, in the ‘plages’ and ‘feuillages’. Thus the three elements whose presence has already been recognised and rejoiced in revisit the poet’s consciousness. Now for the first and only time in this poem there is a tentative reference to water, in the beach and the sailors. Neither can exist without water, but equally neither is water itself. In other words, the poet cannot resolve his poetic incompleteness, because water, unlike earth, air and fire,

is not explicitly a part of his being yet. The last lines of the poem reinforce the sense of the continuity of his spiritual musing and searching:

L'amour et l'amour sont à genoux.
Nous avons affaire avec les hommes. (OP, p. 230)

This same image of genuflection ended 'Les écoutes'. While in that poem prayer was specifically mentioned as the reason for kneeling, it is no less apparent here. For the two loves adopt a pose of obedience and entreaty before God. The end of the poem does not coincide with the consummation of the poet's communion with the elements for the purposes of artistic enlightenment. He is left with 'affaire' to be done. And, this time, there is no epithet attached to 'les hommes' associated with one of the elements. Perhaps the generality of men will include the sailors, so leading the poet to a palpable contact with water and the completion of his task.

It is not clear what distinguishes one love from the other, for, in the course of the poem, there has only ever existed one whole love. The image of love as having to be represented by more than a singular entity, even though there is no (verbal) distinction between the two, connotes the same lack of wholeness, unity, to which the poet bears witness, unable as he is to commune with the elusive fourth element. Thus it may be symbolic of separation instead of union.

The coming together of the four elements to produce art is not a physical, but a verbal and a symbolic process. In other words, in 'Affaire' the poet has to verbalise water,

since his ‘affaire’ is ultimately with the production of words. Thus the tangentiality, the implicitness of water, in the sailors and the beach, is not sufficient in poetic terms for the poet to be able to experience the oneness he seeks to attain. And, since the poet in the work and Norge are of course two separate characters, this means that Norge is tantalising both the reader and the poet in ‘Affaire’ by giving them the hint of water without explicitly mentioning it. This action on Norge’s part is far from being an idle game, for it reveals the fundamental relationship between the poet and the elements in the search for poetic creation. That is to say, it is this very implicitness of water which tells the reader that the poet in ‘Affaire’ has not reached his spiritual destination. It is what justifies the need for a continuation of the ‘nous avons affaire’ refrain.

Norge did write one poem specifically entitled ‘Les quatre éléments’, which appears in Les râpes. This poem examines the elements on both a physical and an artistic level. From the point of view of the former it appears to trace a path from the generality of creatures and their corporeal satiation towards the continued hunger of one individual to another:

TERRE. Bon manger de terre,
 Bêtes et gens!
 Puis irez vous taire
 Terriblement.

EAU. Tout bu, toute l'eau
 Des mers sonores
 Et le coeur dit: ô,
 J'ai soif encore.

FEU. Seul feu, seule flamme
 C'est feu d'enfer
 Qui sait cuire l'âme

Avec la chair.

AIR. L'espace infini
 Pour toi se cambre
 Eh! désir voici
 Enfin ta chambre. (OP, pp. 176/177)

Initially, the mass of men and animals are sustained by the earth, that element which symbolises growth and the life-cycle. Nourished and nurtured physically, they are silent in the face of the power of the earth. However, the poem's first person requires more. Even the sea cannot quench his desire, which is present in his heart as well as his stomach, unlike the throng of the first strophe. The fire attracts him because it alone is able to unite flesh and soul, that is, the twin desires he experiences. Ultimately he is led to 'ta chambre', where his imminent sexual union with the 'toi' of the poem will satisfy both his physical hunger and his need for spiritual satisfaction. The 'enfin' connotes relief and delight at the fulfilment to come.

The 'tu' of the poem is an elusive figure. If the last 'tu' refers to 'désir', then it is not so much the object of the poet's sexual desire as the desire itself, and as such perhaps to be associated with another form of creation, not artistic but biological, since the poet's 'tu' will lead to *pro-creation*. In another sense, when the poet enters desire's bedroom he will seek to possess 'tu' sexually, thereby taking for himself the impulse, the motivation, by which he can create. If the four elements, then, are the components of creation, and their union the process which facilitates the realisation of creation, then 'tu' is the reason why the poet wants or needs to create in the first place. It is his visceral, instinctual, quasi-sexual impulsion to write. Without such a motivation, and

the presence of the human to whom it belongs, any convergence of the elements that may occur is artistically irrelevant.

On an artistic level, the only element which bears an aesthetic aspect is water, with 'Des ^{mees} ~~mees~~ sonores'. The resonant musical quality of water sets it apart from the other elements which, while leading the way to potential spiritual and corporeal enlightenment, do not provide it themselves. It is important that only in the 'EAU' section does the poet express his continued desire. By the time the word 'désir' appears in the 'AIR' strophe the reader is already aware of it. In other words, the advents of desire the feeling and desire the word do not coincide. So the water is host to both the sole representation of aesthetic achievement and the initial expression of the need for more thereof. Although, on the physical level, and of course chronologically, 'EAU' comes in the middle rather than at the end, artistically, as has been seen in 'Les écoutes' and 'Affaire', it marks the beginning and end of the creative process. It represents material solidity for Norge, hence, not the becoming *per se* but the thing that has become and the thing that is about to become. In that respect, the presence of water in the middle of the poem only serves to underscore the continuous nature of artistic creation, which is of course verbalised by the 'j'ai soif encore'.

In the poem, 'TERRE' precedes 'EAU'. Since earth, in the elemental symbolic code of Norge, stands for the unconcealing of art, it is appropriate that before the presence of artistic content is manifested it must be unconcealed, brought from conception to fruition by the gestative quality of the earth. It is therefore also appropriate for air and

fire to be juxtaposed, since they jointly represent transformation, becoming. Their difference consists in the specificity of fire as opposed to the infinity of air. Fire lives and breeds through proximity to and eventual assimilation of that which it burns. In the 'FEU' section the soul and the flesh are united by the flame, which is 'seule', therefore has a precise physical dimension. The union of body and soul also symbolises the whole poem, since both the aesthetic-creative and material sides of the elements are united in the work. On the other hand, air is 'l'espace infini', that element which exists in no single place but, in the guise of the wind, is constantly in motion, transforming and manipulating as it moves.

Yet the flame is also 'feu d'enfer', so surely it hardly possesses specificity if it represents the eternity of hell. Equally, the air arches over to form a room, and thereby becomes a finite space enclosed by walls. Yet this very duality of existence underlines the adaptive, transforming nature of air and fire. They not only cause the becoming of other things, but undergo existential change themselves. Indeed, their continual change is the reason why these two of all the elements stand for the artistic process rather than the end-result. Fire is not hell *per se*, neither is it eternal damnation. It is what causes the agony and suffering in hell. Similarly, the air is not carnal union as such, but the space created for carnal desires to be satiated.

One interesting aspect of this poem is the concision, manifested in the brevity of lines and the ellipsis of such phrases as 'Bon manger de terre', 'Tout bu', and 'Puis irez' (without the subject 'vous'). This has the effect of emphasising those few finite verbs

that do appear. In turn, those verbs provide insight into the nature of the elements. The two verbal phrases in ‘EAU’ are ‘le coeur dit’ and ‘j’ai soif’. This concentration on orality in the strophe about water reminds the reader of the fact that the presence of each element must be verbally explicit, that is, the word itself must be stated for the artistic process to be complete. The essence of the incomplete nature of ‘Affaire’ was precisely that, while tangential reference was made to water, by way of ‘matelots’ and ‘plage’, neither actually represented water itself, and so the poet’s ‘J’ai affaire’ was unfulfilled at the poem’s end, although Norge, by his very use of ‘matelots’ and ‘plage’, implied that the necessary but missing component to the creation of art, water, was available if only the poet could recognise it. The only verb in the section on air is ‘se cambre’, which cannot but resonate with the ancient concept of the sky, not as the visible extent of infinite space, but rather as a specific overarching entity, with form and divinity. For the Egyptians, the sky was frequently seen as a huge cow standing four square over the earth, and with the sun-god Ra sitting on its back, which is how they accounted for the fact that the sun did not fall to earth. Alternatively, the sky was shaped like a pan, with the convex shape similar to the arch implied in ‘se cambre’. For the Mesopotamians, the sky was one half of the arched body of the dead Tiamat, a goddess who died in battle. Thus there is verbal resonance of, on the one hand, the elements as impulses for artistic creation, and, on the other, the mythological basis for the importance of the elements.

It is unusual to find in Norge’s *oeuvre* any poems completely bereft of the elements, the theme of poetic creation through the elements, or at least through interaction with

nature, being at least implicit in most of his writing. The more epigrammatic of the prose poems in Les oignons, in which superficial wit appears paramount rather than deep insight, form the majority of such pieces. One example is 'Incroyable':

Beaucoup de personnes préfèrent conserver l'argent, même quand elles constatent qu'il ne fait pas le bonheur. On s'habitue tellement, disent-elles. Et ces personnes sont si convaincantes que beaucoup d'autres personnes qui avaient le bonheur suppriment ce bonheur pour avoir de l'argent. (OP, p. 499)

At first sight this poem centres on the maxim that the best things in life are free, and that money cannot buy happiness. The tone and language are so simple as to be condescending, as if the poet feels he needs to repeat 'bonheur' and 'argent' and 'personnes' in order to stress his point to a readership unable to extrapolate and infer for itself.

It is this very register which points to a more profound intention on Norge's part. There are not only no elements, but no figurative language at all, and no reference to any world outside that of the minds of the various sets of 'personnes'. Further, the overt implication is that happiness is something which can be hidden, as if it were on the one hand as material as the notes and coins coveted by those who are happy but poor, and on the other as specific and controllable and dispensable as a household commodity, one which might have cost so much as to leave the buyer penniless. The conventional interpretation of the saying that money cannot buy happiness is overturned, so that money, and specifically all one's money, does indeed buy happiness, and as a consequence happiness leaves one poor, whereas usually one is

said to be able to achieve happiness despite, as opposed to by dint of, poverty. In attempting to discredit those who prefer money to happiness, the poet seems in reality to be condoning their creed.

Norge's aim, however, is not to portray himself as supporting greed and materialism and denigrating happiness. On the contrary, the Norgian smile, that manifestation of divine presence and spiritual contentment, could not be less materialistic. His purpose in depicting happiness in such uncharacteristic and mercenary terms, in the context of a piece which lacks all figural as well as elemental input, is precisely to show the reader an example of non-poetic poetry, to demonstrate by its absence what is necessary for poetic creation to take place. The poem's superficial axiom about suppression of one thing in favour ~~of~~ ^{of} something else is being repeated intentionally on the poetic level. In other words, the real function of the poem's superficial subject is not so much to educate the reader about the folly of trading happiness for money, but rather to provide a material overlay, a concrete analogy, for the deeper poetic point. Of course, the people who suppress happiness for the sake of wealth do not realise which of the two is more important, while Norge is well aware that poetic language, that is, what he has suppressed, is more valuable ^{than} ~~than~~ the banal prose with which he replaces it. It is richer, though not in the same way as the people who forego happiness are richer. The reason he suppresses poetic creation is to highlight how vital it is to us, and to underscore how poor and jejune language is without it.

The absence of the elements is not unimportant. Without earth, fire, water, and air or wind the poet cannot realise his poetic goal. This is true on two levels: firstly, because the man whose world is devoid of nature, indeed of any external influences, like the ‘personnes’ in ‘Incroyable’, cannot be a poet, since his only truth is a solipsistic one and his only readership is himself; and secondly, because the presence of the elements in Norge’s work heralds the search for and attainment of artistic creation, and so without them he cannot hope to create.

Another poem which contains no explicit mention of any elements is ‘Le bonheur’, from La belle saison, a piece whose superficial subject is very similar to that of ‘Incroyable’, that is, the rejection of happiness:

N’ayez pas peur, il ne viendra plus,
Il est trop tard pour son arrivée.
Et puis, rien n'est prêt et son chahut
Dérangerait votre vie privée.

N’ayez pas peur, il ne viendra guère,
Il est au diable, il est quelque part
Très loin d’ici sur des rocs lunaires
Et s’il venait, ce serait trop tard.

Non, le bonheur sait qu'on n'aime pas
Son calme regard insupportable.
N’ayez pas peur, il fait les cent pas
Et vous pouvez bien vous mettre à table. (OP, pp. 598/599)

Happiness is shunned, and the poet is certain the addressee can eat in peace. Perhaps, like the unhappy people in ‘Incroyable’, he is rich and his sumptuous meal will betray his wealth. Personified happiness would use his ‘calme regard insupportable’ to prick

the conscience of the rich man, and tempt him to give away his money and his food and so obtain joy at his generosity, when in fact all he wants to do is eat a big meal, and so benefit from the fruits of his wealth without feeling guilty.

The potential references to the presence of any element are stifled by the context. Thus the rock that could connote ground, and therefore earth, is specifically from the moon, and so is precluded from having a terrestrial quality except by association -- a moon, after all, cannot exist in isolation, but must be a moon *of something*, and that something is the earth. In the same way, the tangential invocation of hell refers to the devil and not his fiery kingdom. Happiness is 'au diable', that is to say, at the back of beyond, and not, as it were, 'chez le diable'.

Again the poet evokes stagnation and lack of fulfilment by both the superficial story of the poem and the absence of elements which lies under the surface. The suggested solipsism of the people in 'Incroyable', who appear to enjoy no contact with the outside world, is repeated in 'votre vie privée' which seemingly must be preserved and protected at all costs. The fact that happiness is avoided in both poems, in favour of material gain, also and incidentally demonstrates how Norge's own poetic philosophy had developed since the early works, which emphasised that he felt a Kantian obligation to create irrespective of any motivation to be happy in so doing. Indeed, as in 'La souffrance du bleu', the need to write is a positive source of unhappiness. Here, on the other hand, absence of artistic creativity coincides with absence of happiness. To be more exact, the people in those poems which contain no reference to the

elements are not so much unpoetic as 'apoetic', and less unhappy than 'ahappy', in other words, concerns about happiness and poetry simply do not enter their consciousness, or, when they do, are suppressed.

Norge, then, employs the imagery of the four elements to symbolise, accompany, and cause poetic creation. When there are no elements present in a poem, there is a concomitant lack of artistic and other creativity. There is, on the contrary, spiritual stagnation and a domination of materialism. When one or some but not all of the elements are present, there exists an imbalance, an unfulfilment. Only when all four elements have been expressed explicitly can the poet realise his artistic potential and carry through the 'affaire' he has with his soul and that of the rest of humanity. This is partly because, from a physical viewpoint, the four elements together construct the universe, and so the absence of even one leaves matter incomplete, and partly because, from the point of view of the process of the unconcealing of the truth which constitutes a work of art, each of the four elements performs a different, though not entirely discrete, function. Water is the beginning and the end of that process, since it is characterised mainly by solidity and stability and awareness. Earth represents the truth and its unconcealing as well as the life-cycle. Fire is that element which exists through interaction with and influence over otherness, so stands for the subject-object relationship. And air or wind symbolises the continual state of becoming. The important point to make is that Norge does not always illustrate each element's specific role in the creation of art every time it is mentioned. The reader must go through two stages in his appreciation of the poetic dynamic of the elements in

Norge's work. First he becomes aware of the characteristics of air, earth, fire, and water. Then he is able to infer these properties whenever the elements are mentioned subsequently. They carry a resonance to do with their artistic symbolic value. For the poet's entire *oeuvre* is linked, and is as much a process as the creation of any single work of art. An example of this fact is the recurrence of the theme of suppression of 'bonheur' seen above.

The final aspect to consider is one to which Norge himself addresses his attention in another context, but which predates him by many millennia. It concerns the number of elements. It may be that Empedocles, when crafting his nascent atomism, logically arrived at a total of four elements. However, the number four has always been symbolically important. In his book Man and His Symbols, Jung refers to many instances of the symbol of four. He cites, for instance, the four Gospels, the four sons of Horus, the Egyptian sun-god, God's four corners of the earth, and the common image of man's physicality in quadrilateral terms, as opposed to the sphericity of the psyche.¹³ His conclusion is that the number four is invariably characterised by unity and completion, and is often juxtaposed in a mystic context with the circle or globe, say the circle of the sun or sun-god, the earth's globe, or the sphere of the mind. This is echoed in Norge's imagery of the elements, since only when all four come together is the artistic process able to be completed, yet that process is cyclical, since water is both beginning and end. So the fourness of the elements would seem to have much to do with the concept of wholeness and perfection.

Norge's exploration of the number four comes in his work Les quatre vérités, and most specifically in the first poem, which has the same title. Although he is talking about truths and not elements, many of the crucial aspects to the elements' participation in artistic creation are present: the fact that all four must converge for their potential to be realised; that they are different yet together form a whole; and that the material level (the 'chair') and the spiritual level (the revelation of truth) co-exist. In addition, there is explicit reference to at least one of the elements. And, in any case, Heidegger's concept of the creation of a work of art centres on the unconcealing of previously hidden truth,¹⁴ therefore the presence of truth in a poem about artistic creation is entirely consistent:

Au coin d'un bois se rencontrèrent
Les quatre vérités contraires,

Une de bronze, une d'ivoire,
De feu, de nuage ou de pierre,

Quatre filles comminatoires,
Quatre vérités bien en chair! (OP, p. 355)

For Norge, as for countless mythic and religious and secular traditions before him, in four is unity, perfection, truth, and, ultimately, art.

¹ In Egypt, it was said that the primaeval waters were inhabited by four frogs and four snakes who brought forth Atum, the sun-god and creator. They represent the notion of chaos out of which order comes. The eight creatures include Nun and Naunet, formless Ocean and Matter, Kuk and Kauket, Darkness and Obscurity, and Amon and Amaunet, the Hidden and Concealed ones, probably referring to the winds. The elements are clearly present as discrete essences combining to generate the possibility of creation. The eldest children of Atum, who came from the chaos of the frogs and snakes, were Shu, the air, and Tefnut, moisture, and their children were Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky. This divine genealogy of Egypt, which goes on to encompass Osiris, the bringer of culture, centres clearly on these irreducible elements, characterised both in the primaeval chaos and in the progeny of Atum as creators, not just of life but, in Osiris, of art and craft as well. Earth and Sky were the primal pair for the Egyptians. The importance of the other two elements derives from the climatic and geographical domination exerted by the water of the Nile, which in its seasonal ebb and flow underwent an annual life-cycle, and the all-powerful fire of the sun, whose

life-cycle in contrast was enacted on a daily basis.

For the Mesopotamians, the elements form the governing powers of the cosmic state which constituted and ruled over their world. Only those natural forces which filled the people with awe were regarded as full citizens of the universe, and, as gods, formed a kind of governing assembly. This reflected the state of society on earth, where only the free men of Mesopotamia decided political affairs. The power in the sky was Anu, who symbolised authority as the father of the gods. The power of the wind, or, more specifically, the storm, was Enlil, and he represented violence and forcefulness. The earth's power consisted in its fertility, and was called Nin-tu, 'the lady who gives birth', the queen of the gods, while the power of water, Enki, literally 'Lord of the earth', was characterised by creativity, activity, and thought. Fire was thought of as the son of Heaven, harnessed by man to destroy his enemies by burning images of them. Yet it would only burn those it deemed deserving of such treatment, and so it had the character of a judgmental figure as well as a destructive one. For further details, see H. Frankfort and others, Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1946.

² B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy, London, Allen and Unwin, 1979, pp. 57-65.

³ 'You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever flowing upon you', quoted in History of Western Philosophy, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴ ibid., p. 72.

⁵ G. Bachelard, La psychanalyse du feu, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, contains an interesting chapter titled 'Le complexe d'Empédocle', in which he concentrates on the legend of Empedocles' suicide in Etna and his respect for fire as a symbol of the instinct for life and death.

⁶ Cf. Supervielle's 'Rayon vert': 'L'oiseau, précédé de son désespoir, [...] voulait échapper au déluge du soir' (J. Supervielle, Le forçat innocent suivi de Les amis inconnus, Paris, Gallimard, 1991, p. 96). Supervielle's poetry of space and confinement has much in common with Norge's writing about the elements.

⁷ Book of Common Prayer, 1662, taken from the Interment Service.

⁸ The specific dedication is to a 'Robert Melot du Dy.' (OP, p. 591)

⁹ A. Gide, L'immoraliste, Paris, Gallimard, 1988 edition, p. 54.

¹⁰ See note 9 of 'Chapter Four: Norge and Time', p. 222, for references to the identity of Renan and Calmette.

¹¹ 'And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.' (Genesis 1:4)

¹² 'And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. / And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' (Genesis 2:22/23)

¹³ C. G. Jung, Man and His Symbols, London, Aldus, 1964. See especially Jung's chapter 'Approaching the Unconscious'.

¹⁴ See M. Heidegger, The Origin of The Work of Art, op. cit.

Chapter Four: NORGE AND TIME

The previous two chapters dealt with Norge's creation of his own poetics. The following three chapters will analyse Norge's imagery from another perspective: how he takes already existing philosophies and structures as the source for his poetry. At the core of this analysis is the point that the interaction between Norge's poetic imagery and more abstract concepts is a two-way process: in terms of his poetics, the former produces the latter, whereas in the areas explored in next three chapters the process is reversed. The first of these is the concept of time.

All human activity takes place within certain temporal boundaries, just as everything must also have a spatial dimension. The laws of physics apply as much to the writing down of a poem as to any other deed. It could be argued that literature is essentially about the universal rather than the specific or personal, but of course it relies upon a juxtaposition of the two and not the presence of one to the exclusion of the other. Even the epithet 'timeless' which is applied to much great art is misleading, for if a thing is timeless it in fact does not lack time, but on the contrary exists for all time. At each point in time (and space) the art that is called timeless exists, or is true, so it does not perhaps belong exclusively to a single time but is nevertheless more 'timeful' than 'timeless'. So when a poet writes about time, that is, uses time as a subject of his work,

he seeks to understand and conquer and manipulate it while in reality remaining subordinate to its overriding laws.

There are essentially two ways of representing the concept of time. The first, which has prevailed since Aristotle and through most of modern European thought, gauges time in terms analogous to the measurement of space.¹ The spatial world comprises many individual points, each of which is separate and identifiable. By the same notion time is linear, and each point along the line of time, which appears to move regularly and at a constant speed, is likewise identifiable, notwithstanding Einstein's Theories of Relativity concerning, for example, the passage of time in or near a black hole.² There is no intrinsic difference, therefore, between the calibration of a spot on the ground or on a map and the measurement of a second or millisecond in time. The word 'timeless' here is thus as meaningless as the word 'spaceless', for nothing can exist if it has no specificity, even if it is said also to be true for other points in space or time. If God is considered omnipresent, for instance, that implies He is everywhere at once, not nowhere at all.

The second way of approaching time, the pre-Socratic and Bergsonian view, states that time is not like space, inasmuch as it exists not only, or not at all, in definable units but as an indivisible whole.³ While the post-Socratic paradigm also insists on continuity, it is distinguished by the ability to reduce that whole into constituent parts. Thus time could indeed be said to be timeless because it exists progressively, continuously, rather than as a series of units, in other words time is precise-time-less.

In the Aristotelian model, a thing, with its own time and space, cannot be another thing, thereby existing in another time and space. For Bergson,⁴ the central importance lies not with the specificity of something, its unalterable space-time co-ordinates, but with that thing's passage through time. Heraclitus saw permanence as residing in change, not stasis. For a work of art to be timeless, it must refuse the confinements that mathematicians would place on it, its occupation in linear space-time. It must change with time itself. This means that the poet who writes about time, or of whom it could be said that time is a central theme, depicts time's continuous quality, the fact that time does not pass in defined units, even if points in time do have, for the sake of convenience, names like one o'clock or two o'clock. These co-ordinates serve to help humans bring order and routine to their lives, but do not engender profound personal insight into the nature of time precisely because they are arbitrary and artificial.

If a poet endeavours to depict the continuousness of time, part of the answer as to how to achieve this lies in a concentration on the present. If time behaves like space, then the past is clearly visible, or apprehensible, merely by doing the temporal equivalent of looking over one's shoulder, and the future likewise by looking ahead into the distance. But there are in fact no equivalents. In the case of memory, it is possible to review the past, yet it is no less conceivable to embellish or invent it. The mind's eye may picture an event equally easily whether it actually took place or is fantasised. Similarly, it is possible to plan for the future in meticulous detail, taking into account all assumed contingencies, however actually living the future is only feasible once that future becomes present.

So the only true experiencing that can be done is in the present. In other words, in existential terms, there is only the present, and the past and future are constructs of the mind to help us rationalise and collate what has gone and what is expected to come.

Even Sartre's memorable description of the past as like a mermaid's tale, which we drag behind us in the present, implies fantasy and myth in the image of the mermaid.⁵

That is not, of course, to say that time stands still, as if the present were a static force. Exactly the opposite is true: each different unfolding part of the indivisible thread of time is as much in the present as each other, and can only truly be experienced as it happens.

The point here is not that man's notion of time is complex but that it is somehow ultimately independent of objective existence and so is experienced in the same way as other sensations, like heat or colour or pleasure. Crucially, because the only true time is now and the only true experience in the present, time and existence are one and the same thing. In Heraclitean terms, we never step twice into the same river. As time passes, so does the universe, and our perception of reality depends upon time, and more particularly, time's fluidity. Plato quotes Heraclitus in Theaetetus as insisting 'nothing ever is, everything is becoming',⁶ although this may be apocryphal and mentioned, as were most of Plato's citations of Heraclitus, solely in order to be refuted.

Nowadays Heraclitus would be considered a mystic more than strictly a philosopher, in the style of a Gurdjieff. But this does not devalue his ideas, indeed for the poet his

figural language, like that of Bergson, enhances his sense of reality by lending it a poetic idiom. In its synthesis of two opposing ideas, movement and stasis, time for Heraclitus is one example of the universe's unity and harmony which is attained through polarity, for although we never step twice into the same river, 'we step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and are not'. What this means is that, in opposition to the Cartesian 'cogito' argument, we cannot define ourselves by our perception of reality, we cannot be sure we exist as a unique entity to the exclusion of all other possibilities. This serves to underscore the futility of the linear model of time, where there is only one direction in which to move. For Heraclitus the only singular thing not born of polarity and synthesis is fire, the universal life-force which itself offers an image of a constantly changing flame.

Norge's task is not to rehearse the philosophical arguments about the nature of time, and then simplistically to conclude, say, that Aristotle was right and Heraclitus wrong, but rather to present the tension between the two views of time, the linear and the cyclical, the fixed and the changing, the time of exact units and the time of indivisible oneness. In other words, his aim is to describe man's ever-shifting perception of time and not to assert any physically or philosophically objective reality. This is not universally true of Norge, since, as I suggest in other chapters of this thesis, he does indeed set forth his vision of an objective poetic and material truth. But in the realm of his imagery of time, his treatment is centred on an appreciation of time's fundamentally subjective and pluralistic essence.

It would be foolish to contend that units of time do not exist, or at least that they are not named as such. In 'Semaines', the most common of labels, days of the week, are listed:

Lundi, mardi, mercredi:
Roulis, fourbis, cliquetis.
Coeurs et jours à folles ailes
Dans leur fuite de gazelles.
Jeudi: soucis. Vendredi:
Giboulis, torticolis. (OP, p. 231)

As the days fly past in a constant 'roulis', each is given an epithet, except Friday, which has two. The distinctness of sound of each day is mirrored in the epithets, but the poet also highlights the unity of movement of the days. So there is already a tension between the separation and the fusion of these arbitrary terms. Perhaps the unstoppable onrush of days is what causes the poet's tense stiffness in the 'torticolis'. Each day could not exist without each other, and each has its allotted place in the linear defining of time, yet after the list of days is complete it must start again from the beginning, because the poem is called 'Semaines' and not 'Semaine'. Linearity must thus combine with cyclic motion. For the poet the words that denote days of the week are no indication as to the true nature of those days, but are, on the contrary, essentially a collection of sounds with as much in common as 'Roulis, fourbis, cliquetis', that is, their connection comes more from their rhyme and rhythmic movement than from their meaning. He is more concerned with the forward motion of time as a whole, and this sensation of rhythm and dynamism that accompanies the terms for the days of the weeks is more illustrative of such forward motion than the actual definitions of those

terms. In other words, 'Lundi, mardi, mercredi' and so on represent time by their sound rather than by their arbitrary meanings.

The days of the week are labels that help humanity without reflecting reality, since one Wednesday may be completely different from another, and may in fact resemble a Monday more than a Wednesday, whereas a chair will always look more like a chair than, say, a table. The terms are therefore not descriptive in any real sense, and are meaningless unless associated with other similar terms. Even the expression 'a month of Sundays' refers to an indefinite period of time, and not a month when there are only Sundays and no other day. For the poet a word or series of words which are deliberately intended to have no intrinsic, independent reality is a fascinating challenge, since it disrupts his belief in the divinity within the word.

If the days of the week have no soul, no inner truth, then they are a manifestation of the absence of God, and this is surely what the poet implies in his question at the end of 'Semaines': 'Où est ma dimanche?' The rest of the week witnesses the continual search for money, for material gain:

De lundi à samedi,
La course aux maravédis.
Florins, francs, ducats, roupies!
Tournez les ans, les toupies. (OP, p. 231)

So God's day must be separate, a time when man contemplates spiritual rather than material matters. But if the days of the week are soulless and godless, then Sunday

becomes a time of torment, for the absence of God becomes even more obvious on the day specifically set aside for His worship. A further problem is encountered in the feminine 'ma' of 'dimanche', which serves to increase the reader's unease at this subversion by the poet of such a fundamental and accepted part of human life. The Sunday he seeks is

[...] fleur de pervenche,
Sur son ineffable branche,
Naive et douce de hanche [] (OP, p. 231)

The contrast between the vividness of this image of the young flower that is Sunday and the indistinct reality of the days of the week underscores Norge's attempt to force the reader to re-assess his preconceptions about the units of time he takes for granted. The feminisation of 'dimanche' alone is sufficient to bring doubt into the reader's mind.⁷

Whereas in 'Semaines' it is Sunday that is animated, in 'C'était quand?', from Le gros gibier, it is history itself which comes to life. This is symbolic of the more basic difference between these two poems, which is that 'C'était quand?' is set on a more epic scale, and the time-labels referred to are years instead of days. However, the undermining of these arbitrary units of time which figured so strongly in 'Semaines' is a common feature of the two poems. The first strophe of 'C'était quand?' juxtaposes precise times with more nebulous periods:

Etait-ce au temps des jalouses,
Etait-ce aux jours de la force,
Etait-ce en quatre-vingt-douze,
Ou en mil-neuf-cent-quatorze? (OP, p. 235)

It is unknown when the first two eras took place, but the evocation of such portentous epithets as well as the reference to the First World War implies deceptively that this is to be an epic war poem, detailing the heroic deeds of a lost age. The illusion is maintained in the following lines:

Il faut dire maintenant
Qu'un soleil visionnaire
Luisait sur des baïonnettes. (OP, p. 235)

The visionary nature of the sun identifies the day as glorious. But Norge's irony is unmistakeable in the line 'Il faut dire maintenant', as if the mention of the sun, and thereby the evocation of glory and power and heroism, is formulaic and obligatory. In fact, epic deeds are not the subject of the piece at all. As in 'Semaines' it is time *per se*. The end of the poem recalls the flower Sunday which was 'douce de hanche', only this time the figure is 'Histoire':

Accoudée au pont des Arts
Une belle aux douces hanches
Regardait couler l'histoire.

Et l'Histoire dure et blanche
Au milieu de ses fontaines
Regardait couler l'Histoire. (OP, p. 235)

The Heraclitean river and its application to the passing of time are evident, as is an invocation of the tension between stasis and motion in Apollinaire's 'Le Pont Mirabeau':

Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure
Les jours s'en vont je demeure⁸

The essence of 'Le Pont Mirabeau' is the ineluctability of time's passage, and the impossibility of recapturing former love, while life itself is almost unbearably slow. For Norge in 'C'était quand?', the individuality of human experience, the personal sensation of time, is less important than that of the ironic hero History, who dominates and surveys his realm, while the bayonets of the First World War kill the faceless men like Monsieur Renan and Monsieur Calmette mentioned in the second strophe (OP, p. 235).⁹ Men may view history in terms of individual dates and names and eras, but History sees the totality, the continuous fluent unity of time. It is the difference between the 'histoire' with a small 'h' that the beautiful woman watches flow by, and the capitalised 'Histoire' which is both subject and object, both watcher and watched, and endowed with a sight that can see future as well as past in its omnipotent position.

In 'Matins sans maître' from Le stupéfait, time is again the subject, and there is a strong contrast between a unit of time and infinite, constant time. But in this poem the unit, morning, is clearly shown to be more natural, and therefore less arbitrary and man-made, than terms like '1914' or 'lundi'. With this natural quality comes a sense of worth and power, an uncontrolled ability to connect with and yet defy the world around. Here, then, is a unit of time that dominates man rather than being dominated or defined by man, who must wait for the morning to awaken:

Ces matins qui dorment encore
Dans l'étouffement de leur nid,
Quels rayons vont-ils nous éclore
Au seuil d'avenirs infinis? (S, p. 39)

Either the morning will open its eyes and give the day to the world, or man will be forever in darkness. As he awaits the morning's next act, man is powerless in the face of time's potential to disrupt its own continuum:

Dormez sous vos nuages lourds
De leur foudre, ô matins sans maître
Ou brûlez plutôt pour toujours,
Dévorez-vous avant de naître! (S, p. 39)

The morning may self-immolate, or it may last forever, or it may refuse to be awoken by man's desire to start a new day. There is nothing inevitable about the passage of time, just as the poet's 'dimanche' was mislaid in 'Semaines', symbolising a perversion of the normal course of events. Further, the mornings can sleep 'jusqu'au blasphème' in the fourth quatrain, in other words they not only disturb human reality but also subvert God's control over the world. Their sleep is an act of defiance which no being can counteract, since they are 'sans maître'. The physicist would insist that the term 'morning' is nothing but an approximate human characterisation of the period when the earth's rotation allows a part of it to be lit again by the sun's rays after a time of darkness. The poet, on the other hand, personifies the morning and gives it the power to stop that rotation, shut out the sun, and keep the world in gloom, and all this seemingly upon a whim. The divine and the infinite are hostage to the morning's

ungodly darkness. Nor is this a unique possibility, for the poet addresses mornings in the plural. Every day of our lives darkness and doubt recur, and it is only time's vagary which allows it, and us, to continue to exist.

