

THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY :
AN EXAMPLE FROM BAUDELAIRE*

BY ROSS CHAMBERS

A FEW months ago there took place in Quebec an important international conference of University French Departments ; and the report it produced¹ is an interesting document for anyone concerned with current thinking throughout the world about the discipline of French Studies. It makes it clear that there is now a broad consensus on two main points :

(a) Firstly, it is recognized that the unity of the subject derives from a common approach to its three main areas of interest (language, literature and civilization) and that this approach has much to learn from the sciences of communication and the social sciences in general.

(b) Secondly, the subject must therefore be outward-looking and prepared not only to learn from but to make its contribution to the study of human communication and culture as such ; in this respect the concept of *francophonie*, covering as it does a number of widely diverse cultures, could usefully replace our over-exclusive interest in a single national culture.

In short, French Studies are not so much concerned with *a* culture as they have an interest in cultural study in all its forms and in all the senses of the word culture.

Australian French Departments, I think regrettably, are still a long way from sharing this view of the subject they teach. They are understandably loth to abandon the type of studies in which they have achieved a high standard for a concept which would require them to adopt substantially new criteria of academic excellence. However, our easy assumption that to acquire a foreign language is in itself educationally "broadening", together with a basically common-sense approach to the arts of interpretation which modernists practise, cannot continue for much longer to justify the existence of a subject which is in *intellectual* competition with studies that are much more aware of their methodological unity and their theoretical basis. Consequently, a blueprint for the development of French Studies in this country over the next ten years should aim primarily, I believe, at achieving

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a healthy interdisciplinarity between the different branches of the subject, while recognizing that this presupposes (a) the development of certain branches (such as those relating to *francophonie*), and (b) the cultivation of theoretical thinking in each branch, so that interchange can become much less a haphazard exchange of insights and much more a conscious process of disciplined research.

The subject of my lecture this evening is (very mildly) theoretical and (unadventurously) interdisciplinary, since I am concerned with the field of *poetics* as defined by Roman Jakobson : that is, the study of the "poetic function" of language. The basic question we shall be asking is the one Jakobson tried to answer some fourteen years ago in his now famous winding up of a conference on "Style in Language"² : what can the theory of literature learn about the language of poetry by applying to poetic discourse the methods and categories of linguistics? I should like to stress that this is a field in which I am very much a learner myself, and perhaps I should apologize immediately for having chosen such a topic in preference to the more specialized field in which I might have hoped to give a more expert performance. But I believe it is more important, on an occasion such as this, to raise general questions and to indicate broad areas of future exploration than to give a spectacular display of learning which would necessarily rely heavily on work that is now behind us.

Jakobson's highly stimulating paper gave impetus to a branch of study whose origins, of course, go much further back (most particularly to the Russian formalism of the 20's). Greimas' excellent introduction to a recent volume of essays on the "semiotics" of poetry allows us to measure the distance covered in fourteen years and especially to define the framework in which research is currently going on.³ Stated in very general and non-technical terms, the problems that have been clearly formulated are threefold :

(a) On the hypothesis that in literature the language as signifier undergoes specific structuring or patterning processes, how may one define and analyse the "*form of the expression*" in poetry?

(b) On the hypothesis that in literature the language as signified undergoes structuring or patterning processes, how may one define and analyse the "*form of the content*" in poetry?

(c) On the hypothesis that in literature there is a *correlation* between the form of the expression and the form of the content, what is the nature of this "isomorphism" and how may it be analysed?

