Louis Aragon, a modern French poet, many of whose poems were published clandestinely by the French underground during World War II, became a national hero to the people of France. He was a founder of the Surrealist movement and was deeply involved with Cubism and Dadaism. During the early 1930's, however, Aragon broke with these movements when he joined the Communist party.

Partly because of his ideology, Aragon has not established a literary reputation in the United States. More importantly, however, is the lack of English translations of his works of poetry. Most of his novels have been translated into English, but the present author has found to date only one volume of poetry which was translated by e. e. cummings, The Red Front, whose original title is Front Rouge, published in 1933 by Contempo Publishers.
This thesis, Aragon: A Translation, is an English translation of Aragon by Georges Sadoul, consisting of three sections. The first one is a critical and biographical treatise on Aragon written by Georges Sadoul. It treats the early life of Louis Aragon and Elsa, his wife, beginning with Sadoul's initial meeting of Aragon in the 1920's and continuing through Aragon's love affair with the U. S. S. R. in the 1930's and his involvement with the underground forces during World War II in his native France.

The second part of the thesis is a choice of texts written by Aragon and selected by Sadoul. They are mainly concerned with Aragon's views on poetry and his methods of composition.

The last section of the thesis is a sampling of Aragon's poems, which cover the period of his poetry beginning in 1916 to the publication of Aragon in 1967. An attempt was made, where feasible, to include one poem from each of Aragon's published volumes.

Accepted by:

Charles J. Jeffrey, Chairman
ARAGON: A TRANSLATION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the School of Humanities
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

by
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PREFACE

Louis Aragon, born October 3, 1897, is both a noted French poet and novelist whose early education prepared him for a medical career. Aragon was one of the founders of the Surrealist movement and, as a young writer, was involved with the Dada and Cubism movements. His involvement with Communism began when he became a member of the Communist party in 1927 which resulted in his break with the Surrealist movement in 1933. Since that time, he has concerned himself almost exclusively with social revolution.

During World War II his poems of resistance, published by the underground, deeply stirred the French people. Two such anti-German and anti-Vichy volumes were *Le Crève-Coeur* (1940) and *La Diane française* (1945), both published clandestinely. In these poems Aragon returned to the traditional, sonorous, and rhymed verses reminiscent of the *chansons* of the Middle Ages. By the end of the war he was a national hero.

Aragon has published over sixty complete books, including novels, poetry, history, and translations from English and Russian. While he is well-known to his fellow Frenchmen, his literary renown is limited
in the United States.

Surrealism left its mark on the work of Aragon as recognized by Sadoul. The Surrealist dissatisfaction with the world and the desire to transform life are reflected throughout Aragon's literary career. The search for an absolute has been lifelong. Aragon has written that he has spent his life trying to imagine the world other than it is, but to no avail.

As indicated by Georges Sadoul in this translation, after 1939, a nationalistic sentiment became apparent in his poetry. Aragon wished to give meaning to the French struggle against the German invaders. During this time Aragon was to write the poems that are among the best in French literature. His evolution as a writer has been characterized by the search for the meaning of the existence of man. Aragon has stated that he writes in order to learn and then to communicate what he has learned to others through the imagery of poetry. Aragon believes that writing is the highest form of expression and that a poem or a novel can break down insurmountable barriers between people or nations. His writing makes the world bearable to him because, through it, he is creating a new way of thinking which can be followed by others. This concept of literature is dominant in Aragon's work.
Aragon's principal volumes of poetry include: Le Crève-Coeur, written against the mobilization of 1942; Le Musée Grévin, against Vichy; Les Yeux d'Elsa, where his love for his wife becomes merged with his love for his country; and La Diane française which contains some of the most beautiful clandestine poems; and, finally, Le Nouveau Crève-Coeur where his lyricism is not directed solely against the Germans, but against all suppression. However, after the war, Louis Aragon remained a "young poet" despite his white hair. In his volumes of poetry published in the 1950's and 1960's he sang of the great eternal themes of time, friendship and, above all, love. These volumes include Les Yeux et la Mémoire (1954), Le Roman inachevé (1956) which is perhaps his masterpiece, Elsa (1959), and Le Fou d'Elsa (1963).