Of course the morning is not solely symbolic of the cycle of lost and regained darkness. The poet cannot decide whether to implore it to burn brightly or remain in the sleep of night. The 'on' that gazes upon the dawn is '*aveuglé de lumière*' from the '*incendie insupportable*', a mesmerising, magnetic energy that the morning delivers to earth from the sun. But the poet characterises morning as sleeping '*éperdument*', as if it is barely able to suppress the light it can transfer to the earth from the sun. Perhaps this personified morning is conscious that, in waking, it must die by releasing its life-force. Once the light it possesses is allowed to escape, it is spent, and perishes. When the poet asks it to burn '*pour toujours*', therefore, it cannot. In birth it contains only a finite amount of life, and, being an animate creature, rather than physics' inanimate fourth dimension, it is as mortal as the humans to whom it brings light. If it sleeps, it does not fulfil its purpose, but once it begins to act, it is doomed to die, at least until death's sleep infuses it with enough potential light to be born again the next day. According to this interpretation, the morning is, after all, the prisoner of its own existence, and not '*sans maître*' as the title would have us believe. Its cyclical life is analogous to that of Sisyphus, who was condemned to roll a rock up a hill, from which it always fell back down. But Sisyphus was being punished, and it may be that the morning is suffering a similarly eternal torture as Sisyphus does for his defiance of the deities' omnipotence. The morning believes it has the capricious power to decide whether to bring light to

the world or whether to keep it in an ungodly and deadly darkness by remaining asleep, yet in truth the light within it must be let out. It is faced with the dual torment of, on the one hand, eternal repetition of its Sisyphean action, and, on the other hand, the agony of holding in the light that needs to be spewed out. The poet asks the morning:

Vivrez-vous pour le brûlement,
Hallucinés d'être vous-mêmes? (S, p. 39)

He implies that the unconcealment of this burning light is indeed his reason for existing, and, moreover, that, just as the onlooker is blinded by the dawn, the morning is blinded from the reality of his life by the sheer energy of the light he unleashes, and deluded into believing his power is greater than it actually is. It is for this crime of self-deification that he is punished eternally.

When Norge refers to a period of time, therefore, be it an artificial one like 'lundi' or 'mil-neuf-cent-quatorze' or one more related to natural circumstances, like 'matin', he does so in an entirely different way from that which would prevail in a non-poetic situation, that is, in order to give the reader a fixed and agreed temporal starting-point from which to begin a discussion. On the contrary, he seeks to undermine the reader's most basic preconceptions about time. It is not the case that time is either undefinable, a subjective amorphous entity, or capable of being defined and categorised and labelled. For even those labels and categories are subject to interpretation and subversion. When the days of the week are listed but Sunday is absent, the whole of man's existence is called into question. And when the morning is caught in the tension

between finiteness and infinity, when it is uncertain that it will awaken at all, the specificity that is the whole *raison d'être* of units of time is threatened, or at least that specificity is challenged by questions of time's overriding unity and continuity. And if it was man who thought he could control time by categorising it into units, then the disruption of time's identity affects man in the same way, and undermines his control of the world. The mesmerised 'on' who gazes at the breaking morning is a creature that has ceased to consider time as an object to be controlled, and, although he implores and reasons with it, is ultimately in its thrall.

The image of Sisyphus as a metaphor for the collision of divisible and indivisible time reappears in the poem 'Sisyphe' from Les cerveaux brûlés:

A la fin, j'en ai marre, c'est toujours à recommencer, hurla Sisyphe. Un bon plumard et qu'on s'couche! On a beau être Sisyphe, il y a des moments où ce rocher vout met en boule. Et là-dessus, Sisyphe, ayant soufflé une petite minute, se remit à pousser son caillou. (OP, p. 537)

The treatment of the myth is colloquial in register and humorous in tone. Sisyphe pushes a 'caillou' at the end rather than the previously mentioned 'rocher', which tends to banalise the situation, and this impression is enhanced by the pun on 'boule' as well as the ironic 'à la fin' at the beginning (the task, after all, has no end). The reader's preconception about the tragic and eternal nature of Sisyphus' punishment is undermined, and, although the poet does nothing to refute the endlessness of the Corinthian king's task, it is a momentary glimpse which the reader is afforded, rendering the situation similar to any one of Norge's snap-shot prose poems in its

concentration on a brief instant. In other words, by using Sisyphus as the subject of a poem, the poet could be expected to take the opportunity to depict the whole of time, for that is what characterises Sisyphus' punishment, but instead he refers only to a tiny fraction of it. In addition, that fraction witnesses Sisyphus' taking a rest. So, whereas the conventional myth centres on eternal labour, Norge does the opposite, and highlights momentary rest.

It is questionable exactly how aware Sisyphus is of the extent of his punishment. If nothing else were known about him other than what exists in this poem, the reader could assume that the exclamation '*c'est toujours à recommencer*' was no more than an understandable expression of his exasperation in the face of a job that seems to be taking longer than expected. Of course, part of Norge's point is that man can never even attempt to comprehend what eternity means, and in that respect it is possible that Sisyphus heard his sentence but could not grasp its significance. All that any Sisyphus can do is to roll one rock up one hill at any one time -- eternity does not become shorter if he speeds up or slows down. He must only resign himself to the task and not think too far ahead. He and the poet are thus justified in confining themselves to shorter units of time, '*des moments*', and '*une petite minute*', if only because human comprehension will not allow the concept of eternity or infinity in any meaningful sense.

However, infinity is not found only in the very great. The units of time employed to denote brevity as opposed to eternity, '*des moments*' and '*une petite minute*', are in

themselves imprecise. This is especially true of the latter, which takes a specific measurement and robs it of that specificity. In scientific terms there is no such thing as a short minute, compared, say, with a long minute, but in human experience even precise units of time vary according to subjective criteria. For Sisyphus a minute of rest might well seem to last less time than a minute of rolling a stone up a hill. If a finite period is deprived of objective reality it becomes as infinite as the eternity of Sisyphus' punishment. That is not to say, of course, that it lasts as long as eternity, merely that it shares a quality of indeterminateness, inexactness.

This argument can be taken further. The humour and register of the poem serve to humanise Sisyphus' plight, that is, they turn a mythical figure and his incomprehensible punishment into an utterly common human circumstance. The condemned man is essentially the same as any other person who is faced with a difficult physical task. He would like to rest longer, and is frankly fed up with the time it is taking, but wants to see it through to the end. In Sisyphus' case there is no end, but that is only the reader's assumption based upon the myth, and indeed it would not have been uncharacteristic of Norge were he to have ended the poem by subverting the legend even to the extent of letting Sisyphus go free. The most important part of the poem in this regard is when the subject says 'On a beau être Sisyphe, il y a des moments [...]''. So there exists a myth of Sisyphus' personality that goes beyond the events alone and in which the hero accepts his punishment with a heroic Stoicism that allows him to face the eternity to which he has been condemned. The logic of this myth is that punishment does not only fit our crime but affects our character in a positive fashion. Being a hero, Sisyphus

accepts his fate with the due degree of resignation and determination. Yet the Sisyphus of the poem cannot live up to his punishment, try as he might. There are moments when he cannot achieve the heroic status to which his epic task condemns him. In other words, the normal, human qualities of being fed up, tired, annoyed, manifest themselves despite his best intentions. While striving to be heroic and eternal, he nevertheless lapses momentarily into the here and now. And it is this fusion of the epic and the ephemeral, the eternal and the human, which characterises Sisyphus' notions of time, and which reinforces the infinity of 'une petite minute' and 'des moments'.

According to the myth, Sisyphus' crime was to defy Death by putting it in chains when it came to take him away. His rejection of mortality comes back to haunt him in Norge's poem, for that is what infuses him with feelings of tiredness and a desire for sleep. After all, if he were immortal in the first place, being condemned to eternity would be no punishment at all: he would never get tired, he would never crave sleep, and his Stoic heroism would be undiminished.¹⁰ Therefore, although it is assumed that the never-ending task of rolling a stone up a hill is how he is punished, in fact it is his innate humanity which really curses him, and this is what Norge illustrates in the poem. Camus's three alternative means of escape explored in Le Mythe de Sisyphe, that is, the absurdity of suicide, the irrationality of the leap of faith, and the sole ultimate possibility, self-justification through revolt,¹¹ may each present man with the potential to evade life's meaninglessness, but either way Norge's Sisyphus will never be able to rid himself of his humanity, although of course man's final refuge from his absurd condition, death, is a sanctuary inaccessible to Sisyphus (a fact for which he is

responsible), and he therefore cannot be said to encompass all of the aspects of humanity.

This same theme, of finite man trapped in infinity, is echoed in 'Les murs'. The prisoner sees infinity in terms of the starkly finite walls that surround him:

Et le prisonnier sifflait pour ces murs,
Pour ses quatre murs, où les verrous grincent,
Sifflait la longueur des soleils futurs,
La longueur du temps qui monte et descend
Comme une marée au cœur des serrures. (OP, p. 226)

The features of his cell, the tangible walls and locks and bolts that symbolise his lack of freedom, are vivid in their concreteness and reality and specificity. Yet the walls also represent infinity, because they form an all-round, constant and unending barrier between the prisoner and his external world. He plays the flute, and the music he produces calls out to the length of future suns, that is, to eternity. His melody is not confined by time signatures and bar-lines and strict rhythm, but on the contrary strives for a never-ending quality which will connect its creator with the eternity that envelops him. He does not play for one sun, but rather all suns. For he hopes, without quite believing it, that this connection with the eternal will free him:

[II] ne croit pas assez que sa flûte appelle
Le cœur de la mer, la longueur de mort,
La longueur du temps, la force d'un chant
Qui ferait lever le poids des poutrelles. (OP, p. 226)

Physical presence cannot lift the girders, break through the wall, so perhaps spiritual strength will be more telling. He endeavours to play 'du matin jusqu'au noir qui pince' but his search for a spiritual unlocking of the prison door is in vain. As a mortal, stuck in a finite existence, the immortal is unknowable.

In contrast to the eternal tune he tries to manufacture, according to the final lines 'il aurait suffi d'une note ailée' to break down the walls of the prison and allow him to 'boire la mer à pleines gorgées'. So one transcendent note would have freed him. Faced with infinity, a humble expression of finiteness, one single note with a beginning and an end, would have enabled him to sense what for the moment is beyond his reach. This means that the prison, far from being a physical barrier, is more a mental one. The prisoner has the instrument needed to destroy it; what he lacks is the understanding. In seeking out the eternal, he has neglected the momentary and ephemeral: a single note. He had an inkling that the concrete edifice was able to be overcome by the right spiritual action, but was ignorant of exactly what action to commit.

The music created by the prisoner is a metaphor for time as perceived by man. The captive wants to know all time, all future suns, the whole of 'la longueur du temps', but man can only enter this eternal world by appreciating each unit of time. Similarly, in order to play an endless tune on the flute it is only necessary to produce one note. Or rather, man must be satisfied with the one note and not seek to play all music at the same time. The wall is of the prisoner's own making, since it represents his inability to

be content in the finite world and his vain striving for infinity. He is like Icarus in this respect, and will also fail unless he re-connects with his natural, mortal existence.

For the prisoner, the sea too appears infinite, and indeed if it stretches beyond the horizon it seems to be limitless, though that is how it is perceived rather than its objective reality. The sea is personified, having a heart, and

[...] si la mer était
La longueur des murs, la longueur du temps,
Il saurait, la mer, la prendre à la taille. (OP, p. 226)

So the prisoner would be able to grab the sea by the waist if it were infinite. This would seem to be impossible, for surely it cannot possess both form and infinity. Yet the analogy with time has already been made, and indeed the prisoner recognises that, at least in the case of the sea, an infinite thing can still have tangible substance. It is as if he acknowledges that the sea may be infinite and indivisible while at the same time consisting of individual elements -- the heart and the waist -- yet he cannot imbue time with similar attributes. In other words, he cannot accept that time, like the sea, is both indivisible and divisible. If he were to follow the logic of the metaphor, he would come to appreciate time's finite as well as infinite qualities, and so break free from his prison.

The flute too is important in the contrast between physical and non-physical. While the prisoner attempts to produce from it a melody that will touch eternity, he holds it 'serré, serré dans ses dents', the poet emphasising the physical strain involved. The prisoner is overpowered by the material world and its apparent constraints, as

symbolised by the palpability of the flute and its violent action in forcing through and manipulating air. Yet that air escapes the confines of the flute, and is enhanced by its function of bringing about beautiful and potentially transcendent music. The flute is a concrete object, small in size, but with the capability of reaching out to the ethereal and immaterial. In clutching it tightly between his teeth, the prisoner has the opportunity of recognising in the flute the duality of physicality and spirituality. But, by being pre-occupied by the music made and not the material essence of the flute, he remains unaware of the 'lesson' of the instrument, that is, to touch infinity he needs a physical and finite tool. It is the concrete world he wishes to escape in favour of the formless and everlasting, but he forgets that, in order to reach that world, he must not only tolerate earthliness but celebrate its finite quality.

The essential difference between the treatment of time's divisibility and indivisibility in 'Les murs' as opposed to the other poems referred to is that here no specific units of time are mentioned, only its eternal, infinite side. However, the analogy of the sea and the flute and the walls illustrates the dual finite and infinite quality of time, and the importance to the prisoner of appreciating both and of using the former to attain an understanding of the latter.

Linked to the notion of understanding time in indivisible terms is the question of teleological views of history. If single events are to be seen not only in their own terms but also as part of some grander movement towards a better humanity, then there arises an essentially linear model of history. That does not preclude the potential for

cyclical variations, and indeed indivisible time is a valid concept whether its dynamic is linear or cyclical. But the teleological version of history must by definition imply underlying and irreversible progress in a certain direction. In 'Histoire d'un siècle', from Le stupéfait, a young monarch challenges progress and produces a happier and more cultured society:

Pas de guerre et peu de famines,
A peine quatre épidémies
Et ce siècle-là se termine
Dans l'extrême monotonie.

Depuis cent ans, mousquets et glaives
Rouillaient d'un sommeil imbécile,
L'amour ne saignait plus qu'en rêve
Sans même se mouiller un cil.

Enfin la svelte intelligence
D'un jeune monarque au front lisse
Comprit la fabuleuse urgence
D'instituer quelques supplices.

Il pendit pour de faux péchés,
Il fusilla trente innocents
Et le peuple put étancher
Sa naturelle soif de sang.

On vit les beaux-arts s'y complaire
Et fleurir la littérature.

De grands poètes célébrèrent
Les passions les plus impures

Et les vertigineux chemins
Où rayonnent les coeurs humains. (S, pp. 78/79)

Norge's characteristic irony is obvious in the false praise he affords the king for re-introducing torture and bloodshed and the execution of innocent men, and also in the

apparent need for human violence in order for art to flourish. And, written at the very end of his creative career, this poem could have been devised by the poet as an ironic valedictory address on the nature of humanity. In fact it is clear the monarch's prime concern is for his own well-being: he has the intelligence and astuteness to know that a king's autocratic leadership is most in demand during times of crisis and need and violence, and so he must re-create such times, otherwise his usefulness to the people will be called into question. Calls for constitutional change are always loudest in periods of social prosperity, and it seems that the century in the poem was one of immense social and medical progress. It is also evident that human nature demands activity, and, with nothing to concern it or to threaten its survival, the nation is frankly bored. Rather than have his subjects busy themselves with constructive projects, the monarch initiates an era of destruction and negativity to re-invigorate the country. If this means that innocent lives have to be lost for his own benefit, so be it. Sacrifices need to be made, and his people seem to accept this fact.

The teleological view of history is intrinsically impersonal, since it ultimately rejects the possibility that destructive individuals can have a lasting impact on the world, and instead implies an unconscious and collective impetus in the direction of a better future. This paradigm also acknowledges the need for self-sacrifice in the face of the greater good, but in 'Histoire d'un siècle' the sacrifices are futile and spurious. The image of the 'glaives' is interesting, for apart from being specifically a double-edged sword, its resonance is similarly double-edged: a sword connotes violence, but the

image of 'le glaive de la justice' is a positive and ultimately righteous one. The issue of justice recurs in a negative sense later with the hanging and shooting of innocent men. Those hanged are condemned for 'de faux péchés', from which the reader may infer that the king not only accuses them of crimes they did not commit, but further that he invests in himself a religious significance -- he assumes the Mosaic role of relating God's commandments to his subjects, of designating certain actions sinful. But, being a false prophet, he names inauthentic or imaginary sins. Like the 'urgence' he perceives, they are fabulous, that is, not only great but also unreal.

What the monarch does, then, is anti-teleological, and in two ways. Firstly, he manipulates the natural course of events for personal gain, and thereby acts against inherent historical trends; secondly, the perversion of normality he undertakes is fundamentally regressive, since it reverts society to a former age of violence and death and injustice. He institutes a world where irrationality and inhumanity reign. The poets welcome this, since their domain is the extremes of human emotion and activity, and the only extreme they could chronicle before was 'l'extrême monotonie'. They thrive on man's fear of God and of other men. More paradoxically, love too was moribund before the young ruler's changes. The love in which the poets are interested is passionate, violent, impure, carnal, and feeds off the underlying bestiality of the new age instituted by the king. Spiritual or Platonic love is as tedious as everything else used to be. And it is here that Norge's ironic voice is at its subtlest, for there is no place in this new and animalistic era for the smile, that most human and divine and Norgian of expressions of love and understanding. The poet cannot include himself in

that band of 'de grands poètes' who now flourish, and the 'vertigineux chemins où rayonnent les coeurs humains' surely lead in a different direction from that undergone in the rest of his *oeuvre*. If the king's religiosity is false, the transcendence of these other poets is similarly inauthentic.

The title of the poem encapsulates the contrast between indivisible time and time measured in units. The unit here is far greater than the days of the week and more distinct than the 'moments' and 'petite minute' of other works, but is no less valid for all that. For the context is one of epochs and historical movements, the life of a people rather than the life of an individual. And yet it is an individual, the king, who is at the centre of this era. As well as being more powerful than his lowly and expendable subjects, he tries to live not just in the present, the moments of the day and the days of the week, but in the future. He attempts to assert for himself a place in posterity, on the one hand as a legendary and highly-regarded king whose reign was prosperous and exciting, and on the other as a man who changed the course of history. In this respect he commits the same error as the prisoner in 'Les murs', who sought a correspondence with all of time at once. The contrast between the humble prisoner and the all-powerful ruler is stark, and instructive. The former's incarceration is a result of his inability to appreciate the finite world, while the latter's more material crimes, his murder and violence, are the consequence of his meddling with the infinite, that is, the course of time as a whole, the teleological progression of history. It is also interesting that the word 'histoire' evokes both fact and fiction, historical veracity as well as the fantasy of a story. The title of the poem encourages two contrary interpretations at once. Either it

implies the factual chronicling of a century's epidemics and wars and kings, or it signifies the creation of a fictional version of events, which mirrors the king's manipulation of the past to give it a negative gloss when in objective terms the progress made in the diplomatic and medical and agricultural spheres must surely be positive. The reader's initial glance at the poem would lean him towards the former interpretation, as if the piece merely listed events in a neutral manner; a deeper reading promotes the latter version of the title, with its emphasis on manipulation and perversion of history.

The conflict shown between time's unity and its divisibility is artificial inasmuch as, where one side manifests itself in a poem, the other must also be present, if only implicitly. Certainly they are not mutually exclusive elements in Norge's work. But there is a distinction, and it serves to highlight the dilemmas and dynamics contained within the superficial subjects of the poetry, be they the young king in 'Histoire d'un siècle' or the prisoner in 'Les murs', as well as shedding light on the nature of time itself and man's subjective perception of it. However, in addition to juxtaposing and contrasting these two notions of time, Norge also concentrates separately on indivisible, infinite time, what Bergson calls 'duration' and what the prisoner in 'Les murs' defines as 'la longueur du temps'.

For Norge's purposes, duration is the experiencing of time as it happens, the realisation that there is an entity called the present, which changes, and must change, constantly. In attempting to apprehend 'la longueur du temps', the prisoner considers it as an

infinity, with which he ultimately fails to make contact. But all he needed to breach the barrier between himself and this infinity was one note. If Aristotelian time is made up of a series of single notes, that is, individual units of time that are separable and specific, the concept of duration consists in our appreciation that these units cannot exist in isolation, but depend upon each other. It would be impossible to consider one second or one century as if it existed without other seconds or centuries before and after. Indeed, man's calibration and categorisation of time relies upon what the poet in 'Matins sans maître' cannot bring himself to assume, that it is continuous and unstoppable. Only the very first second of the universe had no antecedent, only the very last will have no successor. By the same token, man is unable to freeze time or reverse its process, in order to repeat an action or sensation, nor can he rush on to a presumed point in the future without first experiencing all the intervening ones.¹² But as soon as he enters the continuum of time from a single point, man connects with all time at once. That does not mean he undergoes all time simultaneously, but simply that he feels the influence, the weight, the continuousness of time as a collective and universal thing. The prisoner's relationship with time will always remain incomplete, because he wants its universality without the attendant and necessary specificity.

Awareness of duration is less complicated than its definition. In 'Ça dure', from Les cerveaux brûlés, there is a comical lack of communication between the poet and the reader:

Non, ça ne peut plus durer! Ç'avait déjà duré longtemps; ça se mit à durer encore. Ah! non, ça ne pouvait plus durer. Ça se mit à durer de plus belle. Ça

dure encore. Ça ne peut absolument plus durer. (Je vous confie que ça durera toujours.) (OP, p. 507)

For the first voice, before the parentheses, it seems the nature of the 'ça' in question is known, and so there is no need to repeat it endlessly. His confusion arises from whether 'ça' will last or not. For the reader, on the other hand, the question of how long it will last is initially less important than the ambiguity of 'ça'. In other words, if the reader knew what 'ça' was, he would have a clearer idea as to whether the poet's doubt about its duration and durability were justified. But he cannot enter into the debate because the poet never defines 'ça'. Apart from treating the subject of time, therefore, this poem is about the nature of poetry itself, inasmuch as it subverts the crucial aspect of interaction between reader and writer. A poem is *ipso facto* a means of communication, of revelation, in which the poet attempts to convey something to the reader. Here the poet is deliberately exclusive rather than inclusive, he intentionally hides the nature of 'ça' from the reader. No attempt is made, either literally or figuratively, to define or evoke 'ça', in addition to which the register is extremely conversational, and so, both in stylistic and in communicative terms, the poet is being wilfully, extravagantly, and humorously 'unpoetic' -- Norge presents a poem whose intention is precisely to be a non-communicative, non-figural non-poem. Or, to express the problem in a different way, the poet appreciates that ambiguity and resonance are crucial to poetic language as opposed, say, to situations where verbal precision and definition are required, so his means of parodying poetry is to render that ambiguity so extreme as to make the poem entirely opaque and inaccessible. In truth, the reader is denied even the ability to speculate on the meaning of 'ça'.

The sole context available is the repetition of the verb 'durer' in a variety of tenses. And it is the cumulative effect of these tenses that ultimately helps to explain the importance of 'ça'. The title is in the present tense, but the experiencing of the present depends upon a connection with all time. That is, after all, how duration, 'la longueur du temps', is characterised. Similarly, the poem defines 'dure' in terms of 'avait duré', 'durer', and 'durera', thus the spectrum of tenses from pluperfect to future are contained within the present. The 'ça' is, therefore, not intended as the substitute for a particular thing of which only the writer is aware, but rather represents a grammatical abstract, the subject of a verb. As such it stands for not one thing but any or all things. Furthermore, as the tenses change, 'ça' always remains 'ça'. It is an entity which exists in the present, and is thereby connected with the past and the future simultaneously. This is why the poet uses the neutral word 'ça', for if instead he had taken as his representative thing a specific object, its very specificity would have excluded it from representing the universality of objects. 'Ça dure' is thus a poem which explores the nature of duration. The reader is consequently mistaken in attempting to find a meaning for 'ça', for in fact it is its very meaninglessness, its neutrality, that is significant.

The word 'ça' does, of course, have one specific meaning in a particular discipline: it is the instinctual and unconscious 'id' in psychology. In this respect it has a connection with time independent of its use as a representative subject of the verb, for the 'id' is that element of the psychic make-up which is inherited, and which therefore possesses a temporal dimension. The parenthetical voice at the end of the poem, which

contradicts the sentiments of the initial voice and is far more certain in its knowledge of the nature of duration, could be seen to symbolise the instinctuality of the poet, the 'id' that counteracts his conscious perception by dint of his atavistic, inherited knowledge of the 'longueur du temps'. In that regard, 'le ça', 'the id', could indeed be said to last forever, or at least to have temporality, to exist for more than just the present.¹³

In 'Ça dure', duration is expressed in terms of an event or a state that lasts. In 'L'attente', from Le gros gibier, it is more a question of waiting for something to begin. In the same way that the wait itself in En attendant Godot is more important than the reason for the wait, so in 'L'attente' Sigismond devotes his life to waiting, and he feels he has to continue to wait, without knowing why. He claims:

"J'attends de savoir
Ce qu'il faut attendre!" (OP, p. 244)

Yet if he had never started to wait there would have been nothing to wait for, and therefore his wait is artificial and entirely self-motivated. Just as Godot never comes, and it is uncertain he even exists, and if he did that would destroy Estragon's and Vladimir's *raison d'être*, so Sigismond creates a world in which he has a purpose, even if that purpose is a fantasy, because his world before was meaningless. He is undaunted by the parenthetical voice which castigates him for his stupidity:

Ça faisait des heures
qu'il attendait là.
(Quel veau, quelle gourde)

Ça faisait des jours
Que duraient ces heures
(Quel sot, quel balourd) [.] (OP, p. 244)

The letters that make up Sigismond appear approximately half in Vladimir (IIMD) and half in Estragon (SGSON), as if his single wait constitutes a combination of their joint wait. In addition, Le gros gibier was published in 1953, only a year after Godot.¹⁴ One could, indeed, suggest that Norge is taking up the theme of waiting, in order to give his own gloss on the subject. For Beckett, the wait represents in part the absurdity of man's existence, in which he is inactive, uncommunicative, dependent upon the will of an elusive and unproven controlling force, and unwilling and unable to free himself in any meaningful existentialist manner. For Norge, the wait may seem to be fruitless and circular, in the sense of having no external logical justification, but there is in fact a point to the wait, and this appears in the following poem, 'La Sainte face'. For these two poems come at the very end of Le gros gibier, and are connected by the respective numerals 'I' and 'II'. Since no other poems in the work are similarly numbered, it seems clear the poet wished to link 'L'attente' and 'La Sainte face' together as distinct from any other pieces, and their position in the work lends them a conclusory weight. If 'L'attente', then, articulates the question as to why Sigismond waits, 'La ^{Sainte} face' provides an answer of sorts:

O mon beau, mon bien,
Toi qui n'aimais rien,
D'amour tu vas vivre. [...]

Approche, reclus,
Il n'en faudra plus,
Des mots d'avenir.

Silence et présence.
Et de l'espérance,
Il ne t'en faut plus:

Elle est toute nue,
Riante à ta vue,
La face d'amour. (OP, pp. 244/245)

The ultimate reward of the lonely and unloving man who waits is the holy face of love.

He no longer needs his hope, not because the situation of Sigismond is hopeless, but rather because hope implies an expectation, a faith in the future, whereas now his hope has been fulfilled, its job is complete, for he has actual proof that the wait was justified: the face of love, of divinity, is 'toute nue', thus unmistakable in its clarity and physicality.

All he requires is 'silence et présence'. In contrast, Vladimir and Estragon talk constantly without coming to any conclusions, and their life exists, if at all, solely for the future. Duration is the experiencing of the present as it occurs, the sensation of time's passing, not into the future, but into a new present. Sigismond's wait is over now that he has a present, now that the 'mots d'avenir' are no longer necessary.

It might be assumed from this that Norge's 'solution' to Godot is to illustrate the need for God. After all, Sigismond succeeds where Didi and Gogo fail because he finds divinity and they do not. However, while this seems to be a philosophical answer, in fact it is more of a simple literary device than anything else. In other words, to 'solve' the problem of a world without God, Norge merely inserts God in the form of a *Deus ex machina* divine apparition, the 'Sainte face'. What is involved, therefore, is less a

sophisticated

~~sophisticated~~ logical proof of the existence of God than a rather obvious demonstration of the omnipotence of the author. Furthermore, the real difference, in religious terms, is surely not that Sigismond has a God whereas Vladimir and Estragon do not, for their Godot is just as all-pervasive and mysterious and divine and physically unattainable as any deity. What differentiates Godot from the 'Sainte face' is that the latter is visible and thus Sigismond does not need blind faith to believe in it. And Norge would be going against all Christian principles if the main thrust of his assertion were that, to know God, we need proof instead of faith. To reject the importance of faith would be to dismiss the cornerstone of all religion.

Therefore, if 'L'attente' and 'La Sainte face' are to be viewed as an effective opposition or response to Godot, they need to rely on more than the insertion of a visible divinity.

And indeed the most important contrast between the two works has little to do with questions of religion, and concerns the whole concept of duration. Where Estragon and Vladimir fail is in their insistence on the future, on some indefinite time to come when Godot will arrive and give their lives meaning. The reason Sigismond succeeds is because the time he spends waiting is as important to him as the reason for the wait. He lives in the present, he experiences 'la longueur du temps'. This is implied in the question the poet poses:

Depuis si longtemps
Les pieds dans la flâche
Et le cœur pendant? (OP, p. 244)

The word 'pendant' is crucial here. It carries resonances of time as well as weight. The heart is heavy inasmuch as it possesses weight, presence, and so exists in the present.

The fact that it is the heart which is seen as heavy underlines Sigismond's emotional presence, that he is not somehow physically in the here and now but emotionally and spiritually lost in a nebulous dream of the future, rather his whole self is joined in the present. Of course 'le coeur pendant' implies unhappiness and depression, as if he is fed up with waiting for no reward, yet Sigismond's true state of mind is revealed when he speaks 'toujours tendre / Et brillant d'espoir', thus hardly indicating melancholy. If the word is considered adverbially, 'le coeur pendant' could mean the heart was 'during', in other words conscious of its experience of duration, of being in the present.¹⁵

And this is why he succeeds where Didi and Gogo fail, not because Norge's work contains God whereas Beckett's does not, but because in Godot duration is subverted in the vain search for a future without or beyond the present. Indeed, the play is noticeable for how it manipulates the idea of present time and action. Events repeat themselves, yet time stands still, and the protagonists cannot bring themselves to act.

For Norge, on the contrary, Sigismond obtains his reward, he finds out why he is waiting and apprehends God, precisely because he exists primarily in and for the present.

Existence in the present is, therefore, most fundamentally a matter of renouncing the concept of the distinction between different times, as if there were a physical barrier between past and present, and between present and future, and therefore of

understanding that all time is unified. Whatever the future may be, it cannot be attained by circumventing or disregarding the present, but rather by embracing it both as an entity in itself and as a means of contacting the present already passed and the present to come. But that does not answer the question of what the present actually is and how it manifests itself, and Norge approaches this subject from a textural viewpoint, in other words how it feels to us, how it is shaped. In 'Trop tard' and 'Durée' two conflicting textures of time emerge.

In 'Trop tard', from Le gros gibier, no one is willing to listen to the self-appointed sage because his advice always come too late:

Non, trop tard, jeune homme,
La fille est déjà mariée.
Non, trop tard, curé,
Leur âme est déjà damnée.
Non, trop tard, docteur,
La jambe est déjà coupée. [...]

Toujours trop tard, mon bon roi!
Et en avant la musique:
On tâch'ra, ma république,
D'être à temps la prochain' fois. (OP, p. 239)

The poem evokes a Rabelaisian carnival of bodily functions and earthy humanity,¹⁶ in which there is no place for a wise man whose chief attribute appears to be hindsight. It is easy to be clever after the event, and he lacks the ability to foresee death and chaos, including most importantly the overthrow of the king and the foundation of a republic. His is hardly the tragic fate of a Cassandra, endowed with the ability to see the future but condemned to have her visions ignored. Indeed if anything the hapless sage is a

pathetic comic figure. Yet the vision of the world presented goes characteristically deeper than the humorous tone would imply. Here is a land in which the people appear to live blindly, unable to avoid mistakes, unable to control their bodies, and stuck in an irrational present where they career from one upheaval to another, oblivious to cause and effect. The question 'qui veut de mes pensées' goes unanswered, admittedly because those thoughts always come too late, but also, and more basically, because considered thought *per se* is alien to this society. This is equally true of the senses:

Non, trop tard, azur,
Nos yeux sont déjà crevés. (OP, p. 239)

The beauty and purity of sensation play no part in the consciousness of these people. And, in an orderless world where everything just happens, outside the influence of those who experience it, the flow of time is uneven and interrupted. The constant repetition of 'Non, trop tard' connotes a similar repetition of unordered time and events, as if temporal and intellectual progress are impossible when man refuses to learn empirically from the mistakes of his life. Moreover, since he always comes 'trop tard' to an understanding of reality, his appreciation of the past will only hinder rather than assist his existence in the present. The paradigm of mistakes in the past leading to progress in the present and a consequent anticipation of the future, on which civilisation depends, is subverted. There is no smooth connection between past, present and future, no unity of time's passing.

In contrast, time in 'Durée', from Famines, is represented by an image of constancy and continuity:

Temps où cailloux se lissent,
Ténèbres qui roucoulent,
Voyelles de la houle
Et morts qui reverdissent. (OP, p. 187)

In 'Trop tard' there are nothing but metaphorical jagged edges, as time exerts no overall influence on the world, but here those edges are smoothed away, so that both time and the stones are even-textured. And, in an image of the cyclical and continuous quality of nature, the dead grow green again, like plants ready to flourish as death gives way to re-birth.

In fact, 'Durée' is not uniquely concerned with the passing of time. Its undertone is violent and bloody:

Dors un peu, vent du glaive,
Dormez, lourdes milices.
Engeance, écoute en rêve
Temps où cailloux se lissent. (OP, p. 187)

The body turns green because it is rotting, and the soldiers and their weapons sleep a while, as do the 'supplices' in the final quatrain, but will doubtless wake up again and resume their destructive actions. Thus the human brutality and baseness in 'Durée' exceed any to be found in 'Trop tard'. Further, if time has a smoother texture in 'Durée', it is nevertheless unseen by men, for duration is most forcefully apparent when

they are asleep. The key to an understanding of the nature of duration comes not from man but from the world around. In 'Trop tard' there is no natural world at all, everything is put in a confused and disordered human context, whereas in 'Durée' nature is dominant, and always active even when man sleeps, and it is from nature that the images of time's smoothness and regularity emanate.

What this means is that, although man may readily encounter the present in his own circle of experience, by simply being and doing that which renders him human, in order to perceive the passing of time he must become aware of a wider context. In Heraclitean terms, in change is permanence, yet man is unable to see himself changing, he only ever 'is' at any one time.¹⁷ The running stream and the pebble that becomes smooth over time are his point of entry into the essence of duration, because they change and yet remain intrinsically the same. The people in 'Trop tard', on the other hand, experience only contingent change, which manifests itself in one unrelated experience after another, but they possess no wisdom, no overview, and thus cannot appreciate what is constant and permanent in their humanity. Put another way, they cannot achieve the smoothness of texture of the pebbles in 'Durée'. They are as blind to it as they are to the purity and absolute of the 'azur', and their lives are as jagged and uneven as the pebbles were before they came under the influence of 'la longueur du temps'. At least the belligerents in 'Durée' share a collectivity in the 'engeance'. Although the evocation of the mob implies less a sentient, conscious humanity than an unthinking elemental mass, it is nonetheless appropriate to a poem about time, for it symbolises the subordination of individual components, single units, in a greater and

more cogent whole. Within the 'engeance', the warriors may think of themselves as both separate and collective, and it is this duality, albeit in another context, that enables man to perceive both his own individual existence in the present and his connection to a more permanent and global time.