I propose to look a little more closely at each of these three sets of assumptions and problems, taking as an example of the "poetic function of language" the fourth

² R. Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics", in T. A. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

³ "Pour une théorie du discours poétique", in *Essais de sémiotique poétique*, ed. A. J. Greimas (Paris, 1972).

of the poems entitled *Spleen* in the *Fleurs du Mal*. Manifestly, any conclusions derived from a single example will be purely tentative and subject to the greatest caution, particularly as Baudelaire's poetic practice may well be idiosyncratic and is in any case atypical by virtue of its greatness, while nineteenth-century poetry in general has no particular claim to represent poetry as a universal phenomenon. It is only *one* form, among many, of poetic language we shall be studying; but I chose the *Spleen*-poem partly for its poetic magnificence and partly in homage to Roman Jakobson, who has already published an admirable "microscopie" of the same text⁴—a "microscopie" being a detailed analysis which is to the traditional "close reading" what a microscope is to a spectacle lens or magnifying glass, as one may see by comparing Jakobson's article with, say, Bernard Weinberg's interpretation of the same poem, published the previous year⁵.

Let us begin, however, by reading the poem with the naked eye :

SPLEEN

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle
Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis,
Et que de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle
Il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits ;

Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,
Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,
S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide
Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris ;

Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées
D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,
Et qu'un peuple muet d'infâmes araignées
Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,

Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie
Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,
Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie
Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtement.

— Et de longs corbillards, sans tambours ni musique,
Défilent lentement dans mon âme ; l'Espoir,
Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce, despotique,
Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir.

Without underrating Jakobson's contribution, one can say that his method of analysis is mainly useful as a mode of approach to the "form of the expression".

⁴ "Une microscopie du dernier *Spleen* des *Fleurs du Mal*", *Tel Quel* (printemps, 1967).

⁵ B. Weinberg, *The Limits of Symbolism* (Chicago U.P., 1966).

As it is formulated in his paper on "Linguistics and Poetics", his assumption that the poetic function may be recognized by the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination, sounds rather obscure to the layman; it could be restated by saying that in poetic discourse the paradigmatic relationships which in non-poetic discourse are relevant only *in absentia* become relevant *in praesentia*. In the speech-chain, the two types of structural units (phonemic and monemic) are patterned so that relationships of similarity and dissimilarity become discernible, and these relationships are perceived as constituting language as a poetic code. Poetic analysis therefore calls for the exhaustive identification and inventory of such patterning throughout the text, the sum total of discernible patterns forming the poem.

In *Spleen*, for example, Jakobson points out that stanzas I, III and V are like each other and unlike the other two in that each includes a reference to the first person and that in each a third person pronoun is placed syntactically or semantically in a relationship of superiority to the first person: "*Il nous* verse . . ."; "Vient tendre *ses* filets au fond de *nos* cerveaux"; "Sur *mon* crâne incliné plante *son* drapeau noir". Other notable similarities are in the prepositional structure, expressing spatial superiority in I and V ("Sur l'esprit gémissant . . ."; "Sur mon crâne incliné") and penetration in III and V ("Au fond de nos cerveaux"; "dans mon âme"). The relationship involved in all of these cases is one between the concrete and the spiritual ("le ciel/l'esprit"; "un peuple/nos cerveaux"; "corbillards/mon âme"; "l'Angoisse/mon crâne")—with in the last case a reversal of the terms which one may consider significant, although Jakobson does not interpret it.

By contrast with these three stanzas, the first person is absent from II and IV. At the same time, an upward thrust is expressed in these two stanzas (and only in them), in contra-distinction to the oppressive and penetrative movements of I, III and V. Whereas all the finite verbs of I, III and V are active, there are a number of passive and reflexive verbs in II and IV ("est changée"; "s'en va battant"; "se mettent à geindre"); and the inchoative and intermittent force of "s'en va battant les murs . . ./Et se cognant la tête" and "se mettent à geindre" contrasts with the durative and continuative ideas expressed in various ways in I, III and V ("longs ennuis"; "de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle"; "étalant ses immenses traînées"; "vaste prison", "vient tendre ses filets"; "longs corbillards"; "défilent lentement").