This thesis is an English translation of the book, Aragon, written by Georges Sadoul and the present author hopefully submits that this translation will further the availability of Aragon's works to those with a high degree of interest in modern French poetry. Aragon was published in 1967 and is one of the series of Poètes d'aujourd'hui.

The translation consists of three sections. The first one is of both a biographical and critical nature
which was written by Georges Sadoul. Sadoul begins his account with the initial meeting of Aragon in the 1920's and, subsequently, Elsa Triolet, a writer, whom Aragon married in 1939. Sadoul narrates details of their trips to the U.S.S.R. in the 1930's which led Aragon to the rupture with the Surrealists after the Kharkov conference held on November 6, 1930. Sadoul fully treats their involvement with the underground movement during World War II. Georges Sadoul's main thesis, he tells us, is not to present an "exhaustive analysis" of Aragon's work but rather to present a chronicle of his forty years' friendship with Aragon and Elsa. He substantiates his treatise with numerous quotations from Aragon's poetical works.

The second section of Aragon consists of writings on poetry by Aragon, i.e. Aragon's own feelings about the writing of poetry and what he feels is the main function of poetry. It is, indeed, the definitive statement of Aragon's views of poetry as a life force. These are excerpts from various sources including essays, prefaces to volumes of poetry, and an interview with Aragon conducted by Francis Crémieux.

The final section of Aragon consists of poems selected to convey the flavor of Aragon's career as a poet but which are not among the best known. The
present author has chosen to translate those which
were felt to be most representative of the different
periods in Aragon's life by attempting to choose one
poem from each volume of poetry. Selections include
two of the most beautiful wartime poems, "Les Amants
séparés," first published February 15, 1940, and
from Brocéliande, "On the False Rain which Fell on a
City of Stone not far from Brocéliande."

The translation has been faithful to the original
text as far as was feasible. Extremely long sentences,
for example, which are very popular in French literature
but confusing to the American reader, have been
rewritten into two or three shorter sentences. All
footnotes are either Sadoul's in the first part or
Aragon's in the second. The present author has included
in the text the French original as well as the English
translation when direct quotations of poetry were made.
However, in the prose quotations, only the English
translation is included. The present author feels that
since interpretation of poetry is a matter of great
importance and, moreover, a personal reading, the
original in French would serve the reader better by
being available for immediate attention by those who
are erudite in French. The English translation, then,
is included for those not fluent in the French language.
In this translation the traditional procedure has been followed in that the French titles have not been translated since the works themselves have not been translated into English. The phrases which are underlined and enclosed in quotation marks have been retained in the original French in the text and the English translation immediately follows in parentheses. The rationale for using this method is that these phrases were enclosed in quotation marks and italicized in the original text indicating a quotation from Aragon (not credited by Sadoul), a slang expression or some other peculiarity which might not be observed by the reader if this practice had not been followed. In every situation the original punctuation in the French text has been faithfully observed by the present translator.

The present author regrets that, due to a shortage of both time and space, more of Aragon's poetry is not included in the thesis.
To Elsa, his wife,
To Ruta, mine,
without whom this book would never have been written.

G. S.

O saints Sébastiens que la vie a criblés / Que vous me ressemblez que vous me ressemblez. Poetry is like the poet. Could it be otherwise? In order to discuss this "poète d'aujourd'hui" (modern poet) it is necessary to discuss the poet and his times. His work is an intimate journal, and publicly, a chronicle of his life and times.

The ambition of the following pages is not to present an "analyse exhaustive" (exhaustive analysis), but to offer the reader the chronicle of a witness who, for forty years, has frequently found himself at the side of Louis and Elsa, for better and for worse, at various moments which occasionally will contribute much to the elaboration and evolution of their "œuvres parallèles" (parallel works).