In 'Midi juste', from Les cerveaux brûlés, a specific time in the present pervades the poet's experience, and connects him to eternity. The time is exactly midday, when the sun is at its zenith, and for a moment the world seems to stop turning, frozen in an endless now:

C'est l'heure où les lions vont boire. Lion ou pas lion, il est midi, buvons! Le soleil s'arrête un peu. La lune clapote bien loin. Les ténèbres sont calcinées pour toujours. L'été crépite. Nos crinières aussi. Et que feraient les langues et les gorges, sinon cherir ce loyal incendie? Soif, soif, soif. C'est l'heure où les lions vont boire. (OP, p. 494)¹⁸

The recurrence of the same sentence at the beginning and the end of the poem emphasises the stagnation of time. And the sun, at the height of its influence and obliterating all traces of gloom for ever, ceases to move. Objectively it never moves anyway, and is stationary while the earth spins, but our perception of course is that the sun does rise and set, so for it to be still is to disrupt the continuum of time, in the same way as the dawn in 'Matins sans maître' threatens not to appear and thus prevent the new day from breaking. The poet in turn cherishes his yearning, because it brings him into contact with the all-powerful sun that refuses to wane, and so envelops him in time's motionlessness. Even the king of the animal world, the lion, must bend before the midday sun, as indeed must the moon, which like a cowed, ~~thirsty~~^{thirsty} beast laps away at

a safe distance. When an animal drinks it is at its most vulnerable, and this moon acknowledges it is in the sun's domain now, so it must keep away.

The poet's thirst, like time itself, is unending. So his cry of 'buvons!', the daily command to drink at the water-hole and relieve the summer heat, is in vain.¹⁹ This noon, this day, he is transfixed, mesmerised by the sun's sublime stillness. He knows it has only stopped 'un peu', but for that instant he experiences a fusion of what is now -- his physical sensations of heat and thirst -- and what is always -- the eternal permanence of sunlight and animal impulse. The most interesting aspect of this perception is that the poet only becomes aware of time's passage when it is momentarily interrupted. If he were to observe the sun all day, he would be unable to see it actually move, but would nevertheless know that it, say, began in the east and over time moved westwards. He would therefore assume it moved all the time, albeit too slowly for him personally to discern. So when the sun stops the poet's previous world-view collapses, and he is startled into a new understanding of the connection between, on the one hand, himself and his present, and, on the other hand, the sun and its quality of eternity.

Two further poems from Les cerveaux brûlés illustrate man's need to undermine his conventional view of time in order conceptually to enter the world of duration. In 'Souvenir', the present is a distinct and finite object which is isolated in order that it may become an equally distinct past:

Pour garder bien intacte cette soirée pathétique, admirable et bouleversante, Eugène, sitôt rentré chez lui, la serra dans un robuste coffret. Et bien assuré de son souvenir, il ne pensa plus jamais à cette soirée pathétique, admirable et bouleversante. (OP, p. 495)

Eugène attempts to capture the past physically, but in so doing he loses the sense of wonderment and depth of emotion that made the evening so special in the first place. He destroys its spirit when he petrifies and preserves it. It may be that the box is so strong and impenetrable it not only keeps the past in but also the present out. For, in the ironically logical world where a memory is considered a solid object, past and present are separable by a physical barrier. The necessary infinity of time is ignored as it assumes a finite, concrete quality. Norge similarly undermines the specialness of the evening Eugène so enjoyed by repeating the same epithets in the same order, as if that evening were being compartmentalised and labelled, and thus objectified. Consequently, the role of human memory is subverted. To remember is no longer to conjure up, subjectively and personally, the mood of a time and place: it has become no different from taking a photograph. And, while memory changes over time, the photo will always remain the same, except that, like the evening preserved in the box, its colour will fade, it will be put away and forgotten about.

In 'Le futur passé', the past, present and future are again finite, definable periods:

Raymond soupirait après l'avenir. Dieu le lui donna, cet avenir. Et maintenant, Raymond soupire après le passé. Il exagère, dit Dieu, il y restera, dans son avenir. (OP, p. 495)

Raymond dreams his life away, never happy to exist in the present and always yearning for another time. When God finally gives him what he wants, he is still unhappy. But his problem is deeper than a simple chronic discontent with his lot. For, to reach the future, we must experience the present, until the time in the future for which we waited arrives, and becomes the present. Yet if we wish not for a specific time to come but for all time to come, that is, the idea of the future as opposed to its reality, we will never be satisfied. The future will always be beyond the horizon. So when God inserts Raymond in the future, and only an omnipresent and omnipotent God would have the capacity to circumvent the present in this way, the future which he enters is no nearer, no more visible. Raymond is in a state of limbo because he can never do anything. As soon as he acts, the future in which he exists would cease to be the future and would become the present, yet he does not dwell in the present any more and so that would be impossible. Thus he can never 'do', he can only ever 'will do'. Previously he thought the future would be a happier environment, now (if there were a 'now' in the future) he realises it is barren, devoid of existence and emotion. So he wants to move time again, not to be reconnected with his present but to go even further back to the past, when he will only be able to 'have done'.

The logical impossibility of both 'Souvenir' and 'Le futur passé' is characteristic of Norge's poetry. It both creates a ridiculous and comical premiss and proceeds from that premiss to a new and ironic logic. In this instance, the poet is additionally emphasising how the concepts of past, present, and future cannot be separated from each other like finite units of time, where, say, Monday and Tuesday have strictly

defined parameters. The essence of duration is that ultimately all time is present, and, if man acknowledges existence in the present, he can then, and only then, attain a connection with what is to come and what has gone before. Therefore, contained within each split second of 'now' is the eternity of 'forever'.

To experience 'la longueur du temps', then, is to live in a constant present. This does not mean, however, that with constancy comes stasis. On the contrary, although the setting is always, and can only be, the present, everything else undergoes continual change and development. As we move from one present to the next, we enter a new existence in that present. Each object, each sensation is perpetually recreated because, were it to remain unchanged, it would only belong in the past. Dwelling in the 'now' requires the same rate of fluidity as that 'now'. So every time a new experience or circumstance is encountered, it alters not just our perception of reality but our entire self. We never are, we always become.

In a poem already discussed in a different context from page ⁶² onwards of this thesis, 'Jamais contente', from Famines, the rose is never described in concrete physical terms, but rather changes according to the external influences acting upon it:

Dans le vent, la rose a soif,
Dans la main, la rose a froid,
Dans la nuit, la rose a faim,
Dans le jour, la rose a peur.
Sur le sein, la rose est bien.
Sur le sein, la rose meurt. (OP, p. 195)

Even though a rose is a well-known object, the reader cannot attribute to it any set colour or shape or size until the poet is more specific in his description. But this rose has only sensuality to define it. Yet even this is paradoxical, since the rose's reactions to the outside world never conform to the reader's expectations. In the hand it should gain warmth, but it is cold. It would be expected to be afraid at night, but the daytime brings fear. And on the breast its reaction is twofold and contradictory: first it is well, then it dies. With each new experience, the rose assumes a character that is both different and unforeseen.

This would seem to be unexceptional, for of course all things react to a new environment imposed upon them. Yet this is a plant, a supposedly unfeeling object which may, admittedly, die but to which human emotion is surely denied. There is a difference, after all, in requiring water, like a rose, and feeling thirsty, like a human. Nor is this a simple personification of the rose on Norge's part, because the object he depicts displays no intrinsic humanity. It may be said to experience human emotions and sensations, but they occur in a void, the rose possesses no underlying character upon which they can act. In other words, in Sartrean terms, the rose has no essence.

The reader's preconceptions about both the physical and poetic properties of a rose are undermined, and this is precisely why the poet takes the rose as his starting point, because it is so resonant and therefore the stripping away of its essence is all the more surprising and powerful for the reader. If the rose has no essence, every time a new external circumstance arises it exerts an influence which is far more marked than would

otherwise be the case. The rose becomes what it feels, for when it is thirsty, for example, thirst is its sole defining factor. Similarly, it becomes the epitome of cold, then the epitome of hunger, and finally it epitomises death, for death is its only attribute. In the fifth line, 'la rose est bien', literally it is well-being. The fact that the respective causes have unusual effects -- the day that frightens, the hand that brings coldness -- is a continual reminder to the reader to eschew assumed essences, to acknowledge each thing for what it does rather than what it would be expected to do.

The rose's existence precedes its essence. Only once it becomes thirst or hunger can it take on the characteristics of a thirsty or a hungry thing. Further, each existence is transitory and ephemeral. Thus it is in a constant state of becoming. The only occasion it has the potential to remain in one state in any degree of permanency is when it dies, yet even then it encounters death 'sur le sein', which is where it was previously well, so the reader may be warned against presuming that this reaction to being on the breast is any longer-lasting than the last. The fact that it stops becoming coincides with the end of the poem, which implies that at least in this literary situation the rose, forced as it is into a continual process of becoming by the will of the poet, can finally assume a state of changelessness. After all, in a universe where to become is to exist, death symbolises nothingness. But, since for Heraclitus in permanence is change, this does not mean the dead rose has achieved any kind of permanent, enduring character in death. What it signifies, on the contrary, is that by dying the rose has become temporary, has stepped outside time. It is static and therefore without existence. In other words, nothingness is not a property like thirst or hunger or fear, but the absence of all properties, all states

of being and becoming. Death and nothingness are timeless, in the sense not of lasting for ever but of lasting for no time.

This has significance for the work of art. The poem 'Jamais contente' exists without time because it cannot be altered. Yet in another sense it does change, and therefore does exist, since a reader's reactions to it, or to any other work, develop and shift, and indeed every new reader will have a different response to it. The poem is like the rose, inasmuch as it depends for its continued existence, its ability to become, on external influence, that is, the reader's reaction. It has no intrinsic physicality other than the ink and the paper needed to write it down. In the same way that the rose is no more or less than the sensations it epitomises, so the poem would be nothing without the words and images and resonances which comprise it. Any assumed *a priori* quality attributed to it is actually the coincidence of several readers' individual interpretations. If, say, they all characterise the poem in a certain manner, that does not preclude a separate reader from viewing it entirely differently, and, as with the rose, the effect it may produce cannot be logically foreseen. If the rose is fearful of the daytime, that reaction is no less valid merely by dint of its rarity.

A poem only dies, that is, ceases to change, to become, when new interpretations of it can no longer be made, when no new environment or era or reader can imbue it with renewed life. It may be that one reason the rose dies in 'Jamais contente', using the same paradigm, is that for the first time in its life the external influence acting upon it is unchanged: in both lines five and six the rose is 'sur le sein'. The first time, this is a new

experience, a new poetic interpretation, but the second, fatal time, change has ceased, and so the flower/poem, with no new interpretative, revivifying force present to compel it to become once more, is dead.

A similar structure, and an identical end, can be seen in 'Monsieur', also from Famines.

Each pair of lines contains an apparent cause and effect, and here too the link between the two is not always obvious, although this time it is the repeated 'monsieur' who creates the cause, whereas in 'Jamais contente' the rose suffers the effects. But the 'monsieur' also dies ultimately:

Je vous dis de m'aider,
Monsieur est lourd.
Je vous dis de crier,
Monsieur est sourd.
Je vous dis d'expliquer,
Monsieur est bête.
Je vous dis d'embarquer,
Monsieur regrette.
je vous dis de l'aimer,
Monsieur est vieux.
Je vous dis de prier,
Monsieur est Dieu.
Eteignez la lumière,
Monsieur s'endort.
Je vous dis de vous taire,
Monsieur est mort. (OP, p. 185)

Not only is the dialogue between cause and effect unclear, for instance in the need to love 'monsieur' because he is old, but the reason for his death, like the rose's death, appears to bear no relation to what precedes it. Certainly if he is God, the man should be immortal, and therefore not die at all, no matter what the cause. The superficial

inference would be that these 'messieurs' are not the same person, yet this evades rather than solves the question of ambiguity, for it denies the presence in the poem of a temporal progression, and the death at the end clearly indicates that such a progression does indeed exist. The same would be true of the rose in 'Jamais contente' were it in fact to be read as more than one rose.

So the 'monsieur' is the same person throughout, but that does not preclude his having a multiplicity of characteristics, and a fluidity of existence. This quasi-polymorphism keeps him alive in the same way as the rose, for to change is to attain permanence and life. The rose dies because the influences acting upon it cease to change, and here too the man's association with the external lapses into stagnation when he sleeps and the 'vous' of the poem stops being active. However, the cause-and-effect process is compounded by the presence, unlike in 'Jamais contente', of a third element, the 'je', which only takes an active physical part in events when apparently trying to lift 'monsieur' in the first line. After this dynamic beginning 'je' seems to assume a more passive role, merely reporting to 'vous' the development of the man's existence. Yet this inactivity is illusory, since 'je' in fact controls the movements of 'vous', who is unable to act without his stimulus. Furthermore, there is no corroborative indication as to the true nature of 'monsieur', only the statements of 'je'. And the authority of 'je' is not confined to instances where 'vous' would be unable accurately to judge, at least visually, the character of 'monsieur', say when he is described as God or deaf or stupid. It is also the case when 'vous' should be able to know for himself, say when 'monsieur' is asleep or heavy or old. Instead of trusting his own quality of perception, 'vous' relies

entirely upon the pronouncements of 'je'. So, while it seems 'je' is only assisting 'vous', in reality his role is dominating and manipulative. And, in the sense that 'monsieur' dies, like the rose, for want of change and stimulation, 'je' controls the life and death of 'monsieur' as well, by denying him interaction with 'vous' at the end. This manipulation of 'vous' and of 'monsieur' helps to underscore the ambiguity of the cause and effect process, for 'je' does not need fully to justify his logic, as if the self-styled but specious rationality were more a veil, a means to obscure his totalitarianism, than an end in itself.

'Monsieur' dies, then, because like the rose he ceases to become. The fate of 'vous' is less clear. If his actions are taken in isolation, he assumes the role of obedient servant to the capricious master 'je', who, like the God of the Old Testament, is fearsome and vindictive and incomprehensible. At the end 'vous' has loved and prayed but is left silent and in darkness, in other words in a state of ignorance and dread, with only his faith in the controlling deity to guide him in his actions, which have already proved lethal to 'monsieur'. It is interesting that the God 'je' cloaks his divinity and instead imbues 'monsieur' with such a status. When 'monsieur' dies, his mortality becomes evident, and so the inaction of 'vous' which kills 'monsieur' is in a sense justified: he exposes the false God and upholds the supremacy of the true deity 'je'. The work of 'vous' takes on a crusading quality, in his destruction of the infidel for the cause of righteousness. Yet of course 'monsieur' himself did not proclaim his divinity, but rather he was the innocent victim of the 'je'-God's command. Perhaps in constantly telling 'vous' to act in certain ways directly relating to 'monsieur's' character, 'je' perceived

that, far from being his own disciple, 'vous' was now the follower of 'monsieur'. Faced with such an apparent rival, albeit one of his own making, his direction of subsequent events can be appreciated. In any event, 'vous', unlike 'monsieur', will continue to exist because he will always be commanded to become, that is, to adapt and change according to the requirements of his servitude and at his master's bidding.

The 'je'/'vous' relationship is not unrelated to that between poet and reader. After all, the poet is divine. If in 'Monsieur' the 'je' is taken as the poet directly addressing his readership, 'vous', he is manifesting his ability to dominate the existence not only of the ~~characters~~ he depicts in his work, the 'messieurs' of his poetry, but also his readers, whose attitude and association to 'monsieur' change as each new piece of information is revealed. The final two lines of the poem are particularly apposite in this interpretation, for once the poem ends and the 'monsieur' ceases to exist the reader consequently ceases to interact with him. The end of a poem marks the concomitant end of communication between the poet, the poem, and the reader. This communicative relationship is in a continual state of becoming, where the dominant role is assumed by the God-poet who manipulates his believers by controlling the information they receive and commanding them to consider it in a certain manner. The ability of the reader to decline, to disobey, to interpret independently, is what differentiates the poet/reader from the 'je'/'vous' pair, although of course the reader never ultimately knows whether 'vous' is ever disobedient, and he can only infer from the fact that the dominance of 'je' remains consistent throughout the poem that his

superior status is unchallenged. In other words, 'vous' remains silent as to whether he obeys or defies the orders of 'je', but at least he never verbally gainsays them.

'Gris', also from the collection Famines, depicts an arrested state of becoming. Man is intrinsically grey, physically and spiritually, and the infusion of colour into his being fails to produce a permanent change:

On vous plonge dans un bain rouge,
Mais qu'on déchire vos poitrines
Et l'on verra du coeur gris,
Chiffonniers!!

*Le roi Salomon se fait une litière
de bois de rose et de lapis-lazuli.*

Chant des hommes gris:
Tu nous embêtes
Avec ton roi Salomon
Et sa sacrée litière,
On la peindra en gris. (OP, p. 194)

The italicised refrain, which appears three times, emphasises the persistent attempt to give man the red of a rose and the blue of a lapis lazuli. Solomon's importance is that he represents the extent of the human spirit, from his grandiose schemes, including the building of his temple, to the humaneness of his so-called Judgement, in which he awarded a baby claimed by two women to the one who showed concern when it was proposed by him to cut the child in half. Man's accomplishments thus range in the story of Solomon from the very great to the very small, encompassing both the physical and the spiritual, and this is exemplified in the refrain, when he has a much smaller temple constructed, not this time for his own greater glory but to celebrate the beauty and

colour of nature. Grey man will reject such a symbol of chromatic splendour, for he has no desire to inject colour and spirituality into his life.

Grey man is static, unalterable, and therefore emotionally dead in the same way that 'monsieur' and the rose die physically for lack of change. The grey world he inhabits is cold, unfriendly, materially rigid, and similarly unchanging:

Hommes gris levés froids
Pour le gris des registres
Et le gris des plafonds,
Pour le gris des statuts
Et pour le gris des siècles. (OP, p. 193)

However, although the grey lasts a long time, there is no permanence. The red liquid washes off when grey man with the grey heart emerges from the bath, and so, with no blood and no humanity, he stakes no claim to independence from his world, that is, he blends into, and becomes indivisible from, the grey around him. For permanence is not solely a temporal quality, rather it implies distinctness, differentness. If to change is to acquire permanence, then to remain static is to forego the need to assert one's separateness, one's existence. Grey man is indistinguishable from the rest of the grey universe, has no unique character, and will be forgotten over the course of time, whereas Solomon, compelling his fellow humans to celebrate the colour and vitality and grandness of their lives, to rejoice in their individual potential, will attain permanence. Grey men are petrified, transitory, identical. Though Solomon's life may have a shorter span than the centuries enveloped in greyness, it is nonetheless more open than grey man's life to the spiritual transcendence that enables him to exist

beyond mortal time. In contrast grey man's life is marked by an inability to experience bodily becoming.

An extreme form of such becoming is encountered by the reader in 'Toujours-jamais', from Les cerveaux brûlés, in which Sebastian, unlike Solomon, apparently possesses a closed heart:

JAMAIS était le sort qu'endurait Sébastien. Nuits de fièvre, ô glaces, ô larmes, ô ténèbres. Mais sans doute était-ce un cœur pusillanime, car les dieux attendris changèrent son lot en TOUJOURS et ses douleurs ne furent pas moins grandes. Nuits de fièvre, ô glaces, ô larmes, ô ténèbres. (OP, p. 504)

Superficially Sebastian's problem is not that he cannot experience becoming, but that he is simply frightened of life, and so the gods, moved to change his circumstances because they assumed his separation from existence was physically rather than mentally founded, fail to reduce his suffering, as his fear still grips him. However, the poet's 'sans doute' implies an ironic level to this judgment. And indeed, it is not Sebastian's cowardice that prevents him from experiencing life now that he dwells in the realm of 'toujours'. Like Raymond in 'Le futur passé', transported into the future, Sebastian has no contact with the present. He cannot become, he can only 'have become', because his permanence, his foreverness, is inauthentic since it is only temporally based. It has not been achieved, unlike Solomon, by any action on his part, indeed quite the opposite, it was his inertia that prompted the gods to alter his situation. Sebastian lacks the existential reality of Solomon. To live in the 'now' we must embrace its state of flux, that is to say, we must constantly act, because each present is followed by another

different present. Yet we can never experience more than one present at the same time.

To dwell in the 'toujours' means to be cut off from the necessary singularity of each present. So Sebastian cannot assert his existential being because he can never know one 'now' at a time. He is condemned to apprehending all presents at once. That is why he is no better off than when he endured 'jamais'. Either way, the uniqueness of each present moment is denied him. Further, since it is impossible to exist in all time without existing in a specific time first, Sebastian is excluded from permanence. Despite being captive in the world of 'toujours', he is ineluctably temporary.

In Norge's 'jamais' and 'toujours', Sebastian stills experiences emotional and physical ill.

Perhaps he also feels the same colourlessness, in the 'ténèbres', as that which pervades the realm of the grey men who, like him, live in a void with no present. It could be argued that he does, after all, exist, and the presence of 'nuits de fièvre' implies a certain specificity, a nowness, to his life. Yet even if this were an authentic present, which it cannot be in the realm of 'jamais' and 'toujours', it is noticeable that his suffering takes on exactly the same form and order in both situations. In other words, even if never and always were a kind of present, Sebastian himself still 'is' rather than 'becomes', so here too he cannot undergo change, flux, and is thereby excluded from a true dwelling in time's passing.

If being is becoming, existence is not a state, with the connotations of stasis that that evokes (although in philosophy it is not uncommon to talk of 'states of becoming'). It is a fluid happening, a process, 'Dasein' in the sense that Heidegger assigns to it rather

than in its more everyday usage. With an almost complete concentration by man on the present, what is actual and real, what is experienced and perceived and done, is more important to existence than what is potential or possible. Indeed, Bergson argues that something must be real before it can be possible. Reality precedes possibility, as existence precedes essence. When we talk of the essence of something, how we imagine it to be before it actually comes about, what we are in fact doing is not inventing it from scratch, but taking as our model equivalent real things in the past and somehow adapting them. We cannot entirely escape what has gone before when we picture what is to come. Moreover, when that new thing comes into existence, our concept of its essence is altered depending upon how it has turned out, how we adjust to its reality. As Bergson writes:

The possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind which throws its image back into the past, once it has been enacted.²⁰

No matter how we may try to envisage the future, we can only arrive at approximations. When the future arrives, or rather as the present becomes a new present, we experience what Bergson calls 'the continuous creation of unforeseeable novelty'.²¹ And as this novelty becomes time in the past, not only does it cease to be novel but the mind treats it as if it had always existed. It becomes impossible to imagine what the world was like without it. The next step is then to say that, looking back before the novelty was created, it had nonetheless been possible, when in fact it had never been dreamed of until it became reality. Crucially, we are constantly changing the past to make it fit with what we now know in the present.

This is as true of the collective mind of society as of the mind of the individual. Thus, once Shakespeare's plays had been written, it is said that they were always possible. Of course they were inasmuch as the paper, pen and words already existed (although in the latter case this is not entirely true). There was possibility in the sense of absence of hindrance. But the plays only became possible in terms of their predating existence when the particular mind existed to write them, and this mind only came into being, was only real, when Shakespeare himself was real, that is, when he lived. No one living before Shakespeare considered the possibility of Shakespeare's plays, only afterwards did the notion of possibility arise.

Only after something has been done can it be said to be possible, to have been possible, and to have become possible. For Bergson this is a liberating idea, since it means that existence is not pre-ordained, in other words, the future is not simply a set of competing possibilities and time merely the scene of battle, unable to influence events and therefore unimportant in itself. As he states, 'We shall have greater strength, for we shall see we are participating, creators of ourselves'.²² Man's relationship with his becoming is an active not a passive one.

For Norge the question of reality and possibility is fundamental, as explored in 'Au-dessus', from Les cerveaux brûlés:

On n'a pas la vérité, c'est évident, mais enfin, quand on l'aura (si on l'a), est-ce qu'on ne sentira pas qu'il y a quelque chose au-dessus de la vérité? Quelque chose qui est au-dessus de la vérité et qui est la vérité même. Et quand on l'aura

(si on l'a), est-ce qu'on ne sentira pas qu'il y a quelque chose au-dessus de ce quelque chose? Et ainsi de suite. (OP, p. 488)

Truth is often considered absolute, be it the scientific truth of, say, the laws of physics, or the religious truth as manifested in the Bible. But the truth written about here is a changing phenomenon. Man does not apprehend it at the moment, but it may be possible to do so some time in the future. And yet even then he will not be certain that there is not in fact some deeper truth waiting to be discovered in a more distant future. So truth is not objective, absolute, but instead relies upon human perception. In fact, 'vérité' could more accurately be defined here as that which is 'vrai', that is to say, the truth as present-day man sees it, the reality of the contemporary world. And because all worlds to come will in their own time be contemporary, there will only ever be current reality, and never absolute truth. The idea of the future naturally connotes progress, a somehow better and more explicable universe to which man may aspire, but like time itself the path towards this unknown absolute truth has no end. Truth can only ever be a process of becoming, never a static state of being. There is, of course, an alternative view of the future, characterised by man's fall from Grace, and denoting an endless decline from a golden age, a regression rather than a progression. Either way, Apocalypse allowing, the future, and the search for truth which it witnesses, have no prospect of ending.

In 'Au-dessus' the poet recognises that man's perception of the truth depends upon his existence in reality. The sole possibility referred to, a nebulous and undefined greater truth that may or may not arise, is primarily possible in terms of its absence of

hindrance, and depends more upon the past ^{than} the future. For Norge is not attempting to envisage the exact nature of that truth, so giving it an essence which precedes its existence, instead he is taking as his example what has always gone before. Every time a claim is made to the absolute truth, in time it is always improved upon or discarded in favour of a completely different model. The reality of the past has coloured the poet's vision of the future, and indeed he acknowledges this fact. The 'ainsi de suite' is a shorthand way of accepting the imposition of reality upon possibility, since he has no revolutionary and conceptual image to offer that is unconnected to the present one. This is fundamental, because it demonstrates how our image of the possible changes according to what is real. Reality does not just precede possibility, it causes it.

When a new reality arises, it has a retroactive effect upon our version of the possible. Before Mohammed, say, Jews and Christians in the Middle East did not believe their respective religions were only undergoing a transition until Islam arrived, yet many thousands of Jews and Christians converted to the new faith, and, crucially, proclaimed the eternal nature of its teachings, as if they had always existed. What they perceived was Norge's 'quelque chose qui est au-dessus de la vérité et qui est la vérité même'. The new reality allows man to reconsider in a different light what has preceded it. In the present it is only possible to exist in one reality at a time, and that reality will necessarily be viewed from a narrow personal perspective, but hindsight enables man to gain a wider picture of what has happened, in other words to add to the appreciation of reality and so create a new, more all-encompassing reality. While the

presence of Bergson's 'continuous creation of unforeseeable novelty' can be predicted, the precise nature of this novelty is impossible to anticipate and only 'foreseeable' retrospectively, in other words, only when reality has changed. Moslems who believe in the eternal quality of Islam are not deluding themselves, therefore, rather they are taking advantage of the hindsight afforded by the precedence of reality over possibility.

The power that man gains from this precedence, as illustrated by Bergson, consists in the awareness of his active participation in the creation of his future:

The possible is the mirage of the present in the past; and as we know the future will constitute a present and the mirage effect is continually being produced, we are convinced that the image of tomorrow is already contained in our actual present. [...] That is precisely the illusion.²³

To grasp one's potential to have a future not entirely reliant upon the image of it emanating from the present is to liberate oneself from a determinist existence, to take a creative part in the realisation of that future. In 'L'avenir', from Le gros gibier, the poet visits a *voyante* to discover if the future has already been decided:

L'avenir, l'avenir,
Ce n'est pas encor tout ça
Pour finir. (OP, p. 233)

The ambiguity of this statement is central to the question. One interpretation is that the future is not yet all the future, where 'ça' refers back to 'l'avenir'. The future is therefore a combination of what is to come and what is already present, implying that our image of the future can only ever be incomplete, and for it to become real there

must be an element of 'unforeseeable novelty'. The 'pour finir' would carry the same idea as 'pour toujours'. Alternatively, the future is partially settled already, but man's role is to complete its creation, so man has an active part to play in his becoming. His uniqueness amongst animals is that he exists 'pour finir' the conception of the future, connoting purpose rather than result. The talent of the seer in 'L'avenir' lies in her ability to perceive beyond the present moment, as the poet acknowledges:

Dans les cartes, les marcs
Lisez notre sang et nos
Souvenirs. (OP, p. 233)

He wonders if the vision she has of the past and the future which arises from it is infallible and unalterable. His implicit question to himself is whether he goes to her in order to find out if and how the future has been mapped out for him, or whether his intention is to know the exact nature of his future precisely so he can prevent it. He needs to know not just if his future is 'tout ça' yet but also, if it is not, who will finish it. Then his concerns take a spiritual turn:

Mais notre âme, ah, notre âme
Immortelle ou pas, l'est-elle
Pour finir? (OP, p. 233)

He is unsure whether there is an afterlife or not, whether his soul will live on after his physical death, and yet even such a fundamental question is not his primary concern. The 'immortelle ou pas' is in fact immaterial to his present preoccupation, which centres on his own personal capacity to change his fate. In this sense the 'pour finir' is

also ironic, since immortality must on the one hand be forever, absolute, 'pour finir' insofar as it means determined once and for all, yet on the other hand immortal life can never 'finir'. The notion of immortality conventionally carries with it the impossibility of the kind of 'unforeseeable novelty' which affects the very nature of existence. Although an immortal's future may not necessarily be any more infallibly and completely imaginable, that is, possible, than that of a mortal, at least it is assumed that whatever the future offers it will not bring about the end of his immortal status. Yet the poet visiting the *voyante* does not rely upon such assumptions. This means that, for him, the absence or presence of a divine entity that would enable his soul to be immortal is less important than his own ability to influence or even to overcome its will. If God renders his soul immortal, he wants to know if he can still be mortal; if there is no God, and therefore no afterlife, he desires the potential to achieve immortality anyway. Man's ability to create an unforeseeable, undetermined future is thus an assertion of his own worth, a form of defiance against God's quality of omnipotence, or, at the very least, a fulfilment of God's will that man must achieve his own personal redemption. The precedence of reality over possibility is a negation of the idea of divine predestination.

In exalting the uncertainty and contingency of the future, the poet in 'L'avenir' is nevertheless sure of one event in his future: his physical death. The manner and time of his death are unimportant in comparison with his ability to affect what happens to his soul before and after, but the fact of his death provides a means of stability, a reference-point around which to focus his questions concerning the future. If physical death were not certain, he would not concentrate on the immortality of his soul. In a

much earlier work, 'Autoscopie' from La double vue, this one certainty is a positive source of comfort to the poet. He describes himself as 'Ouaté d'un pessimisme heureux' (OP, p.42). This apparent oxymoron derives from his knowledge that he must die, which is to foresee a sad future in conventional terms and hence to be a pessimist, combined with the happiness that accompanies clarity and certainty in the midst of an uncertain, uneasy future. That he knows he will die is indeed an egocentric pleasure, since it provokes his imagination into conceiving how others will view his demise:

Plusieurs amis feront un médiocre
poème sur ma mort. [...]

Ne pleure pas, maman. [...]
Je pardonne à tout le monde:
je vais mourir.

Ainsi vous croyez sincèrement
que je vais mourir. (OP, p. 43)

As the poet whose task is to reveal the truth, if he says he will die others believe him. Perhaps they too yearn for certainty in an uncertain, unknowable future. In fact, his realisation of the definite nature of mortality contrasts with the imagined, unreal responses to his own death -- his mother's weeping, his fellow poets' eulogising. He commences with what is real, albeit a future reality, and creates a possible world to accompany it, based on what he knows to be true in the present, that is, his mother's devotion to him, and his peers' admiration, as well, of course, as their amusing literary inferiority. Without that present, his conception of his own death and the reactions to it would be wholly predicated on arbitrary fantasy. Yet he is aware of the fundamental

difference between what is real and what is conjured up in his imaginary future world.

He can have no faith in his putative scenario:

Parfois, je ne sens pas plus
mes idées que ma main gelée. (OP, p. 43)

He can see his hand, and he can see the fact of his death, but his perception is only superficial. The numbness of his frozen hand denies him an internal facet to his sensation, which therefore has no three-dimensional, living quality. In the same way, the whole picture of his future, including his death and the circumstances and reactions surrounding it, are hidden. The irony is that, even when his death becomes real, he will be no clearer as to the responses of others, since he will have no life with which to experience them. The future, then, is so unknowable that even the one event of which we can be sure, our death, will occur beyond our awareness. We can never know what it is like to have died, only how it feels to be dying. Even his own hand is the object to his subject, a separate thing that is viewed as if it were already dead.

Man cannot truly appreciate the contingent nature of what is to come until he has rejected the rigid cause-and-effect model when comparing the present to the future. If he treats them as two distinct entities, whose connection is that what happens in the present unavoidably causes what will happen in the future, he denies both the indivisible unity of time and the ability of external, unpredictable events to shape the course of his life. That is not to negate the role of human creativity that Bergson perceives as arising from the precedence of reality over possibility. Indeed, creativity is

enhanced inasmuch as human behaviour is no longer tied to performing deeds specifically designed to facilitate the future. Man is liberated by the absence of an all-inclusive linear and logical progression from present to future. In 'Un mariage', from Les oignons, the cause-and-effect science of heredity is juxtaposed with the illogical, unscientific world of human relations:

Un garçon comme ça se rencontre rarement: bon comme le pain, vif comme la poudre, fort comme un Turc, doux comme un mouton. Et une fille comme ça: belle comme le jour, fraîche comme la rose, pure comme l'or se rencontre rarement. Eh bien, ils se rencontrent. Ils ont une fille laide comme un pou et une vie bête comme chou. (OP, p. 325)

The apparently perfect couple have a child and a future no one would have expected. Yet there is in truth no reason why the daughter should not be ugly. She may have acquired her ugliness from the father, who, for all his qualities is never called handsome. And even if he were, heredity does not take account only of the previous generation, and the married couple's own parents and grandparents may have been ugly. In either case, the unpredictability of the child's appearance owes nothing to the future's 'unforeseeable novelty', for all the information required to produce the daughter's looks is contained within her genes, and the fact that their provenance is unknown does not mean it is non-existent. On the other hand, the reason the boy and girl have a stupid life together is precisely because man tries to shape the future but must fail. In the description of both people the 'se rencontre' is interesting, since it implies the qualities of boy and girl are not superlative *per se*, or at least that this is not the prime value of such qualities, but rather that they are most useful when the young man and woman are interacting with others. It is as if the two have been intentionally

bred to possess outstanding personal attributes in order to make them attractive to other people. But nothing can ensure that, once boy and girl have met, there will be any personal attraction or compatibility. Yet this point is unclear in the poem, for 'une vie bête comme chou' may be all this couple desires. Certainly neither is regarded in their description as being any more intelligent than a vegetable. And the breeding itself may have been flawed, for it is not immediately evident, with reference to the boy's upbringing, whether all bread is good, or all powder lively or all Turks strong. Similarly, 'belle comme le jour' is a cliché that takes no account of ugly days.