Stanza III, according to Jakobson, is remarkable because it is the stanza in which all the substantives except one ("la pluie") are provided with a determinant; and he associates this "mise en relief" of the substantive (not very clearly, to my mind) with what he calls the inversion of the hierarchical order between figurative and non-figurative terms (the metaphorical is the model for reality, rather than vice versa, in "la pluie imite les barreaux"). It is appropriate, therefore, that in this stanza the two central lines of the whole poem "enunciate the transformation"

of a first metaphor (the bars of the cosmic prison) into a second metaphor (the cobwebs in our brains), the transformation being accompanied by a parallelism of the accent-structure of the two lines :

D'une vasTE prison/imiTE les barreaux,
Et qu'un peupLE muet/d'infâMES araignées . . .

I have been obliged to betray Jakobson by selecting a few items from an analysis which is in intention non-selective and exhaustive ; and most of the observations of his which I have repeated suggest an interpretation of the poem. But hopefully you will have had an inkling of the heteroclitic and uninterpreted nature of the material a Jakobson "microscopie" throws up, based as it is on the hypothesis that in poetry it is the "code" itself, the intense patterning of the form of the expression, which constitutes the "message". Jakobson's view, and his consequent practice, has been strongly criticized on this score, for example by Mounin,⁶ and most readers of literature, given the enormous number of parallelisms and patterns discernible in poetic texts, appear to agree that a criterion of cogency does need to be applied to them. Certain of the paradigms *in praesentia* are presumed to be functional, and others not, and it is most often hypothesized that the functional ones are those which bring the form of the expression and the form of the content into a relationship. Beyond saying that "any apparent similarity in sound is evaluated in terms of similarity and/or dissimilarity in the sense", Jakobson is unhelpful on this point, and in practice he either analyses patterns of form and patterns of content as merely "accompanying" each other, or he analyses them independently of each other.

It may be that a syntactic approach to poetry will help to solve this problem. Jakobson's analysis is least fruitful when he turns his attention to what is precisely the most obvious structural relationship in *Spleen*, that between the building-up of "when"-clauses in apposition (the protasis) and the group of "then"-clauses, also in apposition (the apodosis). His search for "equivalences" cannot give an account of the dramatic structure in the form of the content which the syntax expresses at the level of form. But it may be that syntax, which provides a linking structure between the levels of content and expression, will enable us to identify those "equivalences", "parallelisms", etc., in short the paradigms, which are truly relevant to the poem as poem. I am not thinking here, in Chomskyan terms, of "deep structures" generating "surface structures", because poetics seems destined to be a descriptive discipline rather than a generative one, at least for a long time yet. But the notion of "coupling" expounded by S. R. Levin⁷ has already proved its worth, particularly, as Jacques Geninasca's work on the poetry of Nerval has recently shown,⁸ when it is used in combination with isotopic semantic analysis of the type

⁶ G. Mounin, "Baudelaire devant une critique structurale", in *Baudelaire: Actes du Colloque de Nice (1967)* (Paris, 1968).

⁷ S. R. Levin, *Linguistic Structures in Poetry* (The Hague, 1962).

⁸ *Analyse structurale des "Chimères" de Nerval* (Neuchâtel, 1971).

pioneered by A. J. Greimas.⁹ Coupling occurs when a semantic and/or phonetic relationship is discernible between linguistic items in an equivalent syntactical position, whether the positional matrix be strictly syntagmatic in character or conventional (in that it is supplied by metre, verse-forms, etc.). Not only does coupling draw together the levels of content and of expression, but also, as Levin points out, it helps to explain the "unity" of poetic utterances, since it ensures that "of the total range of paradigmatic possibilities at corresponding positions in the syntagm, only a very restricted sub-group is actually used", namely those which couple phonically or semantically with positionally equivalent terms already used.