This poem is certainly about unpredictability, but the boy and girl are not the real subject of the piece. Norge's concern is primarily with the reader. All the initial reactions the reader is invited to have towards the poem prove to be misguided. The syntax and progression of the argument lead the reader to assume that the message of 'Un mariage' is essentially that, no matter how we may try, we cannot be logical about human relationships. The boy and the girl seem ideally suited for each other but the daughter and their life together are a terrible disappointment. It is only when the reader goes beyond the cliché and concentrates on the exact words and images used that he realises both that the ugliness of the daughter is no great surprise and that the stupid married life the couple lead may be exactly what they want. What is unpredictable, therefore, is not human irrationality -- that, after all, is no surprise in Norge's poetic world -- but that the superficial message of the poem itself is misleading and incomplete -- and deliberately so.

For the notion of the possible and the real has importance for poetic creation as much as for the creation of the future. The reader, in being led by the poet towards a cliché appreciation of 'Un mariage', ignores the ambiguities contained within the individual words in order to fit them into his preconceived idea of what the poem is about. This is also true of the individual images, for instance 'fraîche comme la rose', which the reader takes to mean very fresh, unsullied, pure, because of the commonplace resonances a rose carries in poetry. In fact, it may be that the poet wished to compare the young girl's complexion with an old, wrinkled rose. There is no reason a rose in poetry cannot be old and wrinkled, other than the reader's preconceptions.²⁴ His first, cursory look at the poem engenders in him a notion of what is possible, and he constructs his reality around that, whereas in fact he should only explore the possible once the reality of the poem is established. Then he would be able to conceive of an old rose, an ugly day, a weak Turk, a bad loaf of bread, and the other possible images in 'Un mariage' whose very possibility he rejected at the start. The liberating effect upon the reader of overcoming his preconceived ideas of the poetically possible is clear, and it renders him more open to the 'unforeseeable novelty' contained in a work.

In 'On ne sait jamais', also from Les oignons, Clément attempts to manipulate the future by his actions in the present. Like the reader of 'Un mariage', whose assumption is correct that the theme is unpredictability but who is initially misled as to its source -- that is, what is unpredictable is the poetic language itself, not the course of the marriage -- Clément is right to say 'on ne sait jamais', but his reasons for such a belief are erroneous:

Clément saluait les arbres. On ne sait jamais. Clément baisait les statues. On ne sait jamais. Clément souriait aux oiseaux, respectait les insectes. On ne sait jamais. Clément était parfait, et même avec les hommes. Pas de chance, vraiment: un chêne cent fois salué lui tomba sur l'épaule un beau soir. En somme, Clément avait raison: on ne sait jamais. (QP, p. 312)

Here is an obviously unforeseeable event that negates a man's endeavours to control his future. What he presumably hopes for is a reward, on earth or in heaven, for his kindness to others and his respect for and communication with the environment.

Instead nature injures or kills him. So his 'on ne sait jamais' is disingenuous, since what he is aspiring to is the opposite, a knowledge of what is to come, a capacity to shape what happens in the future by his actions in the present. On the surface his problem is that he deals mainly with inanimate objects or creatures that have no moral awareness, and therefore he has no guarantee of obtaining what he deserves. The fact that he is 'parfait, et même avec les hommes' implies, in the word 'même', that human relationships are an afterthought, a by-product of his concern for the natural world and not the prime motivating factor. This is, after all, understandable, for Clément's attempts to disprove his personal axiomatic motto would be expected to bear greater fruit in things that have no mind of their own, things that can apparently be easily controlled. People are harder to manipulate. And yet the means by which Clément hopes to influence these objects are better suited to humans -- the kiss, the greeting, the smile. The objects around him will ultimately act and react independently because they have no consciousness, no way of being affected by personal kindness. Indeed, the oak tree that falls on him can be assumed not to have intended to do so. Just because it is the subject of the verb 'tomber' does not imply intent to fall, and certainly not intent

to fall on him. For a tree to fall requires the kind of physical effect upon it that Clément never provides. Mere cajoling will not cause it. Thus the oak tree not only cannot be blamed for its act, having no consciousness, but also does not interact with Clément when it falls. He simply happens to be in the way.

A falling oak tree is not difficult to hear or see. Clément must have had a reason for not concentrating on the physical enormity of an oak crashing to the ground. Perhaps he was too busy admiring the beautiful evening, perhaps he spent all his time in his fruitless activity of communicating with objects that never responded to his overtures, and was thus so engrossed in attempting emotional interaction with nature that he was oblivious to its physical aspect. And this is no minor flaw in his putative relationship with the world, for it demonstrates how profound his misunderstanding is. In being kind to the insects and the trees and the birds, he hopes he will receive a dividend of sorts. This will manifest itself in more than simply a response from one of the insects or trees or birds, as if he is conducting some interactive experiment to prove man can communicate with the animal kingdom. His aim is wider: to please nature, so that nature will in turn look kindly on him. In other words he imbues nature with a divinity and a unity that goes beyond each individual tree and insect. God will reward those who treat His world with reverence and love, Clément believes. Yet in treating things in human terms he ignores the fundamental difference between the two: that man has a soul. Clément should certainly love nature because it is part of God's creation, but to humanise insects and trees is to devalue man's spiritual side as well as to neglect the essentially physical quality of nature. Clément does both. Further, if nature is part of

God's creation, the tree falling on Clément is, after all, a conscious event: it is God's sign to Clément that he should cease his activity, and, if his intention is to manifest his love of God, he should concentrate more on gaining the affection of those creatures who possess the soul and the consciousness to appreciate such behaviour, that is, his fellow men. His relationship with nature should be one of wonderment at its physicality.

In another sense, however, Clément's seemingly flawed interaction with his world is praiseworthy. A statue is a representation of a heroic figure, and is normally admired for its artistic value in being a good likeness of the person it commemorates, though of course it can entail a certain embellishment of or improvement on reality. But in kissing the statue, Clément demonstrates a love for the statue as an object in its own right. In linguistic terms, he shows an appreciation of the signifier rather than the signified. The metaphor of Clément's world as poetry is interesting. He hopes to attain contact with the divine that he knows to be in the objects with whom he interacts, but he also loves the objects for their innate worth. If the reader of a poem emulates Clément's behaviour, he will treat each individual word with affection and respect, he will attempt to interact with it, to discover its resonances, and will then better appreciate its relationship with the other similarly individual words. The global picture, the divinity behind Clément's nature, is inauthentic unless it is contained within each single element. Further, although the birds and the insects and the trees represent a greater essence, they are no less valid for what they are rather than what they symbolise. The birds and insects are the poet's words, but words are also more than just the objects they

represent. Norge's famous love of words is more than a clinical celebration of the clarity of the signified, it is a reverence for the signifier itself.

When God's world, and the poet's work, are made real, it is up to Clément and the reader to discover what is then possible. Clément is right that 'on ne sait jamais', in the sense that we are never entirely sure about the true and exclusive nature of a thing, we can never say definitively we have extracted all the knowledge, all the resonances, contained in an object or a word. Clément is doing no more than aspiring to a fuller appreciation of what is around him.

The poetic context of the real and the possible is fundamental. Once a poem has been written, that is, realised, it is the reader's task to uncover new possibilities. There can be no concept of the possible until the work is real. And in that respect literature does have a temporal quality, in the same way that it has a spatial character. The words themselves are not solely representative, symbolic, rather, like Clément's birds and trees, they exist in their own right. That is not to say their essence predates their existence, for a word in a poem only achieves a level of potentiality once it is realised. In other words, the poet cannot restrict a word's resonances once the reader has interacted with it. Equally, a poem is an artistic and communicative object, so it depends upon the existence of someone other than the writer, therefore it cannot be said to be real until it has come into contact with the reader. After all, what the writer intends from a poem, what he imagines its future existence to be, and how it actually affects the reader are two different things.

In 'La rose qui dure', a poem from Les coq-à-l'âne, written when he was eighty-seven years old and doubtless cognisant of his approaching death, Norge depicts time in familiar terms, as an organic being which teases us by running at different speeds depending on whether we are concentrating on its passing or not. When the poet's back is turned

[...] l'horloge va plus vite.
Le temps voleur en profite
Aussitôt pour me flouer
De quelque riche minute. (NP, pp. 205/206)²⁵

As usual when Norge takes a commonplace image, he does so precisely in order to play on its very cliché quality, to explore how a trite image can be renewed and invested with refreshed interest. For in fact the clock which runs faster is distinct from time the thief. The clock is an inanimate mechanism that happens to have malfunctioned, whereas time, that living, conscious and immoral creature, takes advantage of this event to affect the life of the poet, and, being time, it does so 'aussitôt', since its actions necessarily have a temporal context and one which stresses the immediacy, the nowness, of the situation. However, the effect it has is to rob the poet of a period of time, in other words time steals what it already possesses. Man only thinks he owns and controls time, while in fact even the most accurate clock, one manufactured by man himself, pays no attention to how he wishes time to proceed, and time as a whole is an independent entity, able to act to protect its property irrespective of the human moral code against which it may offend.

Man transacts with time. Agreeing to be governed by time, so accepting his mortality, he receives in return precious moments which he fills with his life. These become time present once in the possession of man, and then, as time past, occupy his memory. But in this poem time reneges on the deal, and some moment passes without the poet's having experienced it. It had the potential to be a valuable and fulfilling instant, but now it has slipped into the past seemingly without having first gone through the poet's present, his consciousness. Thus he has no memory of it, the past it occupies is not his.

Time is not the sole culprit in this broken contract. The ageing poet suspects he has too often let periods of time enter the past having left them unfulfilled, uncherished, taken for granted. He wants to postpone indefinitely the date when he must yield to his mortality. He therefore wishes to create a new, more faithful, less fleeting time, one which is constant and ever-lasting:

Adieu, jardins fugitifs,
Amours, saisons, écritures
Et musiques passagères
Qu'écrase l'ombre des ifs!

Moi, je veux la fleur sévère,
Je veux la fleur inventée.
J'invente la fleur qui dure
Et s'appelle éternité. (NP, p. 206)

The flower of eternity which he invents is artificial, and thus it resembles the fleeting music and literature, which mortal man creates in order that he may transcend his mortality but which are ultimately ephemeral. The seasons will always recur, and the

flower on the rose will always die, the petals will fall, and only the plant will survive until the next bloom. The reference to 'jardins fugitifs' is significant, for a garden is the prime example of man's persistent striving to control and subordinate nature. The gardener manufactures his own personal microcosm of the natural world, and cultivates plants that will flower at a certain time, yet the one thing he cannot achieve is the flower that never dies, since, while nature as a whole may endure, just as man as a species may survive for eons, individual plants are as mortal as the gardeners who grow and nurture and water them. Norge's flower of eternity is not a real flower at all. It is an imagined flower which grows where there is no time but eternity. In saying 'adieu' to time and mortality, he takes his leave of the world as a whole, and yearns for the immortal world that he hopes will welcome him after his death.

'La rose qui dure' is a poem that encapsulates many of the concepts of time witnessed in the rest of Norge's poetry. Firstly, there is the conflict between time on the clock, the time of units, and indivisible time. Then there appears the notion of being as becoming, of existence as a fluid continuum dependent upon the constant occurrence of new presents, new nows. To be, in a static sense, is to dwell in the past, to reject the richness of each moment. This leads to an appreciation of duration, the encountering of all times through the present, and ultimately the 'rose qui dure' is inauthentic because it involves man's sacrificing of the present for an immortal future that is in any case impossible to achieve. And finally, it is the powerful reality of the poet's situation, that is, the impending proof of his mortality, which causes him to seek alternative possibilities of existence, yet these imagined possibilities do not construct a new reality

in the future. Similarly, it is the reality of his lost time that engenders his conjuring up of the possibility of 'quelque riche moment'.

Because Norge is a poet not an ideologue, his association with the idea of time is a figural one, that is, it is a source for poetic creation. He seeks not to justify or refute previous philosophers' logical paradigms, but rather to take them as his starting-point and imbue them with an imagery and a symbolic quality which gives them fresh resonance. And, since his poetic language is intended to be ambiguous and fluid, the philosophical ideas explored attain a freedom and life that allows them to go beyond the strictly linear prose in which they were conceived. This means that, whereas a philosopher assumes a didactic relationship with his reader, the reader of Norge is empowered to infer and perceive and imagine for himself.

¹ See D. Furley, Cosmic Problems, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, Chapter 9, for an account of Aristotle's view of time's continuum and its infinite divisibility, as described in his Physics.

² Einstein was in fact a poetic source, especially for the Surrealists. 'The advances made by Einstein in the early part of the century were as exciting to that era as the progress into space has been to later generations. Both Saint-Pol-Roux and Apollinaire refer to Einstein, and long for the day when the artist may be able to make breakthroughs in the concept of reality in step with the mathematician's theories. For them Einstein is the supreme poet of their era' (A. Balakian, Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1986 edition, p. 89).

³ Bergson's purpose is not so much to deny time's divisibility, but rather to approach the general subject of time from a metaphysical not a scientific point of view: 'What is wanted is a difference in method between metaphysics and science: I do not acknowledge a difference in value between the two.' (H. Bergson, The Creative Mind, translated by M. Andison, New York, Citadel, 1992, p. 43.)

⁴ This is specifically meant to describe Bergson's discussion of his method in, for example, The Creative Mind, and not a general comment on all his work.

⁵ 'Comme la Sirène dont le corps humain s'achève en queue de poisson' (J.-P. Sartre, L'être et le néant, Paris, Gallimard, 1990 (first published by the same publisher in 1943), p. 186).

⁶ Cited in B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy, op. cit., p. 63.

⁷ According to Littré's Dictionnaire de la langue française of 1956, 'dimanche' was once 'masculin ou féminin suivant qu'on fit en latin 'dies' masculin ou féminin'. Its use therefore implies an archaic sense. Another purely grammatical explanation could be as an abbreviation for, say, 'ma fête de dimanche'.

⁸ G. Apollinaire, Alcools, Paris, Gallimard, 1920, p. 16.

⁹ Although the purpose of the names is primarily in their providing rhymes with, respectively, 'maintenant' and 'baïonnettes', they also refer to specific figures of the recent past, Ernest Renan (1823-92), the French historian who advocated a scientific approach to history and whose chief

work is his *Life of Jesus* (1863), and Léon Calmette (1863-1933), the physician and bacteriologist who co-discovered the BCG vaccine against tuberculosis. They are both people who represent the advance of science, and thus have an ironic value in a poem detailing the horrors of modern war.

¹⁰ Cicero, judging by his *On Old Age*, might assert that part of Sisyphus' punishment consists in the fact that he lives forever but is refused the right to age and die, and therefore his immortality is in a way inauthentic. According to P. MacKendrick and K. Singh, *The Philosophical Books of Cicero*, London, Duckworth, 1989, pp. 205-212. Cicero in *On Old Age* rejects the popular notion that old age is to be feared, and instead heralds it as the prelude to an infinitely better immortal life to come after death, and as such a necessary and welcome condition. Although this is hardly a unique view, it does shed some light on the view of immortality and eternity in Classical times, from which the myth of Sisyphus originates.

¹¹ In Camus's work, part of Sisyphus' simultaneous tragedy and resolution of that tragedy arises from his awareness of his situation: 'Si ce mythe est tragique, c'est que son héros est conscient. [...] Sisyphe, prolétaire des dieux, impuissant et révolté, connaît toute l'étendue de sa misérable condition' (A. Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Paris, Gallimard, 1942, pp. 165/166).

¹² See G. Kirk, J. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1957. Chapter 6, for a discussion of Heraclitus and his original and comprehensive system of unity through polarity and change.

¹³ Clearly, the term in the poem is 'ça' and not 'le ça', the definite article being crucial to the psychological term.

¹⁴ S. Beckett, *En attendant Godot*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1952.

¹⁵ Apart from an amalgamation of Vladimir and Estragon, the name Sigismund also has resonances of the Siegmund of Wagner's 'Ring' cycle. Siegmund is one of Wotan's offspring. He falls in love with Sieglinde without realising she is his sister. Brünnhilde, one of the Valkyries, disobeys Wotan's commandment by protecting Siegmund against Hunding, but Wotan intervenes and Hunding kills Siegmund. The fruit of Siegmund and Sieglinde's incest is Siegfried, the eponymous hero of the third opera of the cycle (See J. Westrup and F. Hoffman, *Collins Encyclopedia of Music*, London, Chandler Press, 1984, p. 460). The main link between Norge's Sigismund and Wagner's Siegmund would seem to be helplessness in the face of greater forces, which might also characterise the relationship between man and his unconscious and therefore indicate that Norge's Sigismund may be also be a reference to Sigmund Freud. For a discussion of Norge and psychoanalysis see 'Chapter Five: Norge and Loss' below.

¹⁶ See especially M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by H. Iswolsky, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984, and C. Clark, *The Vulgar Rabelais*, Glasgow, Pressgang, 1983, for explorations of Rabelais's depiction of the carnival.

¹⁷ In J. Hoffman and G. Rosenkrantz, *Substance Among Other Categories*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, the authors quote Aristotle's statement that 'some things can exist apart and some cannot, and it is the former that are substances', taken from Aristotle, *The Complete Works*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984. Volume II, p. 1691, as a shorthand definition of the term. Their contemporary approach to the notion of 'substance' is noticeable for its sympathetic treatment of Aristotle.

¹⁸ The title of this poem cannot but remind the reader of Valéry's 'Le cimetière marin' (P. Valéry, *Poésies*, Paris, La Bibliothèque des Chefs-d'oeuvres, 1979 (first published by Gallimard in 1929), pp. 144-149), with its phrase 'Midi le juste'. The graveyard is described as 'Temple du temps', and its temporal quality permeates the entire poem, making an association between it and Norge's 'Midi juste' quite appropriate. Perhaps too the poet's thirst to live in 'Le cimetière marin' can be likened to the lion's more literal thirst in 'Midi juste'.

¹⁹ This is reminiscent of the ancient sign reading 'Hic bibitur' ('ici on boit') in F. Rabelais, *Gargantua*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p. 65.

²⁰ *The Creative Mind*, op. cit., p. 100.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 91.

²² *ibid.*, p. 105.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁴ William Blake's 'The Sick Rose', beginning with the line 'O Rose, thou art sick!', is perhaps the most famous literary depiction of a rose that does not conform to the norm. It appears in his 1794

Songs of Experience, the counterpoint to Songs of Innocence.

²⁵ Cf. 'Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know / Time's thievish progress to eternity', lines 7-8 of Shakespeare's 77th sonnet.

Chapter Five: NORGE AND LOSS

This discussion of Norge's treatment of loss, regret and reparation will centre in particular on one field of learning: Freudian psychology. An attempt will be made to explain and draw together the different aspects of this theme of loss using psychoanalysis, most crucially repression theory, but also by exploring how the poet depicts in a poetic form such concepts as *ego*, *id*, and *superego* and other Freudian ideas such as neurosis and the Oedipus Complex. This approach is different from that which is taken in the rest of the thesis, for two main reasons. First, loss in Norge is more than simply a personal experience, but is a fact which all humans have undergone. Universal, as opposed to personal, human loss is the state of being bereft of those characteristics which man previously considered as his own, the supremacy of his conscious will, the authority and justification to do as he wished in the world, and the ability to apprehend God. Thus, loss is a structural quality, it is an in-built part of being human, and as such it should be examined by exploring in a structural way the human psyche which perceives and experiences such loss. The best model for this type of exploration would seem to be Freudian ego-psychology. Second, and this is the more specific reason why psychoanalysis is used here, because one of the kinds of loss man feels is the loss of dominance of his conscious -- he can no longer be considered in command of his self -- Freudian ideas are doubly relevant: they are one of the causes of, as well as the means of diagnosis for, man's loss.

A work of art is a discovery. Given that art is not necessarily (or not at all) mimetic in nature but presupposes both artifice and creativity, to deal as much as Norge does with the imagery of loss is immediately to challenge the reader. For only through the discovery, the gaining, of a poem does the reader perceive loss. There would be no loss without such a gain. If, furthermore, the loss is to be tempered by some kind of reparation, then the creative work itself, the conduit, must form part of that process. (As will be argued later in this section, reparation does indeed occupy an important place in Norge's treatment of this concept.) In the short introductory paragraph to Les oignons in 1953, the poet writes:

Si les oignons font pleurer, c'est à cause du respect humain. Dans l'ancien temps, les oignons faisaient rire et chacun les respirait afin de trouver la gaîté. Un sage blâma ce rire dénué de fondement et les oignons en furent humiliés. Ils comprirent que les larmes seules sont tolérables sans motif. (OP, p. 293)

Notwithstanding the humorous tone of this explanation, the poet's point about emotion without cause is earnest. For his 'oignons', which are short prose poems, are called after the particular vegetable because, once they are peeled away, there is supposedly nothing left. This is less an overtly modest attitude with regard to the worth of his poetry than a statement about the people who are the subjects of the 'oignons'. Natural and psychoanalytical science has stripped them of their essence. Like the onion, they have no core, no irreducible essence, and while their crying, that is, their emotional behaviour, is not exactly without cause, certainly science likes to reduce it to a question of mere mechanics. In other words, man has lost his right to be

man. Kantian assertions on the impossibility of establishing God as an *a priori* truth,¹ and Darwinian discoveries of man's biological genesis,² undermine the supremacy and absolute freedom humans have apparently enjoyed thus far. Freud showed further that even the individual mind is not under our conscious control. There exist currents beneath the surface which challenge the illusion of intellectual primacy, an idea that is perhaps more disturbing to man than any theory of the origin of species, since the mind can never be safeguarded from its own potentially destructive self, whereas the whole thrust of evolution is that animals have an instinct to survive and protect their kind. In any event, man's loss of authority -- he cannot understand, he cannot control, and he cannot claim supremacy over or detachment from the animal world -- threatens his entire existence. The moral system which was at the core of religion and civilisation can no longer provide the necessary answers to the ontological questions raised.

For Freud, repression has a positive nuance, inasmuch as humans repress what may cause ill or pain.³ This pleasure principle is mirrored in Norge's poetry. The truth of man's loss of authority and supremacy is repressed, in order that he may continue the illusion of endless potentiality and spiritual contentment. Norge illustrates such repression, though in a different, poetic context.

As early as the 27 poèmes incertains, the poet senses that he is grappling not just with the individual's own loss but with the loss of identity and authority of humanity. In 'La souffrance du bleu', the blue sea is oppressive and cruel, a cloak over the world and a barrier to aspiration and adventure. What is lost is the capacity to reach beyond the

visible world, unlike the wind that has none of the physical and spiritual gravity that binds man to the earth. As the poem follows a slow and tortuous journey by sailing boat, dreams are overtaken by despair, and the truth of the poet's imprisonment becomes ever clearer:

Nul surgissement d'île
aux horizons circulaires,
où l'oeil puisse arrêter sa chute
et fraîchement atterrir [...] (OP, p. 14)

Man is the prisoner of the elements, and this despite being in a man-made craft designed specifically to harness and control the power of nature. The unabated fall of the poet's gaze symbolises his metaphysical vision of endless, hopeless physical entrapment on earth with no spiritual means of escape. But man is not the only one to bemoan the lack of wind, as 'le bleu pleure l'absence du vent' (OP, p. 14). The title of the piece, after all, connotes the suffering not only at sea but 'du bleu', as if the sea itself, which seems to human eyes the accomplice to the wind's cruel absence, the never-ending site of the poet's similarly eternal imprisonment, is in fact a victim, the passive obedient servant of the climate. Like man, the sea has turned from an immense, elemental, apparently omnipotent creature with a will of its own into a subservient and still tamed beast. Yet there is no empathy on the poet's part:

Ce bleu, ce bleu, ce bleu oppresseur,
comme une douloureuse vision béatifique! (OP, p. 15)

The sea's response to its loss of authority is as much a source of the poet's torment as the loss itself. Unendowed with the kind of emotional make-up which manifests itself in the voyager's pain, the sea's expression is one of numb, mindless blissfulness. The human curse is not merely, therefore, to lose potentiality, but worse to feel the loss as it comes about. Another image of human helplessness and emotional imprisonment at sea enters the poet's consciousness:

Tout ce bleu ne laisse aucun espoir
d'évasion.

Ecouter le chœur fatal des sirènes;

et mourir,

d'avoir entendu chanter
les sirènes! (OP, p. 15)

Man cannot prevent himself from being touched by the song of the sirens, and is condemned to die by dint of the loss of control both his mind and his craft will suffer.

To recall this mythical image and compare it to the poet's present predicament is to strip away centuries of intellectual progress, to invoke man's former impotence and inadequacy in the face of the world around him, to

Ne plus croire qu'aux seules légendes
et désapprendre la vie! (OP, p. 15)

'La vie' here is more than just the individual life that the poet imagines will end if there is no wind to carry his boat to land; it is the sum of knowledge and experience gained in earlier lives and passed down through the centuries. It is how man progresses, and

therefore it is the manifestation of man's ~~illusionary~~^{illusions} control over himself and his universe. The loss of this life entails a consequent gain in his elemental quality, his primitive respect for the unknown (as opposed to modern man's reaction to the unknown, which is to attempt to conquer it), and his belief in legends like that of the sirens. The poet feels that to lose modern life is in fact to return to some nebulous former time of purer naivety, in the Schillerian sense of the word 'naiv',⁴ and of better communion with nature, rather than his present perception of detachment and alienation.

Loss of authority is accompanied by loss of hope. In 'Perdu', light and hope are lost, again in full sea:

Les tournesols anxieux
obliquent de la croyance
vers la lumière.

Perdue, cette simple foi!
Et perdues surtout:
les lumières! [...]

Les colombes de l'espérance
sont mortes,
ailes épanouies,

en pleine mer. (OP, pp. 16/17)

For Norge, human progress does not entail a proportionate decrease in the unexpected, the unknown. Indeed, man's need to fulfil dreams and fantasies is one of the means by which understanding grows. Therefore, in the open sea, helpless and desperate for land, and blind to any guiding light, man suffers an intellectual and

spiritual trauma that parallels yet ultimately supercedes the associated physical impoverishment. The plea in 'Idylle', also from 27 poèmes incertains, is 'Seigneur, rendez-nous le don d'étonnement' (OP, p. 21). The implication is that it is God's decision as to whether man will be imbued with the surprise that makes him spiritually and intellectually inquisitive, opens his mind, and gives him the impetus to gain a better awareness of his world. Thus a loss of amazement results in, or perhaps from, a loss of communication with God.

Man's loss of authority and spiritual well-being is connected closely to the dual ideas of conscious suppression ('répression') and unconscious repression ('refoulement'). Suppression involves the conscious decision by the suppressor to subdue an unpleasant sensation or emotion, to conceal it and avoid having to face its significance. Repression, on the other hand, is an act of the unconscious allied to the pleasure principle, in which the activity of the unconscious is essentially directed towards the concealment from the conscious of all negative and injurious sensations.⁵ From the point of view of the conscious, suppression therefore requires the suppressor to be cognisant of the negative impulses he is bottling up, whereas when something is repressed the only overt signs that it has been hidden from the conscious are the symptoms of neurosis of which the conscious self is in any case unaware. In 'La pêche du poème', what the poet has demonstrated elsewhere of the growing impotence of humanity is here too recognised, and yet he feels the need to speak in order to give birth to his poetic power:

mais je goûte quand même
belle,
la belle tentation de dire.

O, si confusément tiré des limbes
cérébraux: poème:
poisson un peu étrange
et féerique à travers
les rutilances de l'aquarium
et la cohue de l'eau.

Scintille et sois né!

Or, voici la phrase -- illusion d'optique --
si fièrement et drôlement indigente
et non dite. (OP, p. 5)

The creative process necessitates a gaining as well as a loss of truth. Physical sight and taste fail to mirror reality. Illusion, the loss of mimetic accuracy, abounds and yet the poet is tempted to produce his art, refracted as it is, like light through the water in the aquarium. Despite his consciousness of the illusory quality of art, he must give birth to his literary creation, for, in the same way that the species needs to reproduce to survive, so the poet must work to maintain the spiritual side of man. This process is undoubtedly connected with Freud's idea of 'sublimation', in which artistic creation takes the form of a diversion of energy away from the psycho-sexual drives of the libido and towards a higher, cultural activity.

The poet is fully cognisant of the limitations of art, but he ignores them. In addition, the temptation, the impulse he experiences, is one that emanates from deep within him, and is drawn from the 'limbes cérébraux', the psychic ether of confused, unconscious thought not refined and controlled by his conscious. In other words the artistic

utterances that escape his unconscious are the symptoms that manifest themselves and indicate an unconscious repression. What the poet represses is the very poetry which his act of conscious suppression makes possible. The reason it is repressed is that it goes against the pleasure principle. The fish he catches, that is, the poetic result of delving inside his mind, is 'un peu étrange et féerique', deformed and somehow unreal, not an exact replication of his initial artistic vision but a creation nevertheless, and an act of defiance against that which is 'non dite'. If art produces such deformity, such strangeness, and entails the uncomfortable exploration of the poet's mind, it is an act that the unconscious needs to repress for the psychic well-being of the would-be poet. So to write is to defy the pleasure principle that requires the repression of artistic impulses.

The poet, then, suppresses consciously the knowledge of language's inexpressibility and man's loss of spiritual authority, in order to write. The unconscious meanwhile tries but fails to repress the painful truth of artistic creation. And, if unconscious repression results in the appearance of symptoms of neurosis, that is, indications that something is being repressed, then the Freudian antithesis of neurosis must be what is taking place in the poet's self every time he defies his unconscious and produces art.⁶ For Freud, that antithesis is called perversion, the explicit manifestation of that which the unconscious would normally repress.⁷ Norge's perversion in 'La pêche du poème' is not sexually but artistically based, although the reference to birth connotes an undertone of sexual activity in poetic creation. Artistic perversion consists in the bringing to life of a vision which would normally be repressed, the freeing of poetic

impulses from their concealed state. In conventional terms, perversion implies abnormality, defiance of cultural orthodoxy. Perhaps the 'poisson un peu étrange et féerique' is the symbol of such abnormality.

It is possible to re-read the early work of 27 poèmes incertains in terms of the *ego-id* relationship. In 'La souffrance du bleu', there is no mention of the first person except for one possibly plural 'nous'. Where personal indications are given, as with the 'nous', they are applicable generally. This piece has at its core the instinctive emotion of fear at the loss of human control. The absence of the first person emphasises its quality of *id*, that agency of the mind constituted by inherited instinctual elements. The poem is characterised by a devotion to man's sensuality, where civilised life must be unlearnt and so the intellect overcome. It is these emotional and instinctual components that are unfettered by conscious control, and thus ruled by the *id*. So the absence of the conscious first person in 'La souffrance du bleu' at the very least coincides with, and in fact underscores, the *id*-defined nature of the subject. In 'La pêche du poème', on the other hand, the 'je' in the lines 'mais je goûte quand même / belle, / la belle tentation de dire' (OP, p. 5) makes clear the personal aspect of the poet's situation. Further, the victory of a kind of conscious version of perversion and artistic activity over unconscious repression implies an *ego*-dominated psychic circumstance, which echoes the concentration on the first person in the work. So, in both 'La souffrance du bleu' and 'La pêche du poème' psychoanalytical and linguistic elements converge.

The *superego* is that section of the *ego* which deals with self-judgment and the evaluation of physical, ethical and aesthetic reality, and is the agency of the mind most accommodating to external factors, for instance society and family.⁸ This concentration on self-judgment and the intellectual and spiritual reaction to outside influences is extremely apparent in 27 poèmes incertains. In 'Le retour', the loss of belief must accompany an empirical gaining of knowledge and sensation:

Et surtout,
je sais trop bien les regarder
sans y croire.

En brique ou en toile,
en roc ou en feu,
en coeur ou en marbre,
en spectre ou en laque,
en vers ou en prose,
tout est en toc.

Et surtout, je sais
tout regarder
sans y croire. (OP, p. 22)

A cynical appreciation of reality and artifice characterises this poem. All is false, and that includes literary creation. Here the conscious sees but the preconscious rejects. The visible world in its multiform exoticism holds no delight for the poet, who writes in negation of the pleasure principle and therefore in establishment of the reality principle.⁹ He compares his current life with that of his childhood, and concludes that at least with ignorance and innocence came belief, whereas now his status of seer brings only disbelief, scepticism:

Les guignols de la vie vraie

sont encore plus bêtes
que les pauvres chers guignols
de mon enfance. (OP, p. 22)

The influences of the external, in the brick edifices of society, the fire of nature, and the dolls that symbolise his family life as an infant, infuse his poetry with a self-knowledge and a self-awareness characteristic of the *superego*, while those very aspects of life are crucial to the *superego*'s existence. Once again, therefore, the poet's form and content coincide in terms of their psychic consistency. In other words, he simultaneously describes and experiences the influence of the *superego*.

The end of this poem evokes a disturbing sense of emptiness and despair. The 'retour' of the title defines not only the journey back from the voyage when hope is lost (this trip is to the stars, though its echo of the sea-journey in 'La souffrance du bleu' is unmistakable), but also the circularity of life, in which man returns to his beginning, his childhood, in search of a time when his potentiality was at its greatest and his awareness of human limitation lowest:

A travers les sables d'astres
de la voie lactée, une triomphale
assomption
vers d'autres planètes!

Découvertes?

Hélas! tout n'est qu'à l'envers
ou autrement
Rien de plus.

J'ai fait le tour de l'univers
et me voici sublimement omniscient.
Je m'embête

à mourir. (OP, p. 22)

To know everything is to have faith in nothing, and moreover to have nothing left for which to yearn or strive. The loss evident in this poem is theoretically offset by a concomitant gaining of knowledge, but spiritually the poet feels no sense of reparation for the loss he has suffered. The discerning *superego* reinforces the reality principle against which his unconscious fought but lost, and the poet is left with the curse of his quality of being a *voyant*,¹⁰ that is to say, he is the artist who cannot repress because it is his task to know, feel, and ultimately communicate to others the truth of man's loss.

It can be seen from Norge's earliest work that he varies between expressing loss of authority and illustrating its repression or suppression. As his creative life progresses, so the repressing urge prevails, and when there is loss its impact is mollified by a counterbalancing sense of reparation. This then is the poet's task: to recognise loss and placate it by a concomitant gain, even if that gain is no more than the very creative work, the poem, that brought to the reader's attention the loss in the first place. In Avenue du ciel, Norge is perceptibly searching for concrete values which will replace those lost by man's fall from omnipotence.

In 'XIII', 'le poète travaille à retirer de l'eau ces bijoux faux' (OP, p. 54). These false jewels are similar to the deformed fish of 'La pêche du poème', inasmuch as they are salvaged from the limbo state that is the water and prized as a catch, a gain, but are illusory and incomplete in nature. The falseness of the gems consists in their inauthenticity, the superficial gleam and attractiveness which conceals their untruth.

Thus the poet brings into unconcealment objects that appear to have a value in themselves, but whose true worth is that they obscure from the reader a deeper absence of genuine jewels. The poet suppresses his knowledge of man's loss by pretending that man can still create, can still satisfy his aesthetic needs. The illusion of man's command over his soul is sustained. In 'XXXVII' this deceit continues:

Le sein parfait respire un bouquet plein de ruse
où le dard patient d'une algèbre l'épie --
Mirage, pose-toi, jette au vent tes orties,
écoute mes oiseaux qui ne chantent jamais. (OP, p. 63)

The poet seems in complete control of his material. The lines of the quatrain themselves are classically formed alexandrines. But the apparent authority of the poet, his mastery of the form, is undermined by the incompleteness of the rhyme-scheme, and this gives the reader a strong impression of lack or loss of equilibrium, as if the poem itself were out of kilter, reflecting the absence of communication evoked in the birds that cannot sing and the misleading aroma and the inscrutable language of algebra. The perfect breast is thus flawless only in appearance, in superficial qualities, but the aesthetic content of the air it breathes, that is, the nourishment it ingests, is comprised of trickery, deceit. So the poet will continue his duplicitous activity, invoking the loss of beauty and harmony in the birds that no longer sing. Furthermore, he is fully aware of his falsehood, and stands in comparison with those very birds that, once their art is lost, do not attempt to proffer false hope, unlike the poet, but rather simply cease to utter sound. If the birds were the poet, the man who recognises his fellow men's loss of truth, they would continue to sing, but their song would be

inauthentic. The psychic impulses of man do not transfer themselves to the animal world.

Yet poem 'XI' speaks of 'l'immortalité d'un oiseau' which 'donne encore sa chanson' (OP, p. 53). So this bird, it seems, can still produce a sound. But it is the very quality of immortality that distinguishes it from man. Man's self-image of omniscience and control has been destroyed by Darwin and Freud, whereas that same absence of psychic repressive agents that prevented the birds of 'XXXVII' from singing inauthentically also means that the bird in 'XI' is not affected by a loss of immortality, so it can still communicate and create truth. The ability of birds to fly brings them physically closer to God in the manner that Icarus wishes to do later in Le sourire d'Icare, and their defiance of gravity symbolises a spiritual freedom from the restrictions and limits man has discovered in himself.

The poet acknowledges the enviable situation in which birds find themselves, in contrast to that of man. To be a bird is therefore to negate humanity and human loss, and also, and more importantly, to be in a position to apprehend God. Thus the human mental turmoil evident in Avenue du ciel and the inauthenticity and repression of truth which the poet commits may be transitory states. In 'III', the poet opens himself to God as the means by which man's loss of authority can find reparation:

Tu viens enfin mon Dieu
Je n'ai que mon angoisse
fervente à t'offrir
tu me regardes à bout portant, reçois
mon silence reçois

mon ignorance ma peur. (OP, p. 50)

To be transformed from a duplicitous concealer of human truth into a messenger and a follower of a higher, divine truth, the poet must divest himself of his pretensions, his false utterings, and stand immediately before God in silence, ignorance, and awe. As he writes in another context in 'XI',

Il faut beaucoup d'humilité
pour apercevoir ces choses. (OP, p. 54)

Humility is required to appreciate both God's presence and His ability to save man from his plight of loss. This quality of humility is an indispensable aspect of man's redemption, for it unites the fact of loss with a consciousness and awareness of its existence. Once humility has taken hold of man, he no longer denies the truth of his situation, and therefore ceases the passivity that prevents his achieving reparation. For the poet who metaphorically genuflects before God in 'III' is only passive in terms of his kneeling position. Mentally he has actively assumed a humble stance, and thereby announced his desire to be infused with God's divine presence. In 'XXI', the poet undergoes the same welcoming procedure, although this time God is not named explicitly:

Lente mais ferme blessure,
voici mes mains attentives
à tes courants. Formations,
défautes invisibles

Je veille, je veille,
je veille, tes lames de fond
sur mes joues. Sur ces mains,
ton signe léger.

Les portes de l'attente
claquent sur ton passage --
Au seul profond souhait
récompense accordée,
vers toi, plage promise, aérienne plage
voici ce cœur enfin, cet anxieux cœur,
ta tempête reçue avec reconnaissance. (OP, p. 57)

All the elements of man's necessary humility are present. Firstly, the acceptance of his injured state implies willingness to seek help from outside himself. Secondly, the expectation and arrival of the unnamed 'toi' bring reparation and healing. Finally, the 'plage promise' which is in the air connotes that heavenly paradise to which the poet aspires. Norge's poetry, however, thrives on ambiguity, and the scene is not unambiguous, in the same way that in 'III' the actual result of the poet's supplication is less apparent than the intention. Here the 'lames' are both groundswell, wave, and the blade that provokes the wound which needs healing. This undercurrent of violence is reinforced by the 'tempête' that marks the advent of 'toi'. So, while it is clear at this stage in Norge's writing that his potential escape from the need to repress man's loss can be found in God, the reparation is more putative than real. In other words, the context of the imagery implies an as yet unstable, unsettled situation.

The fulcral work in Norge's writing about man's personal and universal loss is Le sourire d'Icare. By its very title, this work indicates the poet's evolution of thought with regard to the theme. Icarus, it will be remembered, was the son of Daedalus, the architect who built the Labyrinth on Crete for King Minos to contain the Minotaur. The psychoanalytical analogy with the Minotaur and the Labyrinth is not obscure: repression of the harmful demon in order to maintain equilibrium and happiness forms

the core of the Freudian pleasure principle. Icarus is of course known more for his ill-fated flight with his father, using wings made of birds' feathers. The son's escape from Crete was a failure because he ignored his father's warnings and flew too near the sun, so melting the wax that bound the feathers together. For Norge, Icarus is the symbol of a visionary who attempts to overcome gravity and mortality and the knowledge of man's loss of authority by reaching out to God. His flight renders him an angel, corporeal but divine. His fall, failure though it undoubtedly is, is nonetheless also glorious, for it encourages humanity to look to the earth for reparation and consolation. In a later poem from Les oignons called 'L'honneur', Norge returns to this concept of consolation in failure:

Les ailes d'Icare n'ont pas tenu. Les ailes de Dédales ont très bien tenu. Et c'est Icare qui a tout l'honneur. Vous comprenez ça, vous? Moi je comprends, mais je n'aime pas en parler. (OP, p. 315)

The elements of repression, or rather in this case conscious suppression of the knowledge of man's limits, recur in the poet's dislike of mentioning Icarus' kind of honour, and in the Spartan yet strangely colloquial tone of the poem, as if he is hiding what he realises to be man's estate so that the reader will not guess for himself the underlying gravity of the situation, that is, man's inability to transcend physically and regain his lost authority, merely by the register of the piece.

In the first few sections of Le sourire d'Icare the eponymous hero's relationship with his parents is referred to, and for the first time in Norge's work the Oedipal aspect of the mind can be traced. For it is entirely possible that a part of his rejection of his

father's entreaties to keep away from the sun has to do with an Oedipus Complex which has him love his mother and seek to destroy, if not Daedalus himself, then at least Daedalus' bond with and authority over his son. It is his mother who talks to him in Section V:

Mon fils, il te faut prendre femme [...] un grand âge pèse aux épaules de ton père [...] Ta mère t'aime et seule t'a compris. (OP, p. 102)

Icarus ignores his father's pressure, expressed through his mother. His own spiritual needs are much stronger. His love is primarily for God, and so Daedalus has lost his authority over Icarus, who is called 'Icare au front obstiné' in Section VII (OP, p. 104), indicating an unwillingness to bow to the conventional figure of patriarchal supremacy. Oedipus' murder of his father is, after all, regicide as well as patricide. In fact, the father's flight is nowhere to be seen in Norge's work. This implies that, by the time of the attempted escape, the familial and hierarchical bonds between the two have already been completely cut. Of course, in the original legend Daedalus did fly with Icarus, finally landing in Sicily where he was to die after being tortured. Yet for Norge to mention the father's successful flight would be to undermine the metaphysical aspect to the myth. In other words, Icarus fails physically to transcend his mortal, earthbound existence, but if Daedalus were shown to succeed in the same venture then Icarus' failure would have only a personal cause, whereas his fall from heaven is meant to be viewed as symbolic of all of man's ineluctably terrestrial condition. Moreover, a lengthy mention of Daedalus' role in conceiving the plan of escape from Crete would

detract from Norge's concentration on the son's creative potential. In Le sourire d'Icare it is Icarus alone who possesses the dream of transcendence and the spark of creation:

Il s'agit d'être l'ouvrier d'une merveille. Icare choisira les plumes d'aigle pour la forme -- et pour la vitesse et la subtilité, celles de l'hirondelle, les plumes de la colombe pour sa pureté -- et celles de l'alouette pour son désir de la nue. (OP, p. 104)

The mother's entreaties to Icarus concerning his apparent need to take a wife are resonant of one aspect crucial to the formation of the Oedipus Complex.¹¹ A son's hatred for his father arises initially when the mother tries to distance herself physically from that son, a process beginning when she removes her suckling breast from his mouth for the last time. The mother, whose breast was seen by the child as part of himself, becomes in the child's mind a separate and erotic object in her own right. The father then becomes a rival to the son for the affections of the mother, and, recognising this fact, she tries to quell the son's nascent sexual excitement, which takes the form of masturbation.¹² This leads to Freud's notion of the Castration Complex,¹³ but it is not necessary to describe in detail this concept to understand how Icarus can react to his mother's desire for him to turn his affections away from her and find a new woman to love. She says she alone understands Icarus, as if the sexual bond between them is a secret to be kept from the ageing father Daedalus. Further, the creation of huge and beautiful arms, that is, his wings, which will carry him to a transcendent joy is surely at least partly an auto-erotic act by Icarus, who defies the threat of castration implicit in Freud's interpretation of the consequences of the Oedipus Complex. One of the results

of the mother's sexual rejection of the son is described by Freud in An Outline of Psycho-Analysis, cited in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's work Freud on Women:

It is true that as a result of the [castration] threat he has given up masturbation, but not the activities of the imagination accompanying it. On the contrary, since these are now the only form of sexual satisfaction remaining to him, he indulges in them more than before.¹⁴

Icarus' fantasies take a more pronounced form once his mother rejects him sexually. He conceives the 'merveille' of crafting the auto-erotic wings and defying his father's authority in order to express what is, after all, an egocentric and solipsistic fantasy to become immortal. The castration threat, it must be remembered, is a factor in pre-pubescent life, and Icarus is much older than that, but the symbolic value of the sexual schism between mother and son is no less relevant to an appreciation of Icarus' psychological motivations when he strives to build his wings and apprehend God.

As the moment approaches when he must fly, his sense of reality, his workmanlike demeanour, is subsumed in his impatience for action. His *id* dominates, and all self-judgment is suspended as he accepts the unknown and rejects an *ego*-based defensive suppression of his instinctual drives. It is the unknown *ipso facto* which attracts him, and his sense of self, his personal identification, is lost. In other words, by entering the unknown he seeks to recreate himself, or at least to gain a new perspective on his being:

A son destin il s'était promis d'aller calmement, mais déjà il se hâte vers une liberté inouïe [...]

Et se sent arraché tout à coup dans les airs comme une grande feuille qu'emporte le vent. (OP, p. 105)

He is manipulated and carried along to a fate of which he is now, after actively conceiving his dream and building his wings, merely a passive participant. This loss of self is accompanied by, indeed necessary for, the gaining of the power of flight. This is something which the original myth also connotes, and crucially Norge's Icarus ignores the implication once he is in the air. He regains the concept of self, revels in his own importance and uniqueness, and so fails to sustain the flight. The humility required for man to come to an acceptance of his loss, the negation of his preconceived notion of self which enabled Icarus to leave the earth, has been overtaken by a renewed and mistaken sense that gain does not require a concomitant loss. Icarus feels he can achieve his physical transcendence solely through his own abilities. The profusion of instances of the first person singular is testament to this shift that has occurred from the *id*-dominated, self-effacing compulsion to fly and be carried along by the wind to the *ego*-dominated flight itself, particularly when he exclaims:

Je possède, je vois des pays sans contour et des fleuves sans rives.
J'habite seul des neiges [...] (OP, p. 106)

Not only does he possess the world below him, but he transforms it, in the case of the river, into a limitless entity, and his existence in the sky is solitary. He has become God in his own eyes, whereas his initial motivation for flying was physically to touch the divine in heaven, which he perceived as an external and attainable physical being. In the sky, his solipsistic and egocentric detachment from both the divinity he sought and the humanity he left behind grows ever greater:

Le monde sous ses pieds diminuant, ces étendues, ces édifices pâles et ces champs découpés où l'homme s'est étendue, composent la figure d'une mélancolie universelle.

Icare s'élève et n'entend plus que les battements de son coeur. (OP, p. 106)

The flight is a symbol of overreaching human endeavour, in which man forgets his origins and so loses his perspective and context, and therefore his meaning.

Psychologically, it is a portrayal of a recessive *superego* and repressed reality in favour of an unfettered *ego* and an accompanying desire for possession. Icarus' conscious self-image defies the *superego*, that agent of external influence and equilibrium.

Icarus falls to earth. In so doing, he fails to achieve a permanent flight, and thus his belief in his own transcendent power, his physical possession of the divine, is shown to be mistaken. The loss of human authority which he represses, and indeed must repress if such a self-belief were to be sustained for any length of time, is, after all, as true of him as it is of the supposedly less worthy men he left behind when he took off. Loss is therefore paramount in the fall to earth: loss of authority, loss of the repressive capacity that hid the true nature of man's estate from Icarus, loss of self when his delusion ends, as well as physical loss of altitude. The word 'perdu' appears ten times in Section XIII, which details the return to earth, for instance when the delusion becomes clear:

Perdu, perdu! (il n'y a que le vide qui est immense et très sec)
A jamais perdu, cueillant tes fruits dans les vergers de soleils
faux et de mirages [.] (OP, p. 107)

Because Icarus' spiritual self-deceit was so visually corroborated, in his view of the tiny world and the limitless nature he possessed, the image of a mirage is all the more striking, for it emphasises the illusory quality of that which appears clear and irrefutable.

However, the most illuminating phrase amidst the repetition of loss is one that evokes victory:

Perdu, ô cher Icare et jetant aux solitudes ce dernier cri de guerre
et d'amour! Et triomphant et haut de coeur! (OP, p. 107)

Physically Icarus has failed to transcend, he cannot escape his body and assume the immortal flight of the angels. He is once more under the control of gravity, which pulls him to earth and returns him to the species to which he belongs. Even this special man is ultimately still a man. Yet he has triumphed in some way. He has gained the mysterious and undefinable honour referred to in the poem 'L'honneur'. It could be that this is simply a defiant manifestation of Icarus the vainglorious and deluded egocentric, a refusal to believe in his fate. But the seamen who find his body imply another interpretation when they attempt to explain the smile he bears:

-- "On n'en voit jamais sur le visage des morts. Il sourit d'avoir si follement défié Dieu."

-- "Ou de l'avoir adoré de si près."

Mais quelqu'un dit encore: "Chers compagnons, c'est le même sourire." (OP, p. 108)

Icarus endeavoured to approach God, but his means were physical rather than spiritual. As a result, he entered the supposed physical realm of the divine, that is, the sky, and his *ego* perceived that he had achieved his goal and actually become that which he sought. Back on earth, in death he attains a realisation that his proximity to God must be spiritual. His physical belonging to the world of mortal men enhances rather than prevents his apprehension of God, for although (or because) the spatial distance between him and his creator is great, the faith needed to bridge such a gap is greater. Man's loss of authority over his physical surroundings and his conscious potentiality can, for Norge, be answered by an increased degree of humility and an awareness in the omnipotence of the divine. This is how reparation from loss is attained, not through the illusion of defiant physical activity. Thus Icarus smiles, not because he has defied God or adored him from so close *per se*, but because he has learnt that such action is inadequate and only ephemerally satisfactory.

Loss of spirituality is far worse than loss of physical potential. Man can still attain divine presence without being able to transcend bodily limits. He must be cognisant of, even rejoice in, the gravity that prevents him from imitating the angels and sprouting wings. Icarus' smile is his external manifestation of that rejoicing. Further, he smiles in the same way that the Christians are said to have smiled in death when mauled by the lions in the Colosseum in Rome. Corporeal demise, physical loss, only pave the way for spiritual ascension. So Icarus smiles because he knows he will soon adore God 'de si près' once more, only this time as God intends.

In Le sourire d'Icare, Norge both illustrates and undergoes unconscious repression. On the one hand, he portrays Icarus, whose repression of the true nature of human mortality leads him to attempt the impossible in a solipsistic and unsatisfactory way. On the other hand, Norge ultimately presents a model, without the irony that is normally characteristic of his poetry, of a life fulfilled despite or because of that same human mortality. The human condition has at its core the notion of loss, of authority, immortality, potentiality, and sexual communion with the mother, but Icarus physically and Norge poetically and spiritually seek to defy that loss in order to achieve happiness. In essence, Norge both leaves unchallenged the perception of those who discover Icarus' body and accepts the initial premiss of his endeavour, that there is a need to go beyond mere terrestrial existence in some manner. The function of the psychoanalytical paradigm in this section is not primarily to investigate Norge's own psyche, but rather to demonstrate how psychoanalysis both causes man's loss, by showing him that his authority even over his own mind is illusory, and gives hermeneutic insight into the poetry of Norge. However, the suspicion remains that Norge himself represses, and thereby at least initially causes the reader to repress, the unconscious fear that Icarus' smile may simply be a symptom of a wider *id*-resolution, an intellectually unsatisfactory resolution of a crisis by means of sensual gratification, which would certainly leave Icarus with a smile on his face but which equally evinces a failure to confront the reality of the situation he faces.¹⁵ In other words, Norge proffers the fishermen's view of Icarus' smile, that he has defied and adored God and that this smile is an acknowledgement of his ultimate submission to God's will, and the reader accepts such a view as Norge's own. In the final passage of the work, he writes:

Qu'il dorme enfin. Son essor
n'habite plus l'apparence.
L'âme ~~pure~~^{pure} vole encore
sur les faîtes du silence.

Aux hommes lents et distraits
penchés sur leur trouble empire,
il est donné pour secret
le message d'un sourire. (OP, p. 109)

The clear implication is that Icarus has attained God, and his example can be followed by all men who seek transcendence and fulfilment. Therefore, Norge appears not to entertain the possibility that Icarus' final enlightenment and apprehension of God is in itself just as illusory as the physical flight which caused his fall. The concept of *id*-resolution here consists in the predominance of sensual elements in Icarus' flight, including his fall and smile. That is to say, even his final apparent revelation, that God wants him to soar spiritually rather than physically, comes about through sensuality and not some intellectual leap on his part. Like the masturbatory impulses to his wing-building, he is driven by egocentric experiential delight throughout, and the excess of ephemeral gratification inherent in *id*-resolution seems very evident in Icarus' behaviour. To continue the psychoanalytical interpretation of Norge via his works, then, it appears that, in creating a character whose purpose is to demonstrate how we should soar spiritually rather than physically, the poet in fact, and despite his conscious intentions, conjures up an Icarus driven by instinctuality and sensual pleasure. Icarus is the conduit through which Norge expresses his own unconscious and otherwise repressed doubts about the validity of Icarus' transcendence. This is repression rather than suppression precisely because it seems to run counter to Norge's conscious

motivation for writing Le sourire d'Icare, and could be diagnosed therefore as a symptom, that is, the unintentional, as it were, escaped, manifestation of an unconscious driving force. This does not of course mean that Norge's Christianity, his belief in man's power spiritually to touch the divine, is in some way invalid or inauthentic, merely that Norge himself is as much subject to doubt and repression as any man.

The very egocentricity of Icarus' elation and sensuality during his flight serve to make him modern in the sense that Carl Gustav Jung ascribes to the term, in Modern Man in Search of a Soul:

The man whom we can with justice call 'modern' is solitary. He is so of necessity and at all times, for every step towards a fuller consciousness of the present removes him further from his original '*participation mystique*' with the mass of men [...]¹⁶

He is unhappy amongst the generality of men because of their inability to share his vision. And, as has been shown, even Daedalus, who joined him on the flight in the original legend, is absent in Norge's version. But Icarus' modernness extends beyond his isolation, his solitude. For he is nothing if not symbolic of man in a particularly modern crisis, seeking as he does to gain reparation for the loss of authority and potentiality that causes his existential confusion. In failing to transcend physically and having to return to his spirituality, his soul, in order to connect with the divine, Icarus stands as an exemplar of modern man's possible resolution of this crisis. In literary terms, Norge's poetry gains new life when viewed from a psychoanalytical perspective,

and similarly man's loss is turned into gain when he not only accepts but actually welcomes the new insight into himself accorded by psychology. Jung finds hope in this:

If we are still caught by the old idea of an antithesis between mind and matter, the present state of affairs means an unbearable contradiction; it may even divide us against ourselves. But if we can reconcile ourselves with the mysterious truth that spirit is the living body seen from within, and the body the outer manifestation of the living spirit -- the two being really one -- then we can understand why it is that the attempt to transcend the present level of consciousness must give its due to the body. We shall also see that belief in the body cannot tolerate an outlook that denies the body in the name of the spirit. These claims of the physical and psychic life are so pressing compared to similar claims in the past, that we may be tempted to see in this a sign of decadence. Yet it may also signify a rejuvenation, for as Hölderlin says: Wo Gefahr ist, / Wächst das Rettende auch.¹⁷

A translation of the citation from Hölderlin might read: 'Where danger is, deliverance also grows'. The implication is that the danger of man's contemporary state, that is, his awareness of loss, can also be the source of his salvation, though not necessarily in a religious sense, because with new wisdom about his psychological composition man may ultimately regain his identity and potentiality. Jung's depiction of modern man, with a unified soul and body, mirrors Icarus' final understanding that physicality and spirituality both have a role in his existence. Physically he cannot achieve transcendence, but he still attains an albeit *id*-dominated higher sensual status, while his soul will succeed where his body failed in reaching out to God. That is not to say that the oneness of body and soul is in any way a uniquely modern concept, rather that modern man has the capacity to rediscover unity where it appears only fragmentation and disintegration are possible.

Le sourire d'Icare was written only three years after Modern Man in Search of a Soul, in 1936. Whether or not Norge read Jung is not known, but he certainly seems to be pre-occupied in his writing by the same concerns for a re-assertion of man's spiritual identity in a time of material peril in Europe.¹⁸

Norge's next fulcral work, Joie aux âmes, written at the height of the Second World War, continues the poet's contemplation of bodily loss and spiritual gain. The work is less figurative than Le sourire d'Icare, consisting of eight 'poèmes', although they resemble more closely chapters of the Bible split into verses, which is not to say that the Bible is exclusively literal rather than figural. The sub-headings are religious in nature -- communion, revelation, mission -- but with noticeably secular undercurrents. For instance, hunger for earthly food and heavenly manna merge:

Le dieu sec et blanc
des théologies
laisse encor des faims
brûler notre vie.
O bouche agrandie
jusqu'à la gencive
c'est à d'autres faims
que tes dents s'aiguisent! (OP, p. 128)

The argument about man's place on earth, and his failure through Icarus to achieve physical transcendence, has moved on to an acceptance that the earth is indeed his natural bodily home. Before this can be recognised, the pain and loss inherent in terrestrial mortality must be suffered and overcome, in order that the superficial

contentment evinced by humans can be tested and proven to be genuine and profound, in 'Le pas ferré':

Tous ces objets, ces livres calmes qui l'entourent, et ces bahuts gonflés d'aliments, semblent connaître aussi ce bonheur endormi.

Mais désormais, le vide fait partout son signe, et cette grande quiétude n'est plus supportable.

[...] O mère, ce bonheur est pesant comme un ciel de chaleur. Et je suis vide et terne. Et je suis pauvre; tandis que nos trésors s'amoncellent et que nos serrures sont bien fermées. (OP, pp. 129/130)

Man on earth has created a comfortable, materialistic environment, which is, however, unable to satisfy the deeper longing within his soul. He therefore embarks on a journey of whose exact significance he is still unaware. His trek occurs entirely on earth, so there has been a qualitative progression since Icarus. In other words, at least man in Joie aux âmes seeks spiritual enlightenment and fulfilment in the world in which he belongs. Further, the element of solipsistic, self-gratifying *id*-resolution has also disappeared since Icarus. Sensual pleasure has given way to renunciation of material and corporeal delight, and isolation from the rest of humanity has similarly been replaced by communion and connection.

All of nature is implored to help produce food where there is none. There are aspects of many Biblical symbols, for example the serpent and the breaking of bread. Interestingly, elements of both Old and New Testaments are present. This confluence of images, combined with the secular context, illustrate the poet's attempt to revivify that 'dieu sec et blanc des théologies' which partly causes the hunger. If Icarus' lead is

not to be followed, but man is to strive for God on earth, then the Scriptures must be explored and given new resonance, otherwise there will be as little hope of redemption and divine revelation on earth as in the sky.

In 'Jacob et l'ange', a silent angel descends and strikes Jacob on the cheek. The angel's wings and demeanour leave no doubt as to his divinity, yet his almost slapstick physical act in the midst of Jacob's awed declarations of piety divests the scene of its solemnity. The earthiness of the slap across the cheek renders the angel almost human, in contrast to Icarus' wearing of wings to make him angelic. The blow is necessary because the angel that visits Jacob is mute, but no words are required. Jacob, like a baby slapped for the first time to make it breathe, is infused with energy and strength, but also the knowledge that he has been chosen for a task:

Désormais tu es grand, Jacob, tu es lourd aussi, gardien du verbe et de la flamme.

Tu n'écouteras pas ces harpes qu'on accorde, ni les choeurs exaltés des générations, ni le cri d'un oiseau dans l'aube.

[...] Tu iras parmi les hommes, et sous la voûte des années, portant seul ce cri surhumain. (OP, pp. 136/137)

The silence of the angel contrasts with the voice of God which Jacob has been chosen to carry amongst humanity, and the heavenly choir which he is not to hear, because it emanates from the sky whereas Jacob's domain is the earth. The Jacob of the Book of Genesis is likewise the epitome of impulses from both earth and heaven. In his dreams he has a vision of the ladder that reaches heaven and is ascended and descended by the

angels of God, so linking the immaterial to a material essence. It is he who founds Bethlehem, which means 'the bread of God' (bread being later the body of Christ) and builds what he calls 'God's house' out of stone, so turning spirit into concrete. He is Israel, the founder of the nation on earth which follows God's word.¹⁹

Yet he also represents loss, because he steals his brother Esau's birthright (and thereby creates and stands for illicit gain). And his consequent deception of his father reminds the reader of Icarus' Oedipal denial of the authority of Daedalus. When the man in 'Le pas ferré' who renounces his worldly possessions sets out in search of an uncertain spiritual fulfilment, his cry 'O mère' reveals the fact that this renunciation is also one of the comfort of his mother's presence. He leaves the womb as much as his own house. In a dream 'sa mère entend ce pas ferré qui sonne sur la route' (OP, p. 130), implying some kind of union between mother and son, a bond which transcends physical proximity. There is an identification with the mother at the expense of the father. However, the more dominant father-figure here is God, who manipulates Jacob the father-deceiver into a re-identification with Him. Jacob strikes back at the angel that has hit him, but the angel smiles, because, as the poet says to Jacob, 'ta victoire était dans le dessein de Dieu' (OP, p. 137). In other words, Jacob performs God's will, and must continue to do so as he constructs God's house and founds His own nation. The re-identification with a paternal figure is the psychoanalytical paradigm for the formation of the *superego*, which connotes self-judgment and self-awareness. Jacob does indeed become 'Homme de jugement, homme de l'Oraison' (OP, p. 137), and this enlightenment can only be enhanced as he becomes a father to all the children of Israel.

God is the saviour of man's soul, but the identification of God as the father brings psychic salvation in terms of a resolved Oedipus Complex. It was the very lack of such resolution that compounded Icarus' *id*-dominated existence. Without the universal wisdom engendered by the formation of the *superego*, he could not realistically view his own self in relation to those around, and specifically with regard to his connection to God. In his fall to earth, he gained the knowledge of God's status as father of man. Icarus's striving for divinity was doomed, because he could not become his own father. Back on earth, in other words, he is the son of his father once more, like Jacob. Both have substituted the authority of the divine father for that of their terrestrial one, and have thereby gained resolution, reconciliation, and self-knowledge. As the poet writes when the angel disappears, its job having been done, 'Jacob était lumineux' (OP, p. 137), that is, the divine aura around him is matched by a new inner enlightenment.

So identification with God as the father brings about enlightenment and salvation. Like Icarus, all men must remain on earth but soar spiritually:

Oui nous avons été oiseaux, maîtres du vent et de la pesanteur et l'envol nous était venu du seul désir, de la seule ferveur.

Mais aujourd'hui notre richesse est de n'avoir point d'ailes: il nous faudra voler avec le coeur, avec le coeur passer par ces brèches fleuries où commence la joie et l'unique lumière. (OP, p. 142)

This indication of a previous time of omnipotence and unlimited potential, when men could fly and defy gravity, connotes both progress and regression. That power of flight has been lost from some golden age in the past, yet man is better equipped now to use

his greater understanding of his internal workings to attain God through his soul, as if evolution has forced him to shed his now unnecessary wings precisely because they are obsolete. Men are still 'les amis des oiseaux' (OP, p. 142), that is, able to co-exist peacefully with birds, but that *ipso facto* implies that, while there is some primal connection between men and birds, because they belong to the same world of creatures, millennia of evolution have reduced their relationship to a spiritual and emotional rather than a physical one. Icarus' project, while distancing him from the rest of mankind, was nonetheless essentially human in nature. 'Voler avec le coeur' is how all men, not just the 'ouvrier d'une merveille' that Icarus was, can apprehend God. Therefore, the progression from Le sourire d'Icare to Joie aux âmes is that the latter work takes the understanding that Icarus gained in death, and which was manifested in his smile, and renders it accessible to all of humanity.

Revelation of man's task is followed by release, liberation:

Nous ne renonçons à rien, nous ne consentons à aucune limite.

Les méchants n'étaient point méchants. La mort n'était pas la mort. Et le néant - - voilà le mot le plus dénué de sens à la bouche des hommes. (OP, p. 158)

The physical limits to which man must conform, his loss of flight, his gravity, his mortality, are unimportant compared with the spiritual confines which have now been overcome once the establishment of his new inner possibilities and responsibilities is universally accepted. For his questioning of death is not solely related to his desire for spiritual transcendence, but also entails a linguistic freedom previously unencountered.

When his own physical essence was Icarus' prime concern, and his sensual *id*-resolution the manifestation of such a concentration on his body, the concrete, material quality of the world was unquestioned. Now that man may go beyond his body by means of his soul, he becomes aware of the same potential in other things, including words. If 'les méchants' and 'la mort' are not themselves, then their meaning changes because it is as much a part of their essence as their visual aspect. The fact that the poet's rejection of limits has consequences for the word is demonstrated when he calls 'le néant' the most meaningless word man can utter, that is, the verbal quality is what strikes him, the vocal formation of the word, as much as the actual concept of nothingness.

In another twentieth-century writer this absence of certainty in human communicability would be the source of an existential crisis. For Norge, who never questions the facticity of God and always has faith in the future of mankind, it highlights man's continued ability, despite the loss of authority and omnipotence he has suffered, to change his world. Further, the simultaneous acceptance of man's fundamentally spiritual, non-physical relationship with God, on the one hand, and of the fluidity of words, on the other, is not coincidental. For, as has been seen in another chapter of this thesis, the word is divine, as illustrated in the 'Choral', which serves as an epilogue to La joie aux âmes:

Pour mieux écouter, il ouvre les mains,
il n'accueillera plus d'autre message
que cette parole écumante et blanche
qui l'immerge comme un flux infini. [...]

Forêt de musique où roulent des fleuves,
les arbres, les eaux confondant leurs hymnes.
Le Verbe déplie un azur vivace,
le Verbe est Dieu même et Dieu c'est le Verbe. (OP, pp. 162/163)

There is much here which echoes Rilke's Sonette an Orpheus. The idea of loss of flight and spiritual reparation, in a context of melodious nature, is seen for instance in poem 23 of the first part of Rilke's work:

O erst dann, wenn der Flug
nicht mehr um seinetwillen
wird in die Himmelsstillen
steigen, sich selber genug,

um in lichten Profilen,
als das Gerät, das gelang,
Liebling der Winde zu spielen,
sicher schwenkend und schlank, --

erst wenn ein reines Wohin
wachsender Apparate
Knabenstolz überwiegt,

wird, überstürzt von Gewinn,
jener den Fernen Genahte
sein, was er einsam erfliest.²⁰

A rough translation of this might be: 'Only when the flight no longer arises for its own sake in the still sky and in bright profile, a tool of success, a plaything for the wind, lean, veering unerringly -- only when the pure destination outweighs youthful pride in burgeoning machines will he who approaches the far-off, hastened by victory, *be* what he flies alone.' The analogy with Icarus' wings is clear. They are a source of pride and pleasure to him, but they obscure his vision of the destination, the goal he is attempting to reach. The true end will be achieved when he himself is the means of transport (in

both ~~sense~~^{SENSES} of the word), when he ascends inside his own body rather than through the manufacture of an external flying-machine. Orpheus' quest for Eurydice in hell is moreover resonant of the conflicting compulsion for ascent and descent which characterises both Le sourire d'Icare and Joie aux âmes. Physical descent from the sky is concomitant with the opening up of man's possibility of spiritual ascent. He must lose his claim to physical immortality in order to have an immortal soul.

The fact that Joie aux âmes was written in 1941 only enhances the sense of spiritual optimism and potential that infuses the work. All around him is physical loss, as well as the loss of his homeland in the invasion of Belgium. Thus, now more than ever the poet needs to concentrate on the spiritual overcoming of such physical loss. The general absence in Joie aux âmes of the irony so common in his work underlines the seriousness of his intent, to acclaim the presence of the divine in man and his world. And when man seeks reparation for what is lost in war -- life, freedom, peace -- he cannot fully achieve it through violent upheaval and retribution. Norge will have lived through the spiritual and aesthetic loss of identity and confidence which followed the First World War, and so he will have seen the importance of cultural continuity both during and after war. Thus, wartime, despite the difficulties, is perhaps the most appropriate time to explore and reaffirm man's potentiality and transcendability. The very act of literary creation is, after all, also an act of defiance against the destructive urges of war. The very first line of Joie aux âmes underlines this artistic challenge to the forces of darkness and death:

Nous avons chanté dans la ténèbre pour donner preuve de notre éclat. (OP, p. 127)

Les râpes, Norge's first post-war work, displays a tension between personal and universal loss. This is most vividly explored in 'Jean-Baptiste décollé', a dialogue between the body and severed head of John. While the body bemoans its loss of sensory faculties, the head is powerless to control its last perceptions. The personal, and here humorous, loss is also symbolic, however, of John's supposedly incomplete life, in which the body is merely a tool of the spirit and not enjoyed for its own sake. The arms 'cherchent en vain la clarté de mes yeux' (OP, p. 175), unable to experience sensuality for themselves. Too late John revels in the sexual side of humanity, represented by Salome. The sensory features and the ability to communicate are also rendered useless in 'Le vin de cailloux' (OP, pp. 173/174), and life itself has departed the house in 'Grands os' (OP, p. 176). Individual loss of the faculties symbolises a greater sense of confusion and uncertainty in Les râpes. Hope is not entirely lost in 'Grands os', but it cannot hide a lost equilibrium and sureness of identity. The child in 'Orties' loses his life and his character, yet retains a physical unity (OP, p. 174).