Once again, an example or two will have to suffice, Jakobson hints at a type of coupling when he shows that each of the three principal clauses in apposition which form stanza V relates back to the positionally equivalent stanzas I, II and III. Thus, the "longs corbillards" of the first clause are coupled with the "longs ennuis" of I, as subjects of an aggressive action on the spirit, while the downward movement of the verbs "pèse" and "verse" relates to the horizontal, processional movement of "défilent", and the silence of "sans tambours ni musique" contrasts, on the isotope of sonority, with the *gémissement* of the oppressed spirit. The coupling of the two subjects "l'Espérance" (stanza II) and l' "Espoir" (stanza V) is manifest, while "vaincu" relates semantically to the helpless fluttering and knocking of heads against the ceilings of II, and even "pleure" may relate back to the oozing of the "cachot humide" (although the phonetic association is with "pluie" of III). Finally the semantic coupling of "Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir" with "Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux" throws into relief the significant contrasts between the final clause of the poem and the climactic stanza of the protasis: a personified singular subject in the moral order corresponding to a collective population in the physical order, while the naked despotism of "l'Angoisse" contrasts with the furtive invasion of the "peuple muet" and the high concentration of plosives in the final clause contrasts with the many fricatives and liquids of stanza III. In the interests of brevity, I have allowed myself some freedom from the strict method of Levin; but these few examples will perhaps show how the notion of coupling allows us to identify the truly significant paradigms (in form and content) of the poem as well as to see how the formal and the semantic paradigms interrelate; while at the same time it draws our attention to the differences within the paradigms which enable us to describe the movement of the poem.

Noticeably, however, this particular coupling analysis has left out of account stanza IV. When one turns to this stanza, it becomes evident that here the most significant couplings occur, not between clauses and stanzas but between lines and stanzas: the matrix is conventional, not syntagmatic. Lines 1 to 4 of stanza IV are coupled very strikingly with stanzas I to IV of the poem, and by a subtle mixture

⁹ *Sémantique structurale* (Paris, 1966).

of equivalence and contrast, the couplings record the intensity of the spirit's revolt in this climactic stanza and its rapid subsidence into ultimate defeat. "Avec furie" at the end of line 1, linked phonetically with the i/u pattern of "plus triste que les nuits" at the end of stanza I, sums up the essential semantic contrast between the two moments of the poem; similarly the suddenness of "tout à coup" contrasts with the continuative ideas of "en proie aux longs ennuis" and "de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle"; the verb "sautent" reverses the direction of thrust in "pèse" and "verse"; while in the paradigm of sonority the "cloches" represent the opposite extreme from the sound of "l'esprit gémissant" (whose protest they nevertheless espouse). The coupling of the line and the stanza is reinforced by the rhythmic coupling between line 1 of the "when"-section and line 1 of the "then"-section of the poem:

Quand le ciel bas et lourd/PÈSE comme un couvercle . . .
Des cloches tout à coup/SAUTENT avec furie . . .

(and incidentally there is a further coupling of both these lines with the last line of the poem:

Sur mon crâne incliné/PLANTE son drapeau noir

so that the three lines which bear the skeleton of the whole dramatic structure of the poem are strongly marked out by this strikingly characteristic rhythm).

Without going into detail, it is clear that line 2 of IV couples, in terms of a directional paradigm, with stanza II, the difference being that the upward thrust of hope is impeded in II, but unimpeded in "Lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement". (The "affreux hurlement" perhaps contrasts with the rustling of wings implied in II; but more obviously it would acquire relevance in the coupling of IV (sound) with III (silence).) The coupling of line 3 with stanza III is particularly instructive: the vastness and penal quality of the world is explicit in III and implicit in line 3 of IV, but sequestration and invasion have become dispersal and exile with the result that the centripetal movement of the "infâmes araignées" has become the centrifugal movement of the "esprits errants".