If the context is post-war Europe, then the continent must gather together its disparate elements, its hope and soul and physical strength, in order to reconstruct a new whole. The destructive urges of the previous decade must be transformed into creativity. Life and order must come from loss and chaos. The model given is in 'Marche des paysans', the title incorporating the ideas of unison of step and commonality of people:

La meilleure plage

Est promise au loin.
Nous irons sans rage
Mais le glaive au poing.

D'un brillant espoir
L'âme était parée.
Lumière et pouvoir,
O marche sacrée. (OP, p. 170)

Thus the imagery may be military in nature, with the march and the sword, but it is not the debilitating war of before, rather a new unifying struggle whose backdrop is nature, reconstruction, and divine purpose. Norge is saying something very important about the psychology of the community when put to positive ends. Gone is the solipsism of Icarus, who while still a man broke the link between himself and his fellows. A sense of solace is gained from the presence of the family in 'Orties', and there is a natural strength in unity in 'Marche des paysans'. A form of regression occurs in which individual *egos* are subsumed and the *superego* pacified in favour of collectivist instinctuality. The first person plural is the single most striking idea in Les râpes, challenged by the ironically excessive self-love of 'Mon roi':

O Bête d'amour,
Si c'est toi que j'aime
Excessivement,
Pourquoi ces atours,
Pourquoi ce saint chrême
Et ces sacrements?

[...] Je suis et je reste
Mon roi. (OP, p. 169)

This is contrasted with the stark *je/nous* tension of 'Râpes':

Ma miel, ma sel et ma lune,
C'est toi.
Et nous verserons ma vie. (OP, p. 180)

Norge heralds a shift in concentration in this work from the individuality of redemption and reparation to its collective nature. Loss can be turned to gain, destruction to construction, and death to life by the invocation of the community. This much at least Norge seems to have gained from the brutality of the war. The next work, Famines, returns to the theme of hunger, but, as the title suggests, treats it in global and collective rather than individual terms.

Famines begins with the image of Jesus on the cross in 'Cuir et clous' (OP, p. 183) and ends with 'mille voix' of pilgrims calling for hope and vision (OP, p. 108). This development could in itself be described as a progression from the one to the many. After all, Jesus is said to have died in order that the sins of the generality of men would be forgiven. Yet man can only achieve redemption individually, and so the pilgrims' prayers are directed at personal salvation primarily:

Dit par mille voix
Pour un Dieu de fer:
(Par toi et par moi)
'Faites que j'espèrè'. (OP, p. 209)

The thousand voices do not in themselves create one single albeit louder voice just because they occur in unison, yet there is comfort and empathy in unity. Jewish resonances, of the totality of a chosen people, and Christianity's concentration on

individual redemption converge. The collectivity and ritual of the religious mass is evoked, as it is again in 'Fleur de fleur':

Et c'est nous les plus cachés, [...]
C'est nous les plus nus au monde

Nous n'y sommes plus, royaumes,
Vertus, meutes, sacrements.
Adieu. Nos regards fantômes
N'ont pas existé vraiment.

Perdus, les morts et les mers
Et toutes vignes, perdues!
Je n'ai pour suc et pour chair
Que toi, ma pêche mordue. (OP, pp. 184/185)

The phonetic association of 'nous' and 'nu' connotes the global nature of the people's lack of knowledge and certainty. They are laid bare, with only God's comfort and protection to sustain them in time of hardship. To suffer famine is to lose food but to be willing to gain spiritual manna, and so bring oneself closer to God. And to know God is to shed the 'regards fantômes' of former times. It is the 'peur de la peur' of 'Poltron' (OP, p. 206), that is, when man accepts nudity and uncertainty in a time of famine his only guide and means of sustenance is God, and so he must banish doubt and trust in his religious faith. Therefore, his most damaging fear is not where his next food will come from or whether he will freeze to death, but what happens if he succumbs to a lack of faith, in other words, what happens when his fear of the unknown resurfaces. That fear is what he fears above all. Thus the plurality of 'nous', in order to avoid fear of fear, submit to the same *id*-resolution as Icarus: they renounce thought, and trust in God, and thereby take pleasure in their physical famine and

immerse themselves fully in the divine will. They demand extremes of sensation, even the sensation of nudity:

Non, tu n'es pas assez nue
Lorsque tu es toute nue,
Mienne connue inconnue,
O mes folles avenues. (OP, p. 184)

There is a clear suppression of the individuality of rationality, and the fear that accompanies it. Interestingly, Icarus' *id*-resolution was destructive, because it centred on himself alone, and defied rather than obeyed God. Here the mass of people work together to uphold God's will and negate their assumed former egocentricity. The dynamic of loss and gain interacts with that of the individual and the mass. Man gains redemption for himself by combining with others. So he loses his individuality in order to regain it. Without that first uniting of single people there would be no collectivity and therefore no individual salvation. If a lesson for the post-war world is to be gleaned, or intended, from this work, written in 1950 but a thematic culmination of the poetry of the previous decade, it is that, if man wants to retrieve his divinity and his creativity after the destruction of the past, he must do so alone, but he cannot find the strength or sense of purpose to do so until he has joined with the generality of men, each of whom is likewise looking for his own individual spiritual rebirth.

Norge returns to the concept of repression in La langue verte. In 'La porte', the door of the title is a closed barrier between the pleasure principle of illusion and the unconscious, repressed truth of emptiness and loss of control:

Non, n'ouvre pas cette porte.
Ça donne sur l'océan...
Ça donne sur des cloportes...
Pas compris? Sur le néant! (OP, p. 272)

The gently ironic tone of this piece implies that the door must, indeed, be opened in order that man may discard his falsehoods and enter into a truer relationship with his world. This Norge himself professes to have done in the poem 'Dedans':

Dans le sacré dormeur
Enragé du silence,

Dans le sacré fourbis
Noir de la pensée, [...]

Dans le sacré poumon,
Poumon de la poésie,

Norge,

Moi, ô
J'ai vécu

Dans le sacré. (OP, p. 261)

The poet asserts his conscious self, his thought-processes and cognisance, over the silence of the unconscious, through the primacy of the *superego* which gives him the capacity for self-reflection, a process viewed as courageous, partly because it leads to the 'noir' of the unknown, like the nudity of 'Fleur de fleur', except that here man is able to draw on a greater level of self-control than in Famines. Even death, that most 'noir' of all human activities, may be controlled, if not in terms of the exact time of death, then at least in its manner, in 'De la flamme':

Je veux bien mourir, mais laisse-
Moi mourir à ma façon! (OP, p. 271)

This can be compared with the voluntary loss of control in Apollinaire's 'Le brasier',

which also has the motif of the flame:

Ce passé ces têtes de mort
Flamme je fais ce que tu veux [.]²¹

It is noticeable how dominant the position of 'moi' is in both 'Dedans' and 'De la flamme', each time beginning a new line, and in the latter example causing the severance of an inverted subject-verb connection. In other words, the poet's 'moi' carries enough weight syntactically and psychologically to bear the stress of the start of a line of poetry. Apollinaire's submission to the flame contrasts with Norge's control over this most elemental of forces, Heraclitus' permanent source of all life. Humour too helps to assuage the wild, uncontrollable quality of the flame, lessening its fearsomeness. Yet the fact that it is the means of death in the poem, and not death *per se*, implies that human mortality can never be completely overcome. In the very next piece, 'Les poumons', the 'je' figure has rescinded his desire to die:

Moi, je n'aime pas de mourir.
Mais la chance est-elle de courir
Quand on n'est que bergère ou mousse? (OP, p. 276)

The mysterious and lingering smile which is Icarus' legacy to the world returns in 'Crime et châtiment':

Voilà ce que c'est, Messieurs-dames, de sourire
Quand les autres ne savent pas pourquoi vous souriez. (OP, p. 283)

and again in 'Un sourire':

Et je veux un sourire
Qu'aucun vent ne déchire [...] (OP, p. 288)

That smile of Icarus in death, it will be recalled, far from holding the secret to transcendence, is an instance of Norge both describing and indulging in repression of the true nature of man's loss of authority and status, and this same dual character of the smile recurs here. The conflict of the poet, who is at once both offering hope of regaining lost spirituality and reminding the reader of the ineluctability of death, is reflected in 'Le mauvais larron', in which, even if there is a God whom humans can reach, He is incomprehensible:

Son camarade avec deux trois prières
Va droit au ciel et lui, sur son poteau
S'enrage seul et se tord les boyaux
Et souffre tout pour aller en enfer.

Son camarade avec le choeur des anges
Va jubiler toute l'éternité
Et c'est sur lui tout seul que Dieu se venge
De ces maux qu'il a lui-même inventés.

Excusez-moi si je n'y comprends rien. (OP, p. 281)

If God creates the bad as well as the good in men, and this must be the case since according to some Judeo-Christian theologies every good must have its corresponding

and oppose evil, then it surely cannot be right for Him to punish those who are unfortunate enough to suffer His capricious denial of Grace. The reader must agree with Kant, that it is not possible for men to apprehend God's truth, and that human reason is only true within the human world.²² With a smile and an 'excusez-moi', then, the poet must either accept this loss of authority, this time divinely rather than psychoanalytically or biologically founded, or else repress its implications from and for the conscious self.

Loss is treated in a different manner in Les oignons. The tone is playful and epigrammatic, and even more ironic. In these poems it is invariably the main character's personal perspective which alters to show that the perceived absence or loss has little basis in reality. In 'La beauté', Hermance herself does not change, yet her self-view is transformed:

La reine Hermance naquit laide et d'une laideur atroce. Voilà du moins ce qu'une fée mauvaise avait mis dans l'esprit d'Hermance. Elle fit voiler de crêpe tous les miroirs de son palais et chacun fut tenu de jurer qu'elle était la plus belle au monde. Mais Hermance ne put croire à cette impossible beauté. L'éloge des courtisans ne faisait qu'alourdir son désespoir. Un jour, saisie de rage, elle arracha le voile d'un miroir, se découvrit belle à ravir et mourut de bonheur. (OP, p. 294)

In a short piece, Norge has alluded to attitudes towards the aristocracy, to women, to beauty and its relation to truth, to the nature of happiness, and to loss, and all in a style his critics would doubtless dismiss as banal and superficial. For our purposes the suppression/repression evident in the veils and in the bad fairy is most intriguing. Taken at face-value, the fairy is a separate being which encourages Hermance to

believe something which is not true of herself. She then indulges in a conscious suppression of both the sight of her own face and thereby the so-called fact of her ugliness. In psychological terms, however, it is clear the fairy is an unconscious impulse, resulting from an event in early childhood or even in the womb -- '[elle] naquit laide' -- which was characterised by either the rejection of her beauty or her being punished because of it. Her beauty, being thus detrimental to her well-being, has been repressed according to the pleasure principle. The use of beauty as the cause of disadvantage or loss is interesting, because such a quality is conventionally thought of as beneficial. Indeed, here the final knowledge of her beauty does make Hermance happy, but it also proves fatal, and so the repressive instinct of the unconscious was justified inasmuch as it kept her alive. An alternative interpretation is that her death arises not from the beauty itself, but from the very fact that it had to be repressed. Had she known about it all along, she would hardly have received such a lethal shock on encountering her reflection, and so it is the repression of her beauty which is ultimately culpable. The rage which is the specific cause of her discovery must therefore be seen as a symptom of the neurosis caused by her repression.

Loss is again more apparent than real in 'Larmes':

Une fée prend pitié de ce grand chagrin d'Eveline et pour la consoler change ses pleurs en joyaux. De précieux colliers de saphir, d'amethyste et d'émeraude tombaient des beaux yeux d'Eveline. Hélas, comme ses larmes devenaient des trésors, elle ne cessa plus jamais de pleurer. (OP, p. 305)

Loss of the symptom does not imply loss of the cause. In 'Larmes', tears themselves are not the problem. Indeed, wealth may bring its own sorrow, as may an inability to express that sorrow by being denied the capacity to cry. The humorous implication, of course, is that Eveline knows she will be rich so long as she keeps on crying, and so she never stops. In 'La beauté', the truth, that Hermance is beautiful, similarly never ceases. Only the denial of that truth alters. Both are examples of repression of the truth to such an extent that the repression becomes more harmful than the truth itself. The loss that is of greatest importance, therefore, is that of the link between subjective perception and objective reality. This is comically seen in 'L'existence', a parody of the Cartesian 'cogito' argument:

Je voudrais vivre et qui sait si j'existe. -- Bah, si tu existais, tu serais le premier à le savoir. (OP, p. 325)

The loss of distance between objectivity and subjectivity recurs in 'La preuve':

La preuve que je t'aime, c'est que je vais t'occire. Ce poignard qui a faim de goûter tes poumons, c'est bien la preuve que je t'aime. Et par six fois, le colérique Abel perça le sein d'Olga. La douce Olga mourut heureuse: dans l'évidence d'amour. (OP, p. 314)

The shift of perspective from Abel to the narrator to Olga is swift and unmarked by punctuation, increasing the reader's sense of the existence of an ambiguous relationship between reality and perception. At the very least, Olga's happiness is objectively reported yet it is entirely dependent upon Abel's subjective and unorthodox assertion. The word 'évidence' conventionally connotes objectivity, but here Abel's statement is

uncorroborated, indeed his act tends to contradict the emotion he expresses. Like Hermance in 'La beauté', Abel and Olga both undergo repression in order to satisfy the pleasure principle: Abel represses a societal orthodoxy with regard to murder so that he may make his love explicit, while Olga represses an instinctual fear of death so that she may experience happiness. Norge's use as poem-titles of such erstwhile absolutes as 'La beauté' and 'La preuve', words which humanity invests with a degree of objectivity, is ironic, for in the poems themselves he sets out to demonstrate how our sense of objective truth has been lost, and how on the contrary such terms in fact owe as much to subjective and individual interpretations as to absolute qualities. This in turn implies a crucial and underlying loss of objectivity in language *per se*.

On the other hand, Norge sometimes captures a poignant moment by his very refusal to be ironic, a technique that can bear fruit only by the scarcity of its employment. 'L'émigré' is one such example:

Je m'habituerai. Evidemment, ils font les pommes de terre frites tout de travers et je ne comprends pas encore l'australien. Mais je m'habituerai. Ce qui me manque, c'est l'odeur d'électricité brûlée, -- quand sautait le plomb de la motrice, tramway no. 7 conduisant à la Coopérative de la Hestre. (OP, p. 327)

Here the contact lost is between the old and new lives of the migrant. No notion of lost reality or objectivity is posited other than that loss which takes place whenever real life is transplanted into nostalgic remembrance, and all the unsavoury elements of that remembered experience are repressed. The next piece too, 'Le château-chagrin', displays the same sense of factuality and un-ironic objectivity. The narrator is asked by

his grandfather to carry on the old man's custom of raising his cap every time he passes the building, and he solemnly concurs in this wish. Indeed, he will pass it down the generations until it becomes a tradition, even though he never discovers why his grandfather performed the act in the first place. What is implicit is as important as what is stated in such poems. In 'L'émigré' it is the resonance of the old country, both good and bad. In the latter work, the reason for doffing the cap and its relevance to the narrator are left unsaid. This absence is echoed in the sparse realism of the language.

Les oignons are in many ways fragments of a lost greater whole, in which enough is extant for the entire picture to emerge without it becoming necessary for every word to be retrieved. If loss is tempered by reparation, as Norge strives to illustrate, then this concept has applications for the style of language in Les oignons. For, in other words, the loss of this greater whole, the absence of fully explicit explanations and justifications, is accompanied by the two-fold gain of, on the one hand, the reader's own ability to interpret and extrapolate, and, on the other hand, the presence of enough clues for the fragments to be pieced together into a coherent whole. This is not true solely of Norge's work, of course. Rather it defines Norge's view of the reader's hermeneutic task in all of literature.

Norge's work after Les oignons, perhaps reflecting his ageing, begins to address the subject of regret, when thoughts of the loss of past opportunity and seeming destiny return to furnish the writer with an emptiness that can no longer be suppressed:

Dans le cœur excellement,
Ce terrible diamant
Par mille échos se balance,

Relentit infiniment

Et n'est fait que de silence. (OP, p. 361)

Regret is made of silence, nothingness, loss of hope, and yet also the need to articulate verbally the specific regrets experienced. It is also the regret that others have not confronted and accepted the realities he has been espousing over the previous fifty years of writing:

Parmi toutes les feuilles tombées de novembre, il y a tout à coup une feuille qui a quelque chose à te dire. Tu la ramasses. Elle va parler. Tu l'écouteras tout à l'heure. Quand tout à l'heure est arrivé, la feuille a tout dit dans ta poche. Tu n'as rien entendu. Et la feuille est morte. (OP, p. 488)

Already, in fact eight years previously, Gainsbourg had written 'La chanson de Prévert', in which 'les feuilles mortes te rappellent à mon souvenir', also implying regret and loss.²³

Constantly in the poetry of this period, that is, the 1960s and 1970s, there appear images of death or loss of youth and vitality, for instance in 'Encore un fils', from La belle saison:

Un jeune fils après mille et mille ans
Pour nous éclore une jeune espérance,
L'homme assoiffé guette un jeune printemps
Ta vieille croix a perdu sa jouvence. (OP, p. 608)

However, the poetry itself exhibits no sense of ageing. This can be seen in the playful rhythmicality and imagery of 'Le trimeur':

Bonjour, bonjour, brontosaure.
Ça fait longtemps qu'on s'est vu.
Moi, tu sais, j'existe encore
Et toi, tu n'existes plus. (OP, p. 634)

Apart from teasing the brontosaurus for its extinction, the poet laughs at himself, by implying that he too is a dinosaur of sorts, for his longevity, and differs from the brontosaurus only insofar as he is still alive, but otherwise stands comparison with this great beast. That is not to say that none of Norge's poems about loss of youth depict the cruelty and remorselessness of nature and the life-cycle. An example is 'Beaucoup de fièvre', in which there is a dialogue between a mother and son that shows not only how death follows life but how the one positively demands the other:

Maman, je suis au bout du monde;
Si tu lâches ma main, je tombe.
-- Meurs, mon petit, meurs gentiment,
Mon ventre est lourd d'un autre enfant. (OP, p. 595)

There is no maternal instinct in the mother beyond her biological function. At first she attempts to soothe the boy during his illness, but then abandons him when all hope is lost. In 'Ile du rien', life is a desert of unfulfilled desires where man must profess contentment to hide his mortality in a futile act of repression:

Sur l'île du peu, si tu sais vivre,
Il te faut chanter que tout est bien. (OP, p. 601)

Of course Norge's poetry cannot be expected always to fit into a linear pattern. His creative career is characterised to a large extent by the continual adoption of different forms and styles. Yet the poet between the ages of sixty and ninety more or less consistently approaches the theme of loss from the point of view of the mortal who has lost more time, as it were, than he can ever hope to regain in the future. Raymond, in 'Le futur passé', finds himself in Norge's position, chronologically if not spiritually:

Raymond soupirait après l'avenir. Dieu le lui donna, cet avenir. Et maintenant, Raymond soupire après le passé. Il exagère, dit Dieu, il y restera, dans son avenir. (OP, p. 495)

The future becomes the past with frightening speed. God alone has control over time, notwithstanding what has been said about this poem in 'Chapter Four: Norge and Time'. Time, then, is like God in its quality of being unapproachable and uncontrollable from the human perspective, and thus is another symbol of man's lost supremacy over himself and his world.

Norge's last work, Le stupéfai, resonates with images of loss from the by now ninety-year-old poet. The first poem, 'Sur la pointe', returns to the image of nudity, symbolising loss of protection and self-deceit. As old age takes over, it becomes ever more obvious, as man inhabits that limbo between life and death. The idea of immortality can no longer sustain its repressive task:

Tu crois que c'est gai de vivre mort
Dans l'abîme d'être et ne pas être [.] (S, p. 11)

But if the instinctual unconscious repressive forces lose authority over the individual, so does the *ego*, inasmuch as the poet seeks identification with the community. Yet he also comes at last to a greater understanding of God, now that he perceives the proximity between himself and his creator is increasing. But the *superego* is still active and continuing to interpret the poet's place and worth within his world, in the poem 'Je':

Je, c'est qui, c'est moi, c'est eux...
Un épi seul sur sa tige,
C'est vous et c'est eux qui fondent
Dans mille horizons douteux.
Je, c'est amour ou c'est Dieu
Et tout ce qu'il y a d'ange
Dans JE! (S, p. 35)

For the poet, the existence of God is no repression of reality, no illusion conjured up in accordance with the pleasure principle. God is an *a priori* truth, but also a necessary aspect of Norge's construction of his poetic universe. In other words, there is the divinity to which Norge the nonagenarian aspires, and, separately, the divinity in poetry which renders the poet the creator of divine work. As 'Chapter Two: Norge and the Everyday' attempted to demonstrate, in Le stupéfait Norge strives to release himself from his divine poetic task, in order to assume the ordinary mortality of his fellow men. However, he still seeks God the *a priori* truth, because he sheds his poetic divinity precisely in order to die and meet Him in heaven. Nevertheless, the anticipation of death does not make the poet superficially cheerful, now that he can achieve everlasting life. For, while he awaits death, he is exposed all too clearly to the inner darkness and void which remain now that his sense of self has departed, for example in

'En prison', in which the poet's mind and body have lost contact with each other, and so the mind seeks to inhabit other bodies. The body is the prison, a crumbling institution where no communication is possible:

La geôlière au regard de guêpe
M'apporte une soupe aux chardons.

Quand je lui dis quatre paroles,
Elle fait signe qu'elle est sourde.

Je ne sais s'il fait noir dehors.
Ici c'est la nuit pour toujours. [...]

Puisque je ne suis plus moi-même,
Je m'incarne dans tous les autres.

Et puisque je suis tous les autres,
Je m'étreins moi-même à mourir. (S, pp. 56/57)

The only thing of which the poet, whose mind and body have separated as with John in 'Jean-Baptiste décollé', can be certain is the existence of God. But even this ceases to provide comfort, in 'Blasphème':

Rendez-vous au fond de l'abîme!
Impossible de se tromper
Puisqu'on ne peut aller plus bas.

Louer un ange est une frime
Que les dieux ne supportent pas.

On dirait que leur paradis
N'est pas fait pour être habité. (S, p. 114)

Even 'God' has become 'gods', as if the paganisation of the divine divests it of some credibility and authority and so this last vestige of comfort and belief and identity for

the poet has become tenuous. Other poems in this final work, notably 'Fiat lux', 'Dieu dit', and 'Midi partout', underline this combination of loss of belief and awareness that God's existence brings no comfort. Le stupéfait ends with the aptly named 'Silence', a poem which invokes the 'soif de l'âme' (S, p. 124) while wrestling with the state of the poet's relationship with his poetry. That phrase encapsulates so much of the manner in which Norge characterises the theme of loss throughout his work: it implies nutritional craving on the one hand, links the divine and the self on the other, and thus touches upon the question of the association that exists between conscious and unconscious, and the loss and reparation that occur in both.

The basic premiss of this chapter has been that man's lost authority over his world, his mind, and his immortality have been repressed in a triumph of pleasure principle over reality principle. In addition to illustrating this phenomenon, Norge himself undergoes it, particularly in Le sourire d'Icare and the final implication of the smile. This smile symbolises the poet's continuing hope for spiritual transcendence where physical transcendence is not possible. The poet allows everything to be questioned except the existence of God, which nonetheless, in his later years, brings him no comfort. In fact God's will, constancy, accessibility, and judgment are all subject to examination, but not the facticity of His being. The point is not that God does not after all exist, rather that the fact that Norge never questions this (when he questions everything else) enhances the sense that faith and repression on Norge's part are inextricably linked.

Freud's The Future of an Illusion, written in 1927, deals with civilisation and religion in terms of unconscious repression and conscious suppression. His argument begins with the assertion that the masses would let their instinct for anti-social and anti-cultural behaviour run unfettered if they could. The only way in which civilisation prevents itself from crumbling is by coercion. On the one hand, external punishment encourages the upholding of moral demands. On the other, society makes it worth the individual's while to maintain and not destroy civilisation. Foremost amongst these means is religion. Religion renders tolerable the necessary but otherwise unpalatable privations which man must suffer for the good of the whole. Religion gives man primacy over the rest of nature, and it forces him to be good for fear of eternal damnation. These inducements to uphold civilisation act both consciously and, through inherited behavioural patterns, unconsciously to restrict the instinctual urges of man. Freud's intention above all is to show that repression of the true nature of humanity through religion does not in the end lead to more contented and worthwhile lives. In fact it is possible that:

By withdrawing their expectations from the other world and concentrating all their liberated energies into their life on earth, [humans] will probably succeed in achieving a state of things in which life will become tolerable for everyone and civilisation no longer oppressive to anyone. Then, with one of our fellow-unbelievers, they will be able to say without regret: *Den Himmel überlassen wir / Den Engeln und den Spatzen.*²⁴

The lines are from Heinrich Heine's Deutschland, and can be translated: 'We'll leave heaven to the angels and sparrows.'²⁵ For Norge, as for Jung, the absence of a spiritual element from most of Freud's work is problematic. The psychic model he posits is

revolutionary and enormously important for the poetic as well as the psychological domain. Jung, on the other hand, writes that the poet's creative processes necessitate that intangible spiritual aspect:

Creativeness, like the freedom of the will, contains a secret. The psychologist can describe both these manifestations as processes, but he can find no solution of the philosophical problems they offer.²⁶

It is through spiritual transcendence, according to Norge, that art is achieved and discovered. God may thus be seen primarily as a metaphor for the perfect state that the artist can seek to attain by his work. Norge's poetry tells the reader that, while the personal and universal loss which humans perceive is real, there is a catharsis and release to be gained from art's search for perfection. Indeed, it is perhaps a greater consolation to recognise that man alone can achieve such creative and spiritual heights without recourse to a deity at all, so bringing unintended hope to Nietzsche's words that 'God is dead and we have killed him'. However, the purpose of this thesis was never to question Norge's instinctive and unchanging belief in God, rather to give his theism relevance in an atheistic context as well. The real question is whether man must know everything, or should have faith in his unknown, even secular spiritual potential. The idea of loss is that it carries with it that very potential for greater gain in the future.

¹ In his 1781 work Kritik der Reinen Vernunft ('Critique of Pure Reason'), Kant refutes his 1762 assertion, in Der Einzig Mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes, published as I. Kant, The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God, translated by G Treash, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1979, that it is possible for man to establish God as an *a posteriori* truth because of the apparent unity and order of nature. In the first section of Kritik der Reinen Vernunft, 'Transzendentale Elementarlehre', Kant argues that it is in no way possible for man to prove that God exists using human logic (I. Kant, Kritik der Reinen Vernunft, Leipzig, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1930, p. 567 onwards).

² D. Kohn (editor), The Darwinian Heritage, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, is an

interesting collation of studies of the scientific and sociological consequences of Charles Darwin's work on evolution, particularly the 1859 On the Origin of Species. D. Hull's chapter in The Darwinian Heritage, pp. 773-812, entitled 'Darwinism as a Historical Entity: A Historiographic Proposal' is an especially useful overview of the subject, as well as being an attempt to reclaim Darwinism for the scientists at the expense of the sociologists and politicians.

³ Freudian repression is, of course, not a voluntary act, and therefore there is no element of choice in its application: it is a necessary phenomenon of the psyche. However, its short-term effects are sometimes seen as positive, for instance in Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse, 1921: 'Das Kind hatte in der ersten, mit fünf Jahren meist schon abgeschlossenen Phase in einem Elternteil ein erstes Liebesobjekt gefunden, auf welches sich alle seine Befriedigung heischenden Sexualtriebe vereinigt hatten. Die dann eintretende Verdrängung erzwang den Verzicht auf die meisten dieser kindlichen Sexualziele' (S. Freud, Gesammelte Schriften, Leipzig, Vienna and Zurich, International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1925, Vol. 6, pp. 310/311). This is translated as follows: 'In his first phase, which has usually come to an end by the time he is five years old, a child has found the first object for his love in one or other of his parents, and all of his sexual instincts with their demand for satisfaction have been united upon this object. The repression which then sets in compels him to renounce the greater number of these infantile sexual aims' (S. Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, translated by J. Strachey, Vienna and London, International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922, p. 72). The English translation, it must be admitted, seems to render the onset of repression in slightly more positive language than the original German.

⁴ In Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung, published as one work in 1800, Schiller defines 'naive' as being one with nature, and 'sentimental' as being nostalgic for a return from civilisation to nature. In the present age, naivety is near impossible: 'Dichter von dieser naiven Gattung sind in einem künstlichen Weltalter nicht so recht mehr an ihrer Stelle. Auch sind sie in demselben kaum mehr möglich, als daß sie ihrem Zeitalter wild laufen und durch ein günstiges Geschick vor dem verstümmelnden Einfluß desselben geborgen werden', translated as 'Des poètes appartenant à cette catégorie naïve ne sont plus bien à leur place dans un siècle artificiel. C'est à peine même s'ils y sont possibles que comme des coureurs indisciplinés au sein de leur époque, et parce qu'un destin favorable les protège contre l'action dégradante de celle-ci' in F. Schiller, Poésie naïve et poésie sentimentale, Paris, Aubier, Collection bilingue, 1947, pp. 112/113.

⁵ Freud's concepts of repression ('Verdrängung') and the pleasure principle ('das Lustprinzip') are neatly defined in Jenseits des Lustprinzips: 'In der psychoanalytischen Theorie nehmen wir unbedenklich an, daß der Ablauf der seelischen Vorgänge automatisch durch das Lustprinzip reguliert wird und dann eine solche Richtung einschlägt, daß sein Endergebnis mit einer Herabsetzung dieser Spannung, also mit einer Vermeidung von Unlust oder Erzeugung von Lust zusammenfällt' (S. Freud, Gesammelte Schriften, op. cit., Vol. 6, p. 191). This is translated as follows: 'In the psychoanalytical theory of the mind we take it for granted that the course of mental processes is automatically regulated by "the pleasure principle": that is to say, we believe that any given process originates in an unpleasant state of tension and thereupon determines for itself such a path that its ultimate issue coincides with a relaxation of this tension, i.e. with avoidance of "pain" or with production of pleasure' (S. Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, translated by C. J. M. Hubback, London and Vienna, International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922, p. 1).

⁶ D. G. Ornston Jr. (editor), Translating Freud, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1992, provides an interesting insight into the problems that Strachey faced when producing the standard translation of Freud's writing for the International Psycho-Analytical Press in the 1920s, in particular how to render Freud's supposedly down-to-earth style adequately. For the purposes of brevity, some of the definitions in this thesis of terms used by Freud are from C. Badcock, Essential Freud, Oxford, Blackwell, 1988, which, while in English and intentionally simplistic, is still a useful guide to the bases of ego-psychology. Badcock defines neurosis as 'a psychological conflict whose origins lie in the subject's unconscious and whose symptoms represent compromises between an instinctual wish and a defence against it' (p. 185).

⁷ 'Perversion: A form of sexual gratification whose aim is not predominantly genital satisfaction and whose origin lies in the pre-genital libidinal organization of childhood' (ibid., p. 186). The sense of perversion intended in this chapter is obviously other than purely sexual.

⁸ 'Superego: A psychological agency forming a department of the ego and constituted by the internali-

zation of parental figures at the resolution of the Oedipus complex. As such, it exercises functions of self-judgment, reality-testing and ethical and aesthetic evaluation' (*ibid.*, p. 189).

⁹ 'Reality principle: An aspect of mental functioning dominated by considerations of reality and especially pertinent to the interests of the ego in its attempts to secure and gratification of the Pleasure principle' (*ibid.*, p. 188).

¹⁰ See 'Chapter Two: Norge and the Everyday', from p. 37 onwards, for a discussion of Norge as 'voyant'.

¹¹ 'Oedipus complex: The crucial childhood psycho-sexual conflict based on love of the parent of the opposite sex and rivalry with the parent of the same sex. [...] Resolution of the Oedipus complex through identification with one of the parents is normally the most important single contribution to the formation of the superego' (*Essential Freud*, op. cit., p. 185).

¹² In 'Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie' in Vol. 5 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, pp. 60 onwards, Freud identifies the importance of infantile masturbation and its separate stages, while in 'Meine Ansichten über die Rolle der Sexualität in der Ätiologie der Neurosen', *ibid.*, pp. 127 onwards, he describes the close link between masturbation and neurosis.

¹³ 'Castration complex: A system of unconscious representations centering on fear of castration and related to infantile sexual theories which see females as castrated males and castration as a talion punishment for sexual sins' (*Essential Freud*, op. cit., p. 179).

¹⁴ E. Young-Bruehl, *Freud on Women*, London, Hogarth, 1990, p. 366.

¹⁵ 'Id-resolution: The solution to a mental conflict which predominantly achieves its end by some kind of gratification of the drives of the id' (*Essential Freud*, op. cit., p. 183).

¹⁶ C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, translated by W. Dell and C. F. Baynes, London, Ark, 1984, p. 227.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 253/4. The lines of Hölderlin come from the poem 'Patmos' (F. Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Gedichte*, Bad Homburg, Athenäum Verlag, 1970, Volume 1, p. 340).

¹⁸ For writers in the thirties, 'politics and Europe were almost interchangeable terms. Both were urgent, tragic and yet liberating areas to explore; fields of great importance [...] where the future of civilisation would be settled, and settled soon', according to Francis Hope in R. Carter (editor), *Thirties Poets: The Auden Group*, London, Macmillan, 1984, p. 182.

¹⁹ The story of Jacob begins in *Genesis* 27. God first calls Jacob 'Israel' in *Genesis* 35:10.

²⁰ R. M. Rilke, *Duineser Elegien / Die Sonette an Orpheus*, Baden Baden, Insel Verlag, 1974, pp. 65/6.

²¹ G. Apollinaire, *Alcools*, Paris, Gallimard, 1920, p. 89.

²² See note 1. In *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, op. cit., pp. 39 onwards, Kant writes about the problems of concepts such as God and Immortality for the human intellect, and how disciplines like mathematics deceive man by taking as *a priori* truths certain intuitive and *a posteriori* things, thereby making him believe that the power of his reason is greater than it actually is: 'Die Philosophie bedarf einer Wissenschaft, welche die Möglichkeit, die Prinzipien und den Umfang aller Erkenntnisse *a priori* bestimme'. This could be translated: 'Philosophy needs a branch of learning which defines the possibilities, principles and scope of all knowledge in *a priori* terms.'

²³ S. Gainsbourg, *La Javanaise*, LP released by Philips, 1963. 'La chanson de Prévert' is the first song.

²⁴ S. Freud, *Civilisation, Society and Religion*, London, Penguin, 1985, pp. 233/4.

²⁵ The lines appear in the twelfth quatrain of Caput 1 of H. Heine, *Deutschland: ein Wintermärchen*, Frankfurt, Meritz Diesterweg Verlag, 1976, p. 11.

²⁶ *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, op. cit., p. 192.

Chapter Six: NORGE AND COMMUNION

For all Christians, the Communion service is of fundamental importance. In the Eucharist, the sacrament celebrating Christ's Last Supper, Christians partake of the bread and wine that represent the body and blood of Jesus. In so doing, they not only affirm their belief in the Christian faith but also join together, commune, with all other believers and with Jesus himself. The Eucharist is thus simultaneously an act both of worship and of togetherness. Salvation is both a question of individual belief and action and a process of union, with fellow worshippers and with God.

Of course, the bread and wine do not merely represent Christ's body and blood, but actually become them. St Matthew states:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.
And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;
For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28.)¹

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. (I Corinthians 10:16-17.)

Transsubstantiation is the Roman Catholic doctrine that, after consecration, the whole substance of the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, with only the 'accidents', that is, their appearance, remaining the same. The term was used for the first time in an official document from the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and relies to a great extent upon the Aristotelian concept of 'substance'.² On the other hand, the Lutheran idea of consubstantiation consists in the co-existence of the real substances of bread and Christ's body in the Eucharist, and is opposed to Catholic transsubstantiation. In either case, the Communion service is regarded not as symbolic of the Last Supper so much as a constant repetition of it, to include each time the mass of Christian believers who were not present at the original event, which took place during Passover. Every time there is a Communion, people share in the body and blood of Christ, in order to become connected with their saviour and accept both their sinfulness and their hope for redemption.

Norge the poet and Christian takes the example of the Communion, with its literal and transsubstantiationistic force, and applies it to the poetic act. As has been shown, his creative life is a process of sharing the divine quality of words with his reader. In one sense, the word as signifier, with its material divinity, imbues the signified object with a similar divine essence while also reflecting that object's own divinity by dint of its being part of God's universe. So there is a strong literal aspect to poetry. In another sense, however, the act of writing is a metaphorical, secular communion with other writers and non-writers alike. Norge as he writes expresses his fact of belonging to the

literary tradition, in addition to communing with the reader and his external, material world.³

This section will examine Norge's literal and metaphorical communion with reference to one single work, Les quatre vérités, published in 1962. The reason for this approach is that, while communion generally is a fundamental theme of all of Norge's writing, Les quatre vérités is the work which centres most explicitly on both the religious Communion service and the poet's more humanistic act of communion with his fellow man.

Les quatre vérités is a collection of seventy-two poems. In chronological (and somewhat simplistic) terms, Norge's first works, up to and including Joie aux âmes, focus on the search for and discovery of the divine poet's means of fulfilling his task in the world, and so are more ontologically or existentially motivated.⁴ The works immediately before and after Les quatre vérités, on the other hand, while still treating the nature of the poet and his role, centre far more on the, by now more existentially secure, poet's love and manipulation of language for its own sake.⁵ Les quatre vérités stands out precisely because it does not follow this general trend. It also lends itself to isolation from the rest of Norge's *oeuvre* because of the depth and complexity of the language used in some of the poems, which contrasts with the poet's customary simplicity of register and imagery. It may be that world events leading up to 1962, primarily the tension of the Cold War, obliged him to consider the need to reaffirm in poetry the connection between the Communion and spirituality generally and contemporary society. Interestingly, the Second Vatican Council also began in 1962.

Although Les quatre vérités was published six months before ‘Vatican II’ opened, on October 11, the preparations for the Council took several years, and, as a committed Roman Catholic, Norge would certainly have been interested in its remit, which was partly to explore the need for a reform of the rites and ceremonies of the church. This does not mean, of course, that ‘Vatican II’ was Norge’s prime motivation for a work which takes the ideas and substance of the Eucharist as one of its departure points, merely that Les quatre vérités was written at a highly important time for the Church and society in general. This may help to explain its appearing to run contrary to the overall trend in Norge’s writing. Such a trend is in any case only intended as a guide to his development over time, and not some rigid structure.

In an interview in Le Figaro littéraire about the work, Norge’s most telling comments concern the final poem, ‘Concerto’. He implies that his desire is indeed for communion with the world: ‘Je l’ai appelé ainsi parce que je donne ma voix dans la symphonie du monde.’⁶ The poet does not detach himself from the world, but rather seeks to join in with its sound. Yet a concerto involves a solo instrument which sometimes acts alone and sometimes plays in harmony or in counterpoint with the rest of the orchestra, and so Norge, while needing to interact with the world, nonetheless stands apart from it. Without that orchestra, the instrumentalist’s work becomes a solo recital, a sonata rather than a concerto. In the same interview, Norge bemoans the isolation and independence demanded by much of contemporary art:

Dans les arts, maintenant, on ne veut rien devoir à personne. Moi, je dois à tout le monde. Même d’un imbécile, je tire quelque chose. [...] Un poète, c’est un greffier, c’est un employé du cadastre. Nous notons ce qui nous entoure, avec plus ou moins d’émotion. Je suis étonné que tout le monde ne soit pas poète.

[...] Quand votre facteur ou votre épicier parlent, ils commencent à faire de l'art. Le langage, c'est l'art.⁷

Thus art emanates from even the most potentially phatic speech, like that which opens a conversation between a tradesman and his customer. This is because art is communication, or, put another way, poetry is verbal communion, the temporary spiritual joining together, in the most innocuous and unartistic of environments, of two people. However, this is not what impels Norge to write: 'Et pourtant, si j'étais sur une île déserte, je continuerais à écrire'.⁸ The spiritual compulsion to bring the truth into unconcealment which Norge experienced in the earliest stages of his writing career is still present, and moreover as strong as ever, but, in the middle of the period referred to above as one where his primary concern is the inherent magic of language, his poetry is more inclusive than before, precisely because he believes that all humans are able to produce art, and indeed do so without knowing it.⁹

'Concerto' itself is, however, one of Norge's longest and most complex poems. It is also his only work that has footnotes to explain some of the references, although the references which are annotated are paradoxically amongst the more obvious ones in the piece:

C'est William et c'est Lao¹
Que j'unis d'un fil de soie.
Ils se rencontrent là-haut.
C'est Frédéric et François²
Arthur, Oscar, Isidore³
Que j'unis d'un anneau d'or. [...]

¹Shakespeare et Lao-Tseu.

²Nietzsche et Villon.

³Rimbaud, Milosz, Lautréamont. (OP, p. 417)

It is easily imaginable that a reader could guess that 'Lao' refers to Lao-Tseu, the founder of Taoism, and that 'William', 'Arthur' and 'Isidore' could only mean Shakespeare, Rimbaud and Lautréamont. The very fact that footnotes are present suggests that Norge is introducing an element of scholarship to his poem, thus rising above the grocers and postmen and their version of art, yet the spurious nature of the academic content brings only bathos. The poem is full of other names whose mythic or real status is well-known and which therefore require no explanation at the foot of the page, for instance 'Tristan et Yseut' (OP, p. 416), Jean Racine (OP, p. 413), and Apollinaire (OP, p. 417). It is in the nature of art that allusions will be made to other works or figures, and the reader's intelligence may feel slighted by the needless footnotes, which appear to leave nothing to his own ability to draw inferences and connections unaided.

In fact, the specious scholarship is surely intentional. Norge has written a poem which is very long and replete with dense imagery and literary references, yet the intent of the poem is not to confuse but to elucidate, to simplify. Precisely by parodying his own complexity, which is in any case unusual for Norge and therefore alerts the reader to the poet's real intentions, the poet demonstrates that his version of poetry is, as he explains in his interview, available to and produced by everyone. The reader, initially insulted by the footnotes, is subsequently flattered for having been able to understand the references by himself. In addition, the multitude of names is ultimately no more than a representation of the hubbub of sound and allusion created by the 'symphonie du monde' to which the reader belongs.

The poem is both a treatise on and an example of communion. The poet's subject is inclusivity, membership of the human race in its infinite diversity. In a list lasting fifty-nine lines, beginning with 'On le verra bien tantôt, / Comme on verra [...]’ (OP, p. 412), Norge mentions a multitude of people, animals and objects, ranging from 'Le bon roi dans son hermine' (OP, p. 413) to 'Le son du cor dans la brume' (OP, p. 413). He calls this cornucopia:

[...] tout un peuple triste,
Triste, gris et pulluleur,
Mécanique, buraliste,
O ce peuple de licous,
Un gros peuple de lueurs
Dans la main qui bâtit tout,
La main qui suscite encore
Inventant du même coup
Les grands pics célibataires,
La crevette avec l'aurore! (OP, pp. 413/414)

These people, then, are like the 'Hommes gris' in 'Gris', from Famines (OP, p. 193), who resist the activity and change that denotes permanence, existence. The Creator holds this multifarious world in his hand, but it is lifeless. Also like the grey men in 'Gris', variation and transformation are rejected:

Mais broyez le tout par terre,
Ecrasez d'un clair talon
Atlas et mon concerto,
Le Nord, le Sud, Apollon,
Culbutez la fourmilière,
Ça refourmille aussitôt! (OP, p. 414)¹⁰

So the world is unwilling to assert its quality of being alive. The poem continues:

[...] Eh, qu'on se baigne
Dans son orage natal!
Au temps de mourir, mourez,
Mais au temps de vivre, o gué,¹¹
Au temps de vivre, jetez
Le grappin sur cette aubaine
De surgir, de s'étonner
De l'amour et de la haine,
Mais de vivre et d'être né! (OP, p. 414)

The message is very simple, that the emotion one feels is less important than the fact that there is emotion at all. The time to die will one day arrive, but it has not yet done so, and therefore the multitude in God's hand should seize their aliveness and live. The 'aubaine', as in the phrase 'profiter de l'aubaine', should be grasped. Implicit in the imagery of the anchor and the stream that runs through a ford is the Heraclitean notion of the stream into which we cannot step twice, that symbolises an everchanging world, one which is unavoidably in constant motion. And it is not only the love and hatred which arise from an acceptance of being alive, but the surprise of love and hatred. Norge's last work, Le stupéfait, bears witness to his continued belief in the importance of wonderment. As soon as everything is presumed to be normal and expected, the world becomes grey. Indeed, the profusion of exclamation marks in 'Concerto' is a manifestation through punctuation of astonishment as well as, in the register of the musical metaphor of the title, an indication of points of 'sforzando'.

This is again clear in the exclamation mark seen after an otherwise banal recitation of the parts of the verb 'to be':

O, prodige, mes chers hommes,

Je suis, tu es et nous sommes! (OP, p. 414)

Combined with the forceful nature of such an existential declaration is an element of surprise that so simple a statement needs to be made.¹² All the while it is imperative to retain a willingness to be surprised by the strangeness and wonder of the world:

Tu trouves ça naturel,
L'espoir et le désespoir
Que l'on ramasse à la pelle,
Les mille fangeux couloirs, [...]
L'Amour, l'étonnant amour,
Seul figure aux sables chauves
Et partout l'abîme autour
Qui respire comme un fauve? (OP, p. 415)

Another aspect of the 'Je suis, tu es et nous sommes!' avowal is the juxtaposition of different or opposing perceptions and emotions. That very sentence combines three separate viewpoints in one statement, and the first two parts of the verb in a third. There is also 'L'espoir et le désespoir' seen above, and 'De l'amour et de la haine' (OP, p. 414), and earlier 'le froid et le chaud' (OP, p. 413). The passage with the footnotes also consists of the bringing together of disparate cultural components in a single entity:

C'est William et c'est Lao¹
Que j'unis d'un fil de soie.
Ils se rencontrent là-haut.
C'est Frédéric et François²
Arthur, Oscar, Isidore³
Que j'unis d'un anneau d'or. (OP, p. 417)

Unification is the poet's aim. He is performing an immense secular communion, which involves the convergence of opposites and the fusion of different periods of human history. And the references are not arbitrary. Lao-Tseu (or 'Lao-Tzu' in English) founded Taoism, whose central tenet is the Tao, a primal force and, by extension, a code of behaviour which brings man into harmony with nature. Tristan and Isolde, while destined to be separated physically, are characterised in most of the renderings of their legend as being united spiritually. Gottfried's Tristan und Isolt, for example, stresses their oneness by means of verbal interchangeability.¹³ The reference to William (Shakespeare) in connection to love's communion may owe something to Helena's speech in A Midsummer Night's Dream:

[...] So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition,
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;
So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart [...]¹⁴

But the more general point is that Shakespeare is linked to Lao-Tzu and Rimbaud and Villon in one cultural tradition which Norge not only identifies but identifies with, and stakes his claim to join. Thus his communion is also personally motivated, in the sense that his act of union is, certainly, between himself and the rest of the earth, the non-poet and the animals and objects in the world in God's hand, but equally between himself and his creative forebears.

By displaying his cultural genealogy, Norge makes it possible for him to communicate across the barriers of time:

Qui se souvient, qui délire
Dans le cristaux du passé?
Où mille petits vampires
Grattent d'un ongle inspiré
La vaisselle des empires.
L'hébraïque et le crétois
Se lèvent sans courbature
Dans la fièvre de leurs doigts,
Et jamais Delphes ni Rhodes, [...]
Jamais le palais d'Hérode,
[...] ne furent
Si près, si près de parler! (OP, pp. 418/419)

The poet's union with the figures of the past allows him to feel close enough to the Ancient world, the world of historic empires and Biblical kings and Classical places of worship and enlightenment, to be able to converse with its inhabitants. His 'symphonie du monde' thus includes not only the contemporary hubbub but also the echoes of past civilisations. His 'Concerto' is like the Oracle of the Delphi he mentions, throwing up a wide-ranging and complex wisdom whose significance is not always immediately apparent and which is delivered, as the priestess of Apollo, Pythia, would have uttered the Oracle's message, in a feverish, ecstatic state, to which the exclamation marks and the tone of the work bear witness. The 'fièvre de leurs doigts' is mirrored in Norge's own writing. Yet, as well as being his Oracle's spokesman, the poet is the male prophet who would put the questions to Pythia and interpret her answers. This dual role of speaker and interpreter is explained in Norge's interview with Jean Chalon:

On aimerait écrire pour les gens qui ne savent pas lire. Je porte un vif intérêt aux illettrés. [...] Même d'un imbécile, je tire quelque chose. Le principal, c'est de faire sa vérité.¹⁵

It would at first sight seem impossible to write for people who cannot read, but, in addition to connoting the power of oral communication which again evokes the spirit of the Delphic Oracle, his essential motivation is to write in such a way as to make himself understandable in even the most difficult circumstances, in order to reveal the truth that is hidden. The ‘*symphonie du monde*’ is hence only symphonic, that is, sounding together, and not cacophonic, dissonant, as a result of the poet’s own orchestration, his process of filtering out the noise and highlighting those threads of sound that deliver a harmonious resonance. The poet is both composer and amanuensis.

Having achieved a state of proximity to these ancient resonances, the poet must decide what to say to them, in other words, how to commune:

Pour quoi dire? Pour les prunes? [...]
Crie à l’azur, c’est la lune
Aphone qui te répond;
Et sur tes poires d’angoisse
Tes beuglements dans la hune,
Cent mille corbeaux croassent
De leurs créneaux somnambules. (OP, p. 419)

The difficulty of being heard above the crowing and the lowing is the poet’s constant concern. However, communion with those past spirits that have been invoked is possible through silence. The aphonic moon provides the clue to this fact. Unfortunately for the still fervent poet, silence is not his domain:

-- Tu dis: amour et silence.

Et la lourde mer balance
La coupe d'or dans sa danse!
Si sagement contenté,
Vais-je baisser de ma bouche
Cette glauque éternité
Qui rampe ainsi sur sa couche
De sable et de chasteté?
Non, j'ai le mal des ardents [...] (OP, p. 419)

A concerto cannot exist without the solo instrument.¹⁶ And Norge's need to continue to create poetry -- 'si j'étais sur une île déserte, je continuerais à écrire'¹⁷ -- militates against his world's becoming silent:

Non, tout ce que j'ai de noeuds
Et de griffes dans les veines
Refuse un ciel cotonneux, [...]
Que me veut cet azur gras,
Ce marécage embaumé
Qui ne sonnerait au pas
D'un fils, d'un ami, d'un frère? (OP, p. 419)

If the sky is muffled and the earth does not resonate with the footsteps of loved ones, there is no place for this Oracle and its receptiveness to the echoes of the past. Therefore the poet will create sound and invite his reader to do the same:

Cogne dur à la paroi,
Les dieux ont le sommeil lourd. (OP, p. 421)

The earlier question 'Pour quoi dire?' is left partially unanswered. All that is certain by the end of 'Concerto' is that the poet must continue to listen to his world symphony, interpret its meaning, and thereby achieve communion with the present universe and the figures of the past whom he has invoked. In his interview Norge called 'Concerto'

‘un bilan, provisoire comme tous les bilans’. His conclusion is evidently that there is still a need for him to write, and, as far as the world is concerned, for a chronicler and interpreter who also acts as the Oracle in directing the world to eschew silence and search verbally for truth.

Truth is, according to its title after all, the primary subject of Les quatre vérités. Norge says rather redundantly in the interview quoted that he chose this title ‘A cause de l’expression populaire “Je lui dirai ses quatre vérités”’,¹⁸ but does not go on to elaborate. The thrust of the expression is that the truths taught are ‘home’ truths, that is to say, basic but often unwelcome truths about one’s life, things that would rather be forgotten but which need to be reiterated. If ‘Concerto’ is indeed to be read as a ‘bilan’, the home truth of which man needs to be reminded is that he is alive and in the company of other men, both present and past. The difficulty arising from home truths consists not in their intrinsic message, but in the reluctance of its being stated explicitly. Thus the ‘Je suis, tu es et nous sommes!’ avowal is uncomplicated but no less true for all that. And the implication is that home truths, if they need to be said, have been neglected. So when ‘je suis’ is routinely followed by a predicate, that element of the sentence carries more stress, whereas in fact, in Norge’s credo, the supplementary component is of inferior significance, and only when no predicate is present can the truth behind the otherwise banal ‘je suis’ become sufficiently apparent. This is all the more so in the case of ‘nous sommes’, since to the previously stated concept of existence is added a new one, that of communion. Only the poet can justify overriding the need for togetherness, fellowship, since his task is to be the solo

instrument in the concerto, in other words, the lone voice which enunciates ‘les quatre vérités’:

Les poètes, nous sommes les légataires universels de certains messages, bien que je n'aime pas ce dernier mot trop galvaudé.¹⁹

Even when making this point, Norge refers to the plurality of poets and their need to stand apart from the rest of humanity to deliver their lesson. Thus, even in situations which demand isolation, and so a temporary renunciation of the ‘nous sommes’ assertion, the single poet is joined by others in his position and with his ability.

From the very beginning of the work, the poem called ‘Les quatre vérités’ underlines the importance of communion and communication. The four truths are personified as ‘quatre filles comminatoires’ (OP, p. 355). If ‘comminatoires’ connotes a threat of some kind, its exact nature is as yet unclear, although it certainly implies punishment for the apparent defiance of home truths. And the description of the truths conveys menace:

Ces dames Vérités n'ont guère
Que griffe et fureur carnassière,

Venins, tentacules, mâchoires,
Foudres, crocs et pics arrachoirs;

Ce sont les fougueux accessoires
Qui plantent leurs noms dans l'histoire. (OP, p. 355)

The appearance at the beginning of a work of a group of women who are not quite human and whose duty is to affect history is reminiscent of the witches’ scene in

Macbeth.²⁰ However, perhaps the most important aspect of their coven-like meeting is the fact that they are enemies who come together: they are called ‘ces bonnes soeurs adversaires’ (OP, p. 356) but unite in search of a common victory. This communion achieved amongst formerly hostile creatures, although the reason for their erstwhile enmity is unknown, in a sense exceeds that sought by the poet’s unifying call in ‘Concerto’ for the very reason that, in the latter poem, the object of Norge’s attention is humanity as a whole, addressed in one breath. The home truths taught apply equally to all who are able to say ‘je suis’. Communion between human beings is not simply a political matter for Norge, of overcoming religious or sectarian divides. Communion is not solely a synonym for peace in a time of war. Hence ‘Concerto’ is not directed at the resolution of conflicts between people like that which produces the meeting of the adversarial women in ‘Les quatre vérités’. His concern for the re-establishing of the commonality of humans, what makes the ‘je suis’ justified, is more profound, and would exist whether such ephemeral events as wars occurred or not. The kind of secular communion the poet preaches may well result in fewer wars, but that is not his primary aim. After all, the women in ‘Les quatre vérités’ are preparing for a just war, in which home truths are at stake. Their belligerence has not abated because of their coming together; rather it has been directed elsewhere.

While the ‘quatre vérités’ of the poem have been transformed from abstract notions into vivid creatures, ‘bien en chair’ (OP, p. 355), they retain a sense of paradox. They may be anthropomorphic, but they are constituted:

Une de bronze, une d’ivoire,
De feu, de nuage ou de pierre [...] (OP, p. 355)

In the third chapter, 'Norge and the Elements', I referred to the sense of unity and harmony often imbued to the number four, and one of these truths is indeed made of fire, making a superficial allusion to the four elements unavoidable. The four truths themselves together create a kind of unified elemental truth, since the expression demands the number four, and so, for instance, the phrase 'les trois vérités' would not have the same meaning. Yet the other proto-truths do not parallel the four elements: they are all, if anything, associated with the earth, being composed of solid substances found on earth, with the exception of the last, which is either made of cloud or stone. This is problematic, since few things could be as contrasting as these two. Partly this reflects the abnormal, only-half-human nature of the women. However, its more fundamental result is to render any convergence between the elements and the four truths spurious. Further, the strange body-parts 'plantent leurs noms dans l'histoire' (OP, p. 355), but in fact the women's names are never mentioned, which is entirely appropriate, since the expression 'les quatre vérités' does not refer to any four specific truths, unlike, say, the Ten Commandments, but rather implies only the existence of an assembled plurality of things that need to be remembered about life. The overall impression is that Norge, in the vividness of his imagery concerning the creatures and the mock parallel with the four elements, intentionally misleads the reader into believing that the word 'quatre' is to be taken literally. But here is a case where a specific number denotes not that quantity *qua* discrete objects but their unity, as in the phrase 'the four corners of the earth', which similarly connotes not four but one, the whole of the earth -- the earth, after all, has no corners. In other words, the poet's superficial subject is four separate truths who happen to come together for a specific

reason, whereas the actual inference the reader draws from the poem is that the four women cannot but be joined. They certainly cannot exist apart. What this implies about Norge's concept of communion is that, far from being an act which man would be advised to perform with his fellows, it is an inevitable aspect of humanity. Despite ourselves, we commune. For, although the four truths are not the same as the manifold individuals whom Norge mentions in 'Concerto', the latter's commonalities outweigh their differences, and, moreover, will in the poet's opinion always prevail. This is another significance of the lines 'C'est William et c'est Lao / Que j'unis d'un fil de soie' (OP, p. 417), that such diverse characters as Shakespeare and Lao-Tzu lend themselves to being united by even the thinnest and most tenuous of materials, by dint of their membership of the human race and by the fact that they wrote, thus signalling their commitment to communication.

The ant has long been compared to man for its apparently complex social, organised lifestyle. In '~~Concerto~~^{Fourmi}', the poet looks at an ant, perhaps one of the dwellers of the 'fourmilière' that is knocked down and immediately rebuilt in 'Concerto', and is enthralled by its activity. Yet initially this insect is alone and seemingly without importance:

Cette
~~Une~~ fourmi,
Taille ordinaire,
Qui n'a pas la
Moindre importance
Passe d'un trot
Simple et normal. (OP, p. 387)

The very simplicity of the ant is emphasised, not least by the concomitantly simple structure and tone of the poem, in order to counterbalance this axiomatic complexity with which it would naturally be associated. However, this only serves to increase the sense of amazement that the poet can be so captivated by its movements, a sense enhanced by the strangeness of the line-divisions, which will be discussed later. The reason appears to be that, like the poet, the ant is solitary:

Et je suis seul;
Moi, seul au monde
Ai vu passer
Cette fourmi. [...]
Qui serait-elle,
Comment va-t-elle? (OP, pp. 387/388)

In asking the question of the ant, the poet implicitly asks it of himself as well, such is the parallel he perceives between the two. Hence, when he introduces a ‘tu’ to the poem, not only did this new character also have an ant, but the possibility arises that that ant itself had a separate partner of some sort:

Et ta fourmi,
Taille ordinaire,
Qu’en as-tu fait?
Que devient-elle,
Crois-tu qu’elle é-
Tait amoureuse [?] (OP, p. 388)

If the ‘tu’ has done something with its ant, disposed of it in some fashion, then the associated sensation of shared solitude must equally have been discarded. The ‘tu’ is able to live without sensing any isolation from the rest of the world, unlike the poet. Yet it is paradoxically the poet who, with this heightened level of sympathy arising

from his having an ant in view, is in a better position than the ‘tu’ to ask the questions about other unseen and supposedly worthless creatures:

Et toi et moi,
Qui sommes-nous
Et comment tour-
Nent les planètes
Qui n’ont pas la
Moindre importance?
Que fait l’histoire
Au fond des coeurs
Et comment battent
Ces coeurs d’hommes
Qui n’ont pas la
Moindre importance? (OP, p. 388)

Although the poem ends with the lines ‘Pourquoi, pourquoi, / Ça n’a-t-il pas / Plus d’importance?’ (OP, p. 388), in a sense the question is redundant, since the poet can already perceive that belonging to a group, whether it is the ‘foumilière’ or ‘les planètes’ or humanity, should not mean the subordination of the individual’s uniqueness to some nebulous whole. When he views the ant, it is the very fact that such a creature can have its own worth, when normally it is considered solely as one of many other visually identical ants, that is astounding, and the cause of the ant’s capacity to enthrall him. This can be illustrated by the word identity, ‘identité’, which means both similarity and difference. ‘Une carte d’identité’, for instance, evinces an individual’s uniqueness, but, say, ‘une identité de formes ou de goûts’ entails sameness. The poet wonders about the lost ant belonging to the poem’s ‘tu’:

Crois-tu qu’elle é-
Tait amoureuse,
Crois-tu qu’elle a-
Vait faim ou soif,

Crois-tu qu'elle é-
Tait vieille ou jeune
Ou triste ou gaie,
Intelligente
Ou bien quelconque? (OP, p. 388)

If an ant can be happy or sad, hungry or thirsty, then it possesses identity in both senses of the word. On the one hand, it is unique in being able to claim as its own certain emotional or visceral sensations; on the other hand, precisely because the poet can use terms which have a common and accepted meaning, like hunger and sadness and intelligence, the ant, by entertaining such qualities, shares a commonality with all creatures. If ants *per se* can or cannot be held to feel happy or sad, then certainly there is an element of personification in the poem, but that only enhances the relevance of the poet's examination of the lone ant's behaviour, since his primary aim is to explore the relationship between one single human and another in the midst of the nebulous mass called humanity.

Because the title 'Fourmi' immediately connotes community, since ants are the epitome of social beings, Norge counters this preconception by highlighting his ant's solitary status, his potential to be unique. The significance of this is not to destroy the quality of communion, of joining together, but rather to increase it, since communion requires initial solitude, isolation. If people or ants are not apart in the first place, then togetherness is static. In contrast, Norge in 'Concerto' espouses the active search for and assertion of acts of unification. This is echoed in the form of 'Fourmi', in which the tetrasyllabic lines, perhaps symbolising the quadrupedic ant, are so restrictive as to force some of the individual words to be dissected in order for the structure to remain:

Que font les four-
Mis de l'esprit [...]]
Crois-tu qu'elle é-
Tait amoureuse,
Crois-tu qu'elle a-
Vait faim ou soif [?] (OP, p. 388)

If the delineation of a social (or poetic) structure is so rigid that the integrity of the units is threatened, then that may imply something about the detrimental effect the structure has. This poem, then, explores the tension between the two forms of identity, on the one hand that which defines uniqueness, and, on the other, that which enables communion, and by illustrating the tension which comes from the remarkable line-divisions seems to privilege the former at the expense of the latter. These divisions surely imply amputation, separation, the cutting-off of a part from the whole like the lone ant divorced from its society. Yet the poet, in 'persevering' with a line-length that appears to be superior in importance to the integrity of a word, is not renouncing all his previous insistence upon the sacred nature of those words. They can still be manipulated and cut in half without the loss of their inherent divinity. The word is like the ant in 'Fourmi', which 'fait un trajet / De cette branche / A cette pierre' (OP, p. 387), and works hard to be what it is. As if to emphasise the point, even the word 'fourmis' is split between two lines on one occasion, yet it remains the same word. Precisely because ants/words have an intrinsic existence, and the potential to be divine or to love irrespective of their external appearance or their disposition on the page, they may be physically manipulated without their rationale being affected. For the Norgian word is above all a signifier, and therefore as much an object as any thing it is supposed to represent.

This idea of integrity and manipulation is illustrated in ‘Chevaux toujours’.

Throughout, the poet appears tormented by the image of horses:

J'ai des chevaux qui traversent mes flammes,
Foulant ce feu comme un herbage vert;
J'ai des rumeurs de chevaux dans mes drames,
Tout un arroi de galops et de fers.

Chevaux toujours. L'aurore est un cheval
Qui s'ébrouant, chasse au loin les corneilles,
J'ai des chevaux pour hennir tout mon mal
Et des poulains où mes amours s'éveillent. (OP, p. 372)

At first the horse is literal, as it gallops through the streets and through fire. Then, however, it becomes metaphoric: ‘L'aurore est un cheval’. But in the same line the poet insists ‘Chevaux toujours’. From an imagistic point of view this merely reinforces the relentless nature of the poet’s chevaline vision. From a linguistic perspective, on the other hand, it implies the continued integrity and wholeness of the word ‘chevaux’ even as its reference is altered. In the mind of a poet for whom the word is paramount, it is not initially the picture of a horse but the word itself which recurs and haunts him, hence the repetition of the word ‘chevaux’ in the first strophe:

Chevaux, chevaux, pavés, sabots, pavés,
Sabots, glaise et sabots, chevaux et routes,
Chevaux et nuits, ô grands chevaux. (OP, p. 372)

The relentless iambic rhythm of ‘chevaux’ and the other words connotes the poet’s mental image far more than would a simple and single reference to the animal. By way of contrast, in the final two strophes of the poem, the words ‘chevaux’ and ‘cheval’ are

entirely absent, and the constancy of the iambic meter is lost. So ‘chevaux toujours’ is as much an avowal of verbal material continuity as any comment on the images in the poet’s head.

The metaphoric use of a word consists in poetic communion, or, in terms of the Eucharist, consubstantiation, that is, the co-existence in one physical essence of two substances (bread and body, wine and blood). The ‘cheval’ is both a horse and a dawn. Or rather, both a horse and a dawn come together in the word ‘cheval’ when it is used metaphorically. And, as ‘Toujours chevaux’ and ‘Fourmi’ demonstrate, there is no ontogenetic subjugation of any of the elements which come together in that communion, only the physical manipulation apparent as a result of the line-lengths of ‘Fourmi’.

In the section ‘Prisons, supplices’, roughly in the middle of Les quatre vérités and comprising seven poems, this theme of the individual’s capacity to bear physical manipulation, as long as his existential self is maintained, is rehearsed in a moral context. In ‘Fer et feu’, the prisoner prepares for torture:

Les instruments de torture
Etaient déjà préparés
Lorsque la magistrature
Entra, rouge de santé.
L’accusé dont l’ossature
Savait les réalités,
Trembla. De quelle froidure!
Mais quand le fer fut planté
Dans son oeil droit qui fulgure,
Mais quand le feu fut jeté
Comme un cri dans sa figure,
O sereine étrangeté,

On vit grandir sa stature,
Monter, grandir et monter,
Brisant plafonds et clôtures
Et ce visage enchanté
Répandit sur la nature
Un sourire ensanglanté. (OP, p. 384)

The vivid and terrifying nature of the scene is only exceeded by the nobility of the image of the tortured man's defiance of physical pain. The smile is Norge's unmistakable *leitmotif* for an awareness of God's presence. In other words, the poem's far from original moral is that spiritual certainty can overcome physical pain. The prisoner is initially fearful, but ultimately enraptured by his inner beliefs. Conversely in 'Musique', the prisoner's hope is not expunged by his physical situation at first:

Et serrez plus fort les barreaux,
Il passe encore de l'espérance. (OP, p. 382)

But by the end he has somehow reasoned that such hope is artificial, and, when that is destroyed, his physical destruction will be undeniable:

J'en crève! Et sus à la potence.
Percez bien les gorges, piqueurs!
Percez surtout cette espérance
Qu'ils se fabriquent dans le coeur. (OP, p. 382)

The 'surtout' underscores the point that spiritual integrity outlasts physical wholeness, even if only for a moment in the case of the prisoner in 'Musique'. Indeed, in the poems in 'Prisons, supplices', the inner self exists because of the external suffering, and not despite it. The prisoner in 'Fer et feu' would never have come to assume his spiritual smile were he not tortured: where there is only the expectation, and not yet

the fact, of injury the emotion is one not of joy but of fear. In 'Le gros couteau', Eugène is an artist who is tortured physically by the knife of the title, which continuously plunges into his chest. Although he dies from the wounds, he is initially relieved to do so, since he imagines the end of his physical life will bring a concomitant cessation of the pain:

Cette saine mort le planque
Au plus haut du firmament,
Mais son gros couteau lui manque,
Lui manque éternellement. (OP, p. 381)

Thus he needed the physical pain for his spiritual side to assert its existence. An artist's spiritual essence may be the source of his creativity, but the physical production of art requires the 'gros couteau' which epitomises his corporeality and the pain thereof. If the knife disappears, so does his art. Therefore, the physical manipulation and suffering described in 'Prisons, supplices' is indispensable, since it is what allows for the revelation of that internal, spiritual essence which characterises an individual.

Norge's notion of communion is two-fold. Firstly, there exists a coming together of humans, which is called for in 'Concerto' and illustrated in the rest of Les quatre vérités. Secondly, reference is made to the Communion service, in the bread and wine, and the blood and body, of the Eucharist. However, the latter type of Communion has a significance which transcends the metaphoric (or transsubstantiationistic) use of objects that is in any case the poet's craft.²¹ The 'Prisons, supplices' section exemplifies this.

The Eucharist celebrates Jesus' Last Supper. Thus apart from the meal itself it evokes a time just after Judas' betrayal and shortly before the Crucifixion. Jesus himself makes plain the knowledge of his imminent death:

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. [...]
My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death [.] (Matthew 26:29 and 38.)