The case of line 4 is, however, more complex. Its three principal parts: "Qui se mettent—à geindre—opiniâtement" are semantically coupled with the first three lines of IV: the suddenness of 1, the "hurlement" of 2 and the persistence of the "esprits errants et sans patrie" in 3; in a sense, then, the last line summarizes the stanza. But within the stanza, the last line is noticeably contrasted with the first, both formally (the two uninterrupted hemistichs of "Qui se mettent à geindre/opiniâtement" contrasting with the energetic rhythm of line 1) and semantically (for contrary to what Jakobson says the apparently inchoative "se mettent à geindre" is a durative—cf. "set up a whimpering"—contrasting with "Des cloches tout à coup sautent", while the adverbial "opiniâtement" couples with the adverbial "avec furie"). In this way, line 4 both summarizes the movement of the whole stanza and contrasts starkly with line 1; and in both these

ways it marks the defeat of the abortive revolt recorded in line 1, the collapse of the spirit into whimpering submissiveness.

If, then, stanzas IV and V each refer back to the earlier stanzas of the poem, it follows that a final contrastive analysis of the relationship between IV and V would be most instructive, for it would display the principal elements in tension in the poem (that is, the main poetic paradigms), together with their relationship as it works itself out in its final stage. There is no time to undertake such an analysis now, but it would be conceived in terms of pairs such as upward and downward movement, centrifugal and centripetal movement, wandering and processional (that is: undirected and directed) movement, and finally—most important of all—movement and stasis, sound and silence.

But there are other types of syntax than purely linguistic and positional ones. The coherence of imagery, analysable in terms of a cultural or individual complex or the laws of the imagination, forms such a syntax, and will give us further insight into the form of the content. *Spleen* is a poem of melancholia, and its imagery conforms to the traditional iconography of prison and exile, the bat and the spider, cobwebs, rain, tears, moaning, funereal processions and the colour of mourning, black. But if Gilbert Durand is correct in his book on *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*,¹⁰ there is a more fundamental "syntax" (which he would call a *régime de l'imaginaire*) at work in the poem and accounting for the relationships discernible on the level of its imaginative content. It is the syntax of struggle, victory and defeat. The "diurnal" imagination, according to Durand, sees the self as a hero engaged in constant battle with the encroaching forces of impurity and time: the enemy, Kronos, can only be held at bay by a combative stance and by the constant affirmation of the self's separateness, or by an escape into ascensional movement. The victory, in *Spleen*, clearly goes to Kronos, but it is worth pointing out that the enemy here has two faces: time is experienced as a threat of oppression (at the hands of "le ciel bas et lourd", "une vaste prison", or "l'Angoisse, atroce, despotique") and it is experienced as an insidious and elongated plurality, a threat of invasion and dispersal (the "longs ennuis"; the "immenses traînées" of the rain like prison bars; the "peuple muet d'infâmes araignées" spinning, not *toiles* (the word one would expect) but "filets"; finally, the "longs corbillards" which are the internal allies of the external victor, "l'Angoisse").

The first two lines show the spirit faced with this double enemy: on the one hand the oppressive external force of the sky, on the other the threat of internal dispersal due to the invading "longs ennuis". As it develops, the poem records the gradual disappearance of any sense of separation between the oppressive world and the mind it threatens: in stanza III, the rain before the eyes is like the bars before prison windows, which is as much as to say that the mind is a prison, and the identification of prison-world and prison-mind is confirmed by the invasion of spiders "au fond de nos cerveaux". In stanza IV, the protest of the bells towards

¹⁰ Paris, P.U.F., 1963; also Bordas, 1969.

heaven takes place, then, in a single penal cosmos which is both "mind" and "world" (whereas in I, the protestor, "l'esprit gémissant" and the oppressor, the sky, were carefully distinguished); so that, by stanza V, the unity of the world and the soul is quite naturally assumed in the image of the funeral processions. And although the final picture is again one of separation, with "l'Angoisse" despotically oppressing the bowed hero (and this duality is necessary to enable the typically "diurnal" image of defeat in the downward thrust of the black flag), the separateness of the conflicting elements is twice denied, since the victorious force (formerly the physical universe) is now a moral entity, while the vanquished (formerly the spirit) is a material thing, the "crâne incliné".