So the Communion resonates strongly with Jesus' sacrifice and death. In 'Prisons, supplices', the physical pain and anguish that is assuaged by spiritual comfort is the same as Christ's experience on the cross. The prisoner in 'Fer et feu' first feels dread at the sight of the instruments of torture, in the same way that Jesus cries 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46). And just as the prisoner's fear evaporates into a divine smile, so the resurrected Jesus tells his disciples 'Be not afraid' (Matthew 28:10). Similarly, in 'Le gros couteau', the artist's sharp, piercing knife can be compared with both the crown of thorns and the nails that bind him to the cross. Alternatively, it may symbolise the Holy Ghost, since, when he ~~relinquishes~~^{relinquishes} the knife, dies and goes 'Au plus haut du firmament' (OP, p. 381), he parallels Jesus' moment of death: 'Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost' (Matthew 27:50). If the Holy Ghost is that part of the Trinity which stands for God actions, Jesus' possession of it renders him a divine, a miracle-worker, in the same way that Eugène in 'Le gros couteau' possesses the knife of artistic action: 'Ça fait mal d'être un élu!' says the knife (OP, p. 381). The name of the artist, Eugène, itself means 'beautiful kind' and unmistakably connotes an exceptional being.²²

‘Cri du cœur’, from the section entitled ‘De l’oeuf à la tombe’, unites these two images, of the knife and the death-cry:

Cri, sordide cri de mort
Au fond du cœur se déchaîne.
Et même cri sur la plaine,
Sur les blés de Messidor.

Couteau, ce chant, tu le trouves
Dans la gorge du cochon, [...]

Mais il dure dans le cœur,
Il rugit dans la blessure
Et de toute sa splendeur,
Il règne. Il dure et fulgure. (OP, p. 361)

The corn goes to make the bread that becomes Christ’s body in the Eucharist. The wolf that ‘also shall dwell with the lamb’ (Isaiah 11:6) when the spirit of God comes upon the people of Israel is killed, indicating a time of upheaval and apparent godlessness like that when Jesus is on the cross and the elders of the community deny his divinity:

He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. [...] The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. (Matthew 27:42-44)

The function of the reference to the Revolutionary month of Messidor may also be to suggest a period of godless chaos.

So the purpose of the evocation in Les quatre vérités of the Communion does not confine itself to the primary images of bread and wine. The whole of the Passion is being invoked by Norge, since the Communion is a commemoration of more than simply the Last Supper whose events it ritualises. The wider implications of the Eucharist, the suffering and death of Jesus, the presence of the Holy Ghost, the notions of unity and betrayal, and the separation of bodily anguish from spiritual security, are also rehearsed in the work. However, there are, in addition, numerous references in Les quatre vérités to those more obvious components of the Communion service. For the specific elements of the rite are not merely accessories; rather, as the weight Norge lends to the property of physical objects implies, they make the very act of Communion possible. Without bread and wine, and without the other ceremonies of faith, there would only be the abstract philosophy of the Church. The solidity and materiality of the bread and wine render belief, an otherwise intensely nebulous and subjective concept, equally material.

‘L’âme du boulanger’, from the section ‘Goût du bonheur’, contrasts the solidity of the baker’s end-product with the elusive nature of his soul, which is, nonetheless, considered a living person and not an abstract:

Mon âme et moi, nous nous voyons très peu:
Elle a sa vie et ne m’en parle guère.
Je connais mal ses loisirs oublieux,
Moi, je n’ai pas le temps; j’ai mes affaires. (OP, p. 371)

However, as mentioned in the chapter ‘Norge and the Everyday’,²³ the superficial resolve of the baker not to submit to the concerns of his soul, but instead to remain

entirely within the realm of his physical self, is undermined in the third strophe by a clear reference to the Communion service:

Ma pâte est chair que j'engrosse des mains [...] (OP, p. 371)

The bread he bakes becomes the bread of the Eucharist, which itself becomes the body of Christ. So, while appearing to eschew the soul, in fact he acts in accordance with his unconscious spiritual needs. Moreover, his involvement with Christ's body occurs at the earliest stage, when the bread is still flour and then dough. He does not so much partake of Christ's body, in a service of Communion, as create it himself. Yet he is not God the Father. His role is more that of an unwitting exemplar of the Book of John the evangelist, who, unlike the writers of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, begins his version not with a more or less literal narrative of the birth of Jesus but with an account of the creation of the Word. When Christ came to earth, 'The Word was made flesh' (John 1:14). Later, Jesus tells his followers who demand sustenance 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35). So the baker in 'L'âme du boulanger' creates bread, and thus Jesus, out of the Word, the divine creativity inside him of which he is unaware. He is one of Moses' Israelites in Egypt, who, when hungry, are told:

And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, [...] that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only [...] (Deuteronomy 8:2/3)

The baker is fed with manna because he has a soul and is infused with the power to create the Word, through his bread, but he ‘knewest not’, since he denies that his soul carries any influence on his life. Although financially he may well ‘live by bread only’, inasmuch as it earns him a living, spiritually he is sustained by his maligned soul. Even his protestations to the soul that the time has once more come for him to bake bread have a ritualistic air, as if his work is as much religious service as secular profession:

[...] Et l’instant est venu
Que je me plonge à fond dans ma boulange.
[...] La farine m’attend. (OP, p. 372)

If bread in Les quatre vérités shares the transsubstantiational quality of the Communion bread, references to wine in the work are no less resonant. In ‘Les barreaux’, the prisoner dreams of release from his captivity:

Cana, c’est ici et j’ai soif, tu sais,
Mon amour, Cana, visage d’eau vive;
Ma si douce au cœur, ma bonne à l’excès,
Change toujours en vin mon eau captive.

Le vin, c’est toi. Les barreaux, tu les passes;
Tout mon visage à travers ces barreaux
M’inonde et fait qu’un jus vraiment nouveau
Me soûle, o gué, avec ton vin de race. (OP, p. 383)

Cana is the small town in Galilee where Jesus is said to have turned water into wine at a wedding ceremony.²⁴ The prisoner’s imagination turns the wine into his lover, whom he can then touch from his own side of the bars. The importance of Cana is that it is the site of the first of Jesus’ miracles, according to John. His account stresses Christ’s

unwillingness to begin his work, since he seems to imply he knows it will eventually lead to his death:

And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. (John 2:3-4)

Like Jesus' mother, the prisoner's lover seems to exert an influence upon him which is impossible to defy. Where Mary compels him to begin his fateful and ultimately fatal journey to martyrdom, the captive's desire to touch his lover causes him to reject the reality of his present situation and search, presumably in vain, for an escape. She provokes his 'soif', which is more than a simple thirst for something to drink, since, after all, he has water at his disposal. But unlike Jesus, he can only change water into wine in his mind, and therefore his physical needs will remain unsatiated. Perhaps 'Cana, c'est ici' because he is as trapped in his circumstance as Jesus is in his. Although the wine of the Holy Sacrament refers specifically to Christ's blood, and not the wine that Jesus creates from water, the connection between the wedding ceremony in Cana and the Last Supper is undeniable. The two occasions represent feasts respectively at the beginning and the end of Christ's period of miraculous activity. And, while the Communion with its concrete symbolism reflects the all too apparent need of Christ's followers to witness miracles with their own eyes in order to believe in him, this is a constant source of reproach on his part: 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe' (John 4:48). In contrast, the prisoner in 'Les barreaux' believes in miracles before he sees them: 'Le vin, c'est toi. Les barreaux, tu les passes'

(OP, p. 383). He has the kind of faith which Jesus would welcome, that is, one that does not rely upon tangible evidence.

And yet it is above all the tangibility of Christ that is celebrated in the Communion. It is the fact of his being the Word of God made flesh which characterises the entire life of Christ according to the gospels. He experiences human birth and human death, goes into the wilderness to undergo bodily temptation, and performs physical miracles. His blood and body, therefore, are the most immediate manifestations of his having come to earth and having 'dwelt among us' (John 1:14) as a human, the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Every time Communion is taken, the participants do more than specifically re-enact the Last Supper: they also commemorate Jesus' whole time on earth.

This is echoed in 'Les quatre vérités', where the women are the incarnation of abstract home truths. And, like Jesus' birth, the transformation from abstract to physical being is not idle, but undergone for a purpose: in the case of the women, man must be reminded of the truth of his situation, as described in 'Concerto'. The need for Jesus is described in Isaiah's prophecies:

The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war; he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. (Isaiah 42:13)

Thus Jesus fulfils the same need as the four women, to return a world to righteousness. Similarly, Christ's death so that man may live forever -- 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live [.]' (John 11:25) -- also finds its equivalent in Norge's work, in 'Tout et rien':

Dans la forêt de fleurs fauves qui dévorent leurs enfants, bon! je remeurs encore un coup. Je meurs, ce sera pour vivre.

De gros rochers imbéciles obéissaient à des chevaux hagards. Une poudre noire montait devant le soleil;

C'était une odeur de mouches mortes. Et cette odeur deviendrait un corail. Le magnifique rien constructeur.

Avec du rien faisait un oeil de truie, avec cet oeil, un pont blanc sur la Loire.

Et puis, tout retournait à ce rien qui n'arrêtait pas de mâcher.

Donc, ça remeurt encore une fois. Mais c'est pour vivre et cette fois sera la bonne.

Le stupide rien constructeur avec du rien faisait du tout. (OP, p. 375)

Like the chaotic, ungodly world which Jesus' birth and death will restore to order, the environment into which the 'je' of 'Tout et rien' dies and is resurrected is unnatural: wild flowers eat their own offspring, the substance emitted by dead flies becomes coral, and nothingness creates everything. Yet that last occurrence evokes more the idea of the Big Bang than a divine Creationist viewpoint. So the Jesus figure has entered a world in which he seems to have no influence, because it is not created by his Father. The cycle of nothingness and everything is continuous, and the 'ça remeurt encore une fois' has even divested the second death and resurrection of any sense of belonging to 'je' the Messiah. When he says 'cette fois sera la bonne' the tone is surely more one of hope than expectation. After all, if the nothingness is 'magnifique' but 'stupide' then it cannot belong to a sentient entity, let alone an omniscient God. The would-be Jesus of 'Tout et rien' may employ the similar language to that of his genuine counterpart, but the universe that surrounds him belies his desire to play the role of son of God.

By 'La poésie', two poems after 'Tout et rien' in Les quatre vérités, the false divine Redeemer has become a similarly spurious poet, who seeks to create 'tout' but does not possess the words to do so:

Je dis que les jours...
Je dis que les nuits...
Je dis que les jus...
Je dis que les lèvres...
Je dis que les pleurs... [...]

-- Mais, dis-le, dis-le!
Dis-le, nom de Dieu!
-- Je dis que les hommes...
... Ciel, j'allais tout dire
Et me voilà mort. (OP, p. 376)

The beginning of the poem promised much, evocative as it was of Genesis 1:5 and God's separation of day and night. Perhaps this aspiring poet would rehearse the Creation in verbal terms. Yet, for all his good intentions, his construction of a poetic 'tout' is in vain, since he is unable to find the words to express his vision.²⁵ Both he and the 'je' of 'Tout et rien' are not the Word made flesh. The unnamed interlocutor who exclaims 'Dis-le, nom de Dieu!' manifests more than exasperation. For it is the very 'nom de Dieu' that he invokes which is lacking from the failed poet. In other words, there is no divine Word within the latter's spirit to enable him to emulate Norge and be God's verbal representative on earth. His death, since it marks the end of the poem 'La poésie', is not followed by resurrection, and thus denotes the absence of any element of immortality and divinity in his composition. Like the 'je' of 'Tout et rien', he is a mortal attempting to claim a non-existent immortal inheritance. In contrast, the blood and body in the Eucharist are what establish Christ as simultaneously, on the one

hand, physical, human and mortal, and, on the other, the personification of the immortal Holy Spirit. In ‘Pierre écrite’, from the section ‘Morts et vifs’, a nameless person ‘faisait des signaux dans les tribus d’aveugles’ and ‘appelait à vivre un grand peuple de morts’ (OP, p. 395), indicating Christ’s healing of the sick²⁶ and his coming to earth in order to bring the news of God’s eternal kingdom. Perhaps the title refers to the tablets of stone on which God’s Commandments were written. In any case, the juxtaposition of physical palpability and spiritual, divine presence is clear.

Les quatre vérités, then, is a work which unites secular and religious communion. On the one hand is the idea of the need for humans to assert their existence and togetherness, that is, what characterises their humanity, as well as an attempt on the poet’s part to link himself to other literary and cultural figures of the past and present. On the other hand, the symbols and themes inherent in the Communion service are rehearsed: trans- or consubstantiation, both poetic and literal, the incarnation of a spirit, the reasons for Christ’s descent to earth, and his works and life while here. Yet the question remains: why does Norge construct a vision and, in ‘Concerto’, a plea for communion, other than from the vague motivation of wanting a more peaceful, more holy society? Is there, in other words, a poetic impulse to this desire?

A possible answer is present in ‘Concerto’ itself. Norge considered himself ‘[une] voix dans la symphonie du monde’.²⁷ In order for the various instruments, of which Norge’s is the solo, to play in harmony, there needs to be a conductor. Otherwise the result is cacophony. By the same token, without a score the symphony or concerto will, the next time it is played, be completely different, and therefore not a symphony or a

concerto at all. Similarly, the Communion service is not merely a celebration of the body and blood of Christ, but a rite of the Church which is the same every time it is performed. The institution of religion is lent authority whenever that rite is enacted, as if man cannot commemorate Jesus on his own.

In ‘Concerto’, the poet writes:

D’incroyables amitiés,
D’orageuses préhistoires
Et de gigantesques ruses
Se nouaient, se trahissaient
De la glaise à l’infusoire,
Des soleils à la méduse.
Un grand vouloir d’ossature
Germait chez les créatures
Et l’âme cherchait un masque
Pour enfin sourire à Dieu,
Puis tout retombait au flasque,
Au nul, au stupide, au creux. (OP, p. 418)

What the creatures strongly desire, then, is an ‘ossature’, a framework or structure. With such a structure they can make and wear the mask that will enable them not only to see God but to smile, that is, manifest His presence. Without a structure, the creatures are like the jellyfish, flaccid and amorphous, lacking solidity and permanence. They return to the empty, ignorant state that they occupied previously. It is the structure of the Church and its rituals that give it the authority to lead those who believe. In the same way, Norge’s invocation of the figures of the past whom he claims to unite, such as Shakespeare and Lao-Tzu and Rimbaud, by their presence give him both a place in some overall cultural structure and the authority with which to assert his ideas to the rest of humanity.

Communion, be it secular or religious, involves the coming together of individuals.

And what those individuals seek in communion is precisely that 'ossature' of structure and authority, the conductor and score of the concerto/symphony, in other words, guidance from those who know about how to behave, how to communicate, and, in the ecclesiastical context, how to worship.

A mask like that which 'l'âme cherchait' is ~~a~~^{an} object of illusion, the means by which one person represents himself as another, and so the sense of deceit is undeniable.

However, this aspect of playing a role in order to apprehend God is implicit in the transsubstantiation of the Communion service, where the wine and bread take on a different character solely because of the situation. Equally, the first three lines cited above may be a description of the tales told in the Bible, whose literal value is less important than their metaphorical or allegorical truth. The stormy prehistory would depict the Old Testament generally, unbelievable friendships perhaps the lying down together of the wolf and the lamb in Isaiah 11:6, and the 'gigantesques ruses' anything from the story of the Creation to the parables told by Jesus. In a way, Norge is specifically questioning whether the Communion bread and wine do in fact become the body and blood of Christ, or whether their importance is symbolic. But, more generally, he seems to be recognising that, in order for followers of a religion or members of the human race to accept the authority and structure of their respective community, they first must suspend disbelief in the literal nature of the myths and rites to which they subscribe. For, while 'ruses' and 'masque' do undoubtedly have negative

overtones, those of the ‘nul’, ‘stupide’, and ‘creux’ alternative existence are surely greater. In faith there is:

Le nu, le froid et le chaud,
Mais le chaud, vainqueur du froid. [...]
Le doute aux glissants chaînons, [...]
Mais le oui vainqueur du non [...] (OP, p. 413)

That is to say, opposing impulses are always present, but faith leans towards acceptance rather than rejection, and towards the naked warmth of vulnerable, credulous belonging rather than the cold of sceptical isolation. So, if the six days of Creation, say, are a gigantic ruse, then their value is not so much in any adherence to literal reality but in their construct of a world designed and created by God and in which man has a special place, as opposed to a Big Bang theory or an evolutionist version of life on earth, in which man’s place is arbitrary and therefore devalued.

If structure and authority are what the Christian seeks from his Church and its stories and ceremonies, then the same is true of the poet. In Norge’s case, this is not only true because of his Christian beliefs. It would also be the desire of an atheist, whose faith was invested merely in humanity. Thus Norge creates a cultural genealogy that stretches back to Lao-Tzu and forward to Valéry and Milosz, and which bears both structure and authority, precisely in order to claim his own place in it and let the mark of authority extend to him. He wants his voice to be added to the symphony of the world, and, as he states in ‘Concerto’:

Il faut que je vous le dise,
Ils vont reconnaître Nise,²⁸

Ils vont reconnaître Norge [...] (OP, p. 418)

For the world to recognise Norge and his wife is a two-fold process: firstly, their art is imbued with an air of authority, by dint of their belonging to the global and historic structure that marks that unity of culture identified and championed by Norge in ‘Concerto’; but, secondly, as with the ant in ‘Fourmi’, they are appreciated as individuals irrespective of their place in the universal framework, and considered to have a character and worth which that structure or framework cannot diminish. Their ambition is emblematic. For it is that fusion of individual integrity and unification with others that characterises Norge’s depiction of communion.

¹ The Bible used here is the King James Version. Other versions will naturally have different wording, though differences in meaning are minimal and not the subject of this thesis. For instance, the New World Bible substitutes ‘blood of the covenant’ for ‘blood of the new testament’.

² ‘The substance of each thing is that which is peculiar to it, which does not belong to anything else’ (B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy, op. cit., p. 176). The bread becomes Christ’s body, and therefore cannot remain bread as well.

³ This societal element to Norge’s poetic objective is echoed in Ponge, in Proèmes: ‘1° Il faut parler; 2° il faut inciter les meilleurs à parler; 3° il faut susciter l’homme, l’inciter à être; 4° il faut inciter la société à être de telle sorte que chaque homme soit. Suscitation ou surrection? Résurrection. Insurrection. Il faut que l’homme, tout comme d’abord le poète, trouve sa loi, sa clef, son dieu en lui-même’ (F. Ponge, Tome premier, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p. 216). The religious terms used underscore the divine nature of the poet’s task in relation to his reader.

⁴ This period covers the following works: 27 poèmes incertains (1923), Plusieurs malentendus/ La double vue (1926), Avenue du ciel (1929), Souvenir de l’enchante (1929), Calendrier (1933), La belle endormie (1935), C’est un pays (1936), Le sourire d’Icare (1936), L’imposteur (1937) and La joie aux âmes (1941).

⁵ This particularly refers to Les oignons (1953 onwards), Le gros gibier (1953), La langue verte (1954), Le vin profond (1968) and Les cerveaux brûlés (1969).

⁶ ‘Antiquaire et poète Géo Norge fait le bilan de ses *Quatre vérités*’, article by Jean Chalon in Le Figaro littéraire, Paris, March 31, 1962, p. 3.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Like Monsieur Jourdain in Molière’s Le bourgeois gentilhomme, who learns from the philosophy teacher in Act I that he has been speaking prose all his life.

¹⁰ In ‘Gris’, Solomon’s ‘litière de bois de rose et de lapis-lazuli’ is painted over in grey (OP, p. 194), in a similar act of defiance against change.

¹¹ This surely echoes the ‘au gué’ of the poem Alceste recites to Oronte in Molière’s Le misanthrope Act I Scene II. Since the subject of the two characters’ conversation is poetry itself, the reference would seem to be extremely apposite in a work about the poet’s role in the world.

¹² Although Sartre would deny that the verb ‘être’ was the most appropriate means of enunciating one’s existential self: ‘Peut-être qu’on n’est pas pour soi-même à la manière d’une chose. Peut-être même qu’on n’est pas du tout; toujours en question, toujours en sursis, peut-être doit-on perpétuellement se faire’ (J.-P. Sartre, Baudelaire, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 49).

¹³ ‘ein man, ein wîp; ein wîp, ein man.

Tristan, ïsot; ïsot, Tristan.’ (G. von Strassburg, *Tristan und ïsot*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1974, p. 6) This technique is witnessed earlier in the description of the emotions their single heart will experience:

ein ander werlt die meine ich,
diu sament in einem herzen treit,
ir süeze sûr, ir liebez leit,
ir herzeliep, ir senede nôt,
ir liebez leben, ir leiden tôt,
ir lieben tôt, ir leidez leben [...] (ibid., p. 4)

‘I have another world in mind which together in one heart bears its bitter-sweet, its dear sorrow, its heart’s joy, its love’s pain, its dear life, its sorrowful death, its dear death, its sorrowful life’ (G. von Strassburg, *Tristan*, translated by A. T. Hatto, London, Penguin, 1960, p. 42).

¹⁴ *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act III Scene II, lines 208-212.

¹⁵ ‘Antiquitaire et poète Géo Norge fait le bilan de ses *Quatre Vérités*’, op. cit.

¹⁶ Even Bartók’s 1943 Concerto for Orchestra, for instance, is predicated both on the notion of the interplay of solo instruments with the rest of the orchestra and on the potential of the whole orchestra to become one, that is, a solo part.

¹⁷ ‘Antiquitaire et poète Géo Norge fait le bilan de ses *Quatre Vérités*’, op. cit.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ The ‘foudres’ and the ‘poil de guerre’ (OP, p. 355) are particularly redolent of the first lines:

‘First witch: When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second witch: When the hurlyburly’s done,

When the battle’s lost and won.’ (*Macbeth*, Act I Scene I, lines 1-4)

²¹ Norge’s love of the resonant and metaphoric value of objects is discussed in the interview with Jean Chalon, when the poet is asked why he is an antiquities dealer (the ‘antiquaire’ of the article’s title): ‘L’objet me touche beaucoup. J’en ai besoin. Une herbe, un caillou, quand je me promène, m’intéressent. Mais si un objet est fait par un homme, cela m’intéresse encore plus. Le bras de ce fauteuil où vous êtes assis, c’est une lettre que m’envoie celui qui l’a tordu comme une vague’ (op. cit.). Cf. Ponge’s *Le parti pris des choses*, in which, for instance, Norge’s ‘herbe’ becomes Ponge’s ‘Végétation’, imbued with a character and an activity seemingly lacking from Norge’s notion of non-man-made objects (F. Ponge, *Tome premier*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, pp. 101-103).

²² The name is also redolent of the science of eugenics, coined and championed by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, and characterised by the biological improvement of the human race. It was widely supported in the first part of the twentieth century, but the abuse of its doctrine by the Nazis led to its falling into disrepute. Perhaps the graphic torture and manipulation detailed in the section ‘Prisons, supplices’ owes something to the popular image of Nazi medical experiments performed in the name of eugenics.

²³ See p. 83 onwards.

²⁴ The town appears first in *John* 2:1, and in another context in *John* 4:46 when Jesus returns to meet a nobleman whose son is sick in Capernaum.

²⁵ Cf. Mallarmé’s comments to Degas, already cited in this thesis, about how poetry is comprised of words not ideas (P. Valéry, *Oeuvres*, op. cit., p. 1324).

²⁶ ‘And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him. [...] Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened’ (*Matthew* 9:27-30).

²⁷ ‘Antiquitaire et poète Géo Norge fait le bilan de ses *Quatre Vérités*’, op. cit.

²⁸ ‘Nise’ is Norge’s nickname for his wife, the painter (and therefore equally valid heir to the legacy of authority) Denise Perrier.

Chapter Seven: CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR STRUCTURE

Although many of the central themes explored in this thesis have been identified in the work of Crine,¹ Klinkenberg,² Tordeur³ and others, for instance, the importance of the elements, the everyday, and the Christian message, these motifs have always been treated essentially as ends in themselves, that is, they were the primary subjects of Norge's *oeuvre*. He would return again and again to these same sources of inspiration throughout his life simply because he wanted to describe man's estate in terms, say, of the everyday, or the elements, indeed he perceived that this was the best way to convey his vision, which is one of the world infused with God's presence. The central thrust of this thesis is that such a view misses the point of Norge's poetry, by settling for a basically thematic approach which refuses to see any underlying structure.

The conventional view of Norge's treatment of the everyday centres on the fact that he transforms what was previously commonplace and banal and gives it new resonance and life by rendering it unfamiliar to the reader, and, conversely, that the exotic and unusual is divested of its quality of distance and made approachable and understandable. This dual act of dislocation has a similarly dual purpose: first, to force the reader to look at his world in a different way; second, and more fundamentally, to imbue that world with a mystical character. For Norge's God is present in the humblest of things, and therefore, on the one hand, a force which causes the everyday to lose its sense of ordinariness, and, on the other, an entity dwelling not in a distant and exotic

heaven but in the world around us. Norge's function as poet is thus to bring word of God's presence and proximity, to see and describe the divinity in all things, which proves God's existence and which the non-poet cannot perceive. And since his Word, that is, his gospel, is divine, the words in his poetry become equally divine.

Furthermore, if Norge is invested with the status of a prophet, to read and interpret his poetry becomes an act of Scriptural hermeneutics. In a way this is indeed the case, since he is a self-appointed seer of the divine in the universe, and so any reading by the non-seer can only be an analysis of the ramifications of the truth Norge preaches in his work, rather than an attempt to justify or refute the validity of that truth.

However, this is only the starting-point for a truer understanding of Norge's use of the imagery of the everyday. The key is that his poetic creation is not merely an exercise in Christian worship, but is, on the contrary, just as rewarding for the atheist, and the reason is precisely that there is, underlying his divine poetics, a structural truth which does not rely upon religious belief, and it is this which previous Norge critics have not discussed. For what Norge has done is to create a poetic paradigm, not by means of abstract thought, but from the commonplace, banal, ordinary things that surround him. His is a structure empirically conceived. Whether or not his God is inherent in the everyday is ultimately secondary. In this sense, his poetry is like Sartre's existentialism, founded in the chestnut tree and other 'en-soi' of La nausée.⁴ Of course, whereas for Sartre 'Les Choses' indicate an Absurd world devoid of justification and in which God is absent or irrelevant,⁵ for Norge those same objects achieve a kind of justification through their being inhabited by God. But more fundamentally Norge's message is that, irrespective of one's religious viewpoint and therefore whether one accepts his

vision of a pantheistic deity or not, even the humblest common thing is part of a greater whole to which and in which everything is connected. At the heart of his celebration of individual objects and people, therefore, is not only an espousal of God's Word but a conviction of the underlying structural nature of matter, that is, that all things are related and bound by a common essence.

Similarly, a discussion of Norge's imagery of the four elements may well begin with an exploration of the particular character with which Norge endows air, water, fire, and earth. In brief, water represents solidity and matter, earth the life-cycle, air (and, by extension, wind) the process of becoming rather than being, and fire the effect that such becoming has on things. However, to be content with this figurative lexicon of the elements, to settle thus for such an inadequate explanation of the poet's motivation in calling upon the elements so much in his work, is to deny that they have an existence and purpose that transcends their individual traits. For, apart, Norge's elements are incomplete and unfulfilled, but, united in common cause like the women in 'Les quatre vérités', they perform an extraordinary function: to create art. Hence, the elements must be seen not solely as discrete aspects of nature chosen merely for their imagistic or metaphoric value in lyric poetry, but as connected stages in the creation of poetry itself, in the same way that, for the speculative philosophies and religions of the first western civilisations up to the pre-Socratics, the combination of the four elements accounted for the creation of the world. Poetry for Norge is facilitated by the convergence of all four elements, and, conversely, when one or more of the elements is absent, there can be no artistic creativity. Further, on those rare occasions when a Norge poem contains no elements, there is a depiction of effete stagnation and a

consequent lack of artistic opportunity. What the poet has done is to construct a poetic model parallel to Empedocles' material model for the creation and character of the universe.

The construction by the poet of this paradigm of poetic creation serves many purposes. First, Norge insists upon investing the elements with a function which goes beyond the conventionally metaphorical, by liberating them from the usual poetic lexicon. Second, it stresses the importance of primeval, pre-rational systems of belief, by basing a poetic philosophy on ancient tenets which rely upon mysticism and myth. Third, it places poetry firmly in the realm of material creation, both by the analogy with Empedoclean proto-atomism⁶ and by the fact that the natural world does not so much inspire poetic thoughts in the poet as actively produces poetry, or at least causes or necessitates its production. Art is no longer mere artifice, but as real and natural as the world it portrays. Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally for the purposes of this thesis, it demonstrates that Norge, as with the imagery of the everyday, sees the world in terms of possessing an underlying structure, one that embraces man, nature, and art in one framework.

Norge creates and re-creates his own world, which is both poetic and material. But he also observes the world which is already in place, for instance in his imagery of time and of loss. Icarus tries and fails to transcend physically when in fact he should be doing so spiritually while his body remains on the earth to which he and Norge belongs. Time is not only a linear absolute in the hands of the mathematicians, but rather a flexible medium which enables us, on the one hand, to rejoice in our nowness,

the fact that we exist in the present time and space, and, on the other hand, to connect with the possible past and the real future. What we have lost -- our control over both the world outside and our mind within -- lends us the humility which is a barrier against arrogance and solipsism. Norge's smile is a joyous recognition of man's spiritual essence, as previous critics have all pointed out, but, rather than being a symbol of some kind of smug, inert contentedness, it is an act of assertion, a shared and tacit signal, an indication of togetherness and commonality, an acknowledgement that, say, loss is universal as well as personal and therefore that reparation through loss is a process that can be achieved only if we combine, commune.

The concept of communion is paramount in Norge. The ritual components of the Eucharist have their parallel in poetry, where trans- or consubstantiation is apparent in the use of metaphoric language. And the coming together, the communing, of individuals is implicit in the cornucopia visible throughout Norge's work of named and unnamed creatures, each of which has a worth and a character of its own but which together present a global picture, a congregation seeking justification and salvation. Just as each person is responsible for his or her own redemption, but such a redemption is impossible without the presence of other similarly motivated people, so Norge's menagerie of unusual individuals only has a sense of cohesion and community because of the consistency of his humanist message.

Norge's role in the concerto which this menagerie combines to play is to be the solo instrument, the voice above the throng preaching the notion of communion. What he gains from this position is the same thing that the lone Christian seeks in the Church

and its ceremonies: a sense of belonging, and the authority that accompanies such a sense. To play his concerto with no orchestra would for Norge be the same as man worshipping alone, or suffering loss of self-determination alone. Where there is no one else to validate or experience or sympathise with his human activity, his own humanity is called into question. This is doubly true of the poet, whose life's work depends entirely upon the existence of a reader, and is surely yet more crucial for a poet like Norge, whose stated task is to lead the whole orchestra, that is, to be the prophet of both humanism and divinity and who therefore needs as wide a readership as possible.

Norge's poetry, then, is above all an assertion of unity and community, of each individual man's place in an interconnected universal structure called humanity. This in turn lends him authority, in the sense both of being authoritative and of having permission. He is authoritative because of his knowledge of man's quality of communion, and he has permission (to write) because he knows his reader belongs to the same structure as he does. However, this is not the kind of oppressive authority that one man wields over another. His version of authority entails the liberation, not the subjugation, of man, because it frees him from his loss of potentiality and self-determination. In other words, man does not bend before some authoritarian governance, but rather re-establishes in himself the supremacy that comes from an awareness of his divine legacy, his earthly status, and his communion with other men. In a personal context, Norge the poet wishes to affirm his right to belong to the literary tradition, and so he invokes the names of his poetic forebears. This enables him to speak with another sense of authority, that is, the approval and sanction of great writers of an earlier age. But his task is not only a self-centred one, for, with the

justification that such a genealogy grants him, he carries a stamp of validity and authenticity that allows him to communicate to his reader with conviction, and thus impart his message of hope and humanity.

Norge's poetry is mistakenly viewed by many as superficial, witty to the exclusion of serious content, and unstructured. In fact it interacts continually with philosophy, phenomenological as well as ontological. This interaction is a two-way process: poetry both begets and is born out of philosophical ideas, which encompass time, religion, nature, existence. Norge's work is poetry with a structure and about structure. The reason is that the poet requires structure, and not only rhythmic and metric structure in order to provide his poems with a framework. Norge's structure is what asserts his sense of belonging to the human race, his constant search for what connects him to others. It is also, in the literary sphere, what links him with past writers: his language and vision, and his awareness of the cultural heritage, the legacy of which he claims a share. When he refers to Rimbaud in 'Concerto', he is almost summoning up Rimbaud's creative daemon that it may infuse him with the same genius. Just as Norge's structure gives him the authority to be a human, so it acknowledges his right to call himself a poet.

In the end, structure implies unity and communion and belonging, and gives him the authority to write, in other words to be who and what he is, to have the justification to see and feel what he sees and feels, to be a sentient human being. In short, for all this devout Christian's divine leanings, the reader of Norge is ultimately obliged to echo Pilate's words about Jesus: 'Ecce homo' -- 'Behold the man'.⁷

¹ M. Crine, Norge, Brussels, Labor, 1986.

² J.-M. Klinkenberg, in Norge, Remuer ciel et terre, Brussels, Labor, 1985.

³ J. Tordeur, in Norge, Oeuvres poétiques (1923-1973), Paris, Seghers, 1978.

⁴ J.-P. Sartre, La nausée, Paris, Gallimard, 1938. The 'en-soi' of Sartre's philosophy are stagnant, unjustified, and simply 'are' irrespective of any control or meaning one would like to impose upon them. See J.-P. Sartre, L'être et le néant, Paris, Gallimard, first published 1943, and especially section VI of the introduction, for an account of being 'en soi'.

⁵ Having returned from the gardens where his experience with the chestnut-tree took place, Roquentin writes: 'Le mot d'Absurdité naît à présent sous ma plume; tout à l'heure, au jardin, je ne l'ai pas trouvé, mais je ne le cherchais pas non plus, je n'en avais pas besoin: je pensais sans mots, *sur les choses, avec les choses*' (J.-P. Sartre, La nausée, op. cit., pp. 183/4). Of course, Sartre's existentialism does not conclude with this Absurdity, but constructs a morality of its own that does not depend upon the existence or otherwise of God, as Oreste says when he is about to kill Egisthe in Les mouches: 'La justice est une affaire d'hommes, et je n'ai pas besoin d'un Dieu pour me l'enseigner' (J.-P. Sartre, Les mouches, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, Act II Scene VI).

⁶ According to B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy, op. cit., p. 82, the founders of Atomism were Leucippus and Democritus, but there is no doubt that Empedocles' notion of the elements was an important precursor. Perhaps the most fundamental difference is that the Atomists sought to present a view of the world's creation without cause or purpose, unlike Empedocles and his conflict between Love and Strife.

⁷ 'Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!' (John 19:5)

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