This victory of the singular enemy is accompanied by an invasion of the plural enemy: the mind, at first still resisting ("*en proie* aux longs ennuis") soon takes on a disquietingly plural aspect itself, as hope flutters its wings and knocks against the ceiling; and the invasion of spiders "*au fond de nos cerveaux*" shows it completely over-run by the disquieting plurality of the enemy. That is why, in IV, it is the mind itself which has become dispersed and plural, so that the "esprits errants et sans patrie" look backwards to the "peuple muet d'infâmes araignées" and forwards to the "longs corbillards" which will soon process through the soul. To the diurnal imagination, an invasion—a breakdown of the sense of its own separateness—is the same thing as disintegration. It is also characteristic of the diurnal imagination to experience the breakdown of its separateness as a "negative separateness", that is, as solitude; and so the insistence on the generality of experience ("l'esprit") at the beginning and the sense of a common destiny expressed in "*Il nous* verse un jour" and "*au fond de nos cerveaux*" yield to the particularity and inviduality of "*mon ame*" and "*mon crâne*" in the final stanza. It is over a lonely man that the unholy alliance of the invading plural "corbillards" and the oppressive singular "Angoisse" wins its victory. These three elements—solitude, downward oppression and the disintegration of frontiers—taken together form a complex image of defeat as the diurnal imagination would conceive it; and so there is something emblematic in the way the last stanza places the defeated hero, "l'Espoir, vaincu", between its two allied victors, just as the opening lines placed "l'esprit" between its two attacking enemies.

Perhaps now I may make an interpretative leap and say what no purely formal analysis could reveal, namely that the fundamental image in the poem is not the explicit image of the prison, but the implicit image of the tomb. The syntax of imagery in the poem is a syntax of the tomb, because the tomb is the place where one is alone to be at one and the same time crushed by a cruel "couvercle" and invaded by the disintegrative forces of dispersal and decomposition. No reader of the *Fleurs du Mal* can escape the conclusion that the plural invasion which turns "l'esprit gémissant" into "des esprits errants" is cover-imagery for the worm which eats our bodies beneath the oppressive slab; so that melancholia is described by the poem as the sensation, not so much of being buried alive as of living one's own death.

But Baudelaire's tomb is also a strangely resonant one: it resounds with the *gémissement* of the spirit, with the rustling and knocking of the bat of hope, the sudden clash of pealing bells, then again with the persistent whimpering of the "esprits errants", and finally with the weeping of defeated Hope. For the battle is not solely between the weight and the worms of the tomb and the mind; there is also a conflict between the eerie silence of the invaders (the "peuple muet d'infâmes araignées" of III and the "longs corbillards, sans tambours ni musique" of V) and a spirit which ceaselessly continues to manifest itself in sound. And this conflict is *not* lost: the sounds are strangled, mournful, even despairing, but ("opiniâtement" is the key word here) at the end of the poem, between the twin tableaux of defeat, we see Hope, "vaincu" but *still weeping*. It is as if the persistent moaning of the defeated spirit has taken over from its enemy, time, that enemy's most insidious weapon, its "length", and turned that weapon against it. The elongated forces of "ennui", "pluie", "barreaux", "filets", "corbillards", etc. cannot quite defeat that persistent, elongated "filet de son" which is the spirit's last defence and final manifestation of life.

This interpretation, if it is correct, suggests very strongly in what way the phonetic form of the poem relates to the form of its content. The imaginative syntax of the tomb accounts both for the poem's content and for its acoustic properties, since the patterns of sound in the poem imitate (as the rain imitates prison bars) the echoing of the spirit's weeping in the tomb. The relationship between the form of the content and the form of the expression is therefore, in this case, that of metaphor and metonymy: the sounds imitate metaphorically those sounds which metonymically are part of the world of the tomb. Thus, the predominant nasality of the poem (which Jakobson associates arbitrarily with first person forms like "nous", "nos", "mon") owes its presence to the strongly resonant quality of nasal sound which imitates the resonance of the echoing vault (it is also strongly associated, in another way, with the theme of time, thanks to the words "quand" and "long", the present participle endings and, of course, the adverb "opiniâtement"). Plosive consonants, particularly gutturals in contact with back vowels, reinforce this resonance ("comme un couvercle"; "cachot"; "cognant"; and particularly "Des cloches tout à coup . . ."). But the pattern of closed front and central vowels (i/é/u/in) reproduces the strangled thinness, the constriction of the moan which emanates from the oppressed spirit ("l'esprit gémissant"): throughout the poem, rhymes in i and é predominate and are supported by words like "triste", "pluie", "prison", "muet", "filets", "furie", "hurlement", "esprits errants", "geindre", "défilent", "vaincu"; and it is evident from this enumeration itself how closely the acoustic imitation of *gémissement* is also associated with words expressive of the time theme. At the same time, more intermittent patterns of imitation are discernible: consonant-patterns such as the *chuintement* of the fluttering "chauve-souris" of "Espérance" and the fricative rustle of "Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux" contribute to filling the poem with imitative noise. But the imitation is not mere

onomatopoeia or alliteration : it is significant in terms of the " theme " of the poem (the form of the content) just as the theme itself derives significance from the form of the expression : indeed the true " theme ", the poetic statement as such, does not lie in the form of the content so much as it derives from the correlation of content and expression into a single whole.

My analysis is of course desperately incomplete, and I have suggested an interpretation more than I have demonstrated it. But the time has come to offer a conclusion, and in fact I shall offer two : Baudelaire's conclusion about the language of poetry, and my own. What Baudelaire's poem tells us by its very structure is that poetry is the language of the human spirit, bowed and weeping in the tomb of the world, but undefeated as long as it may turn time against itself, filling it with a persistent thread of sound which, however thin it may be, opposed " opiniâtrement " the hostile silence. And that thread of sound takes as its subject-matter the very experience which threatens it with silence : what madness was for Nerval or Artaud, or the void for Mallarmé, melancholia was for Baudelaire—a challenge to recreate it in aesthetically patterned words. These experiences are all faces of death, but poetry is not so much, as Philippe Jaccottet puts it, " la voix donnée à la mort ", as it is the voice which opposes death : it opposes death by giving death a human voice.

More specifically, what our study of the poem as an example of the language of poetry has suggested is that poetry is a language which attempts to transcend the condition of language. It does so by taking a set of linguistic signs, defined by Saussure in terms of the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, and shaping them until they form one single, unique sign which has properties diametrically opposed to those of its component parts : a sign in which the form is an image of the content, a sign, then, which is an " icon ". That is what Mallarmé meant when he remarked that verse, " philosophiquement, (. . .) rémunère le défaut des langues " ;¹¹ it is an attempt, as Genette has pointed out, to restore the language of the Golden Age¹² by achieving the condition of what Geninasca calls " un dire qui fait ce qu'il dit ", a saying which does as it says¹³. If all these opinions are correct—but at best they may well only define lyric poetry of the nineteenth century?—then it is less appropriate to consider poetics, as Jakobson does, as a branch of linguistics than it would be, following Mukarovsky¹⁴, to define it as a separate branch, alongside of linguistics, of the much wider science of semiology, the science of signs.

My conclusion, then, is technical, but because it shows us the poet using language against language, and more particularly the axis of time against the contingency of signs, it is not incompatible, I think, with the poet's suggestion that poetry is the protest of the spirit in a hostile world. Who would deny, however, that the poet's statement is incomparably nobler than that of your new Professor of French?

¹¹ " Variations sur un sujet ", in *Oeuvres poétiques* (Paris, 1965).

¹² G. Genette, *Figures*, II (Paris, 1969).

¹³ J. Geninasca, " Découpage conventionnel et signification ", in *Essais de sémiotique poétique*, ed. A. J. Greimas, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ J. Mukarovsky, " Littérature et sémiologie ", *Poétique* (3, 1970).