Without a doubt when speaking of the man, must I not discuss his poems and their deep meaning? But I intend less to study in detail their "secrets de fabrication" (secrets of manufacture) than to study Aragon himself,
through his various stages, who has taken care to deliver to the public the successive keys to his poetical work. One will find less remote the essence of these writings, indispensable to the understanding of his verses, his rhymes, his metaphors, in their deep meaning. We will include some of these texts, but above all in order to induce the reader to investigate for himself this "traité de style poétique" (treatise of poetical style) which goes from La Rime en 1940 through diverse passages from Fou d'Elsa by passing, notably, through Les Poètes and the capital Laçon de Ribérac.

When I met Louis Aragon for the first time at the Pierre Gallery, Bonaparte Street, I was unaware that he had published "des vers" (some verses). While studying at Nancy, I had bought Anicet, Les Aventures de Télémaque, Le Libertinage. I had read and reread these books so many times that I knew entire pages by heart. Feu de joie was not attainable in Lorraine, and following a classification learned at the lycée, if Paul Eluard was a poet, Aragon, whose prose fascinated me through his intense poetry, was for me a "prosateur" (a prose-writer) like his friends, André Breton or René Crevel.

The meeting at the Pierre Gallery had decided the orientation of my life. I had organized an exhibition
of paintings which was to take place in Nancy in May, 1926. In a few minutes Aragon had convinced me to invite besides Picasso and Braque, Henri Matisse and Jean Lurçat, four others who were unknown to me (and to many others in 1925): Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Hans Arp, André Masson.

Then hailing a taxi, the author of Anicet transported me to Blanche Square. I suddenly found myself in the Cyrano Cafe, sitting at the table with André Breton, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Péret, René Crevel and several others, amazed at seeing so many glorious ones assembled at one place. I returned, timidly but often, to this "Rendez-vous des Amis" (Rendez-vous of Friends). One did not see Aragon there everyday. He traveled much in what were to me distant countries: Holland, Spain, England, Italy.

Le Mouvement perpetuel was then put on sale, but the attendance of the Surrealist painters at the show in Nancy provoked such a scandal that I soon left my native city for Paris without having read these poems. My silent assiduity at the Cyrano was ended by me being admitted by the Surrealists as one of their own.

I first heard by oral recitation the poems of Aragon which were later published in La Grande Gaîté. They told me that he had written some of them when he
was with friends, one evening in a public place, on the back of a pack of cigarettes. Certain ones of these verses came to be accepted as proverbs for us. We would repeat them at every turn:

Heureusement que pour se distraire
On a la Radiophonie--
Avec mon crayon trempé dans le Vittel
Je vais écrire un poème immortel
A la gloire des Petits Beurres LU--
J'ai fait le mouvement Dada
Disait le Dadaïste,--
Bordel pour bordel
Moi j'aime mieux le métro
C'est plus gai
Et puis c'est plus chaud

Fortunately to amuse oneself
One has the Radio--
With my pen soaked in Vittel
I shall write an immortal poem
To the glory of Petits Beurres LU--
I made the Dada movement
Said the Dadaist--
Cathouse for cathouse
Me I like the Metro better
It is gayer
And also it's warmer

The poet did not mince words: like all young people, of every age and in every country, he called things by their name, even "Les choses du Sexe / Drôle de façon de parler des choses du Sexe" (The things of Sex / Strange is the way of talking about Sex). Aragon has always, in verse as in prose, taken care to use spoken French, the everyday words, "distingués" or "populaires" (elegant or
common), noble or ignoble.

The tone of La Grande Gaîté is grinding, controversial, sneering, indignant. He goes so far as to say:

Je n'aime pas les gens, je vous dis que
Je n'aime pas les gens
Parce qu'ils sont effroyablement bornes et stupides
Parce qu'ils déjeunent et dînent aux heures fixées
Par leurs parents parce qu'ils vont au théâtre à l'école
A la revue du Quatorze Juillet

I don't like people, I tell you
I don't like people
Because they are hideously narrow-minded and stupid
Because they eat breakfast and dinner at times fixed
By their parents because they are going to the theater
To the Fourteenth of July revue

On page one hundred of La Grande Gaîté, the cries of anger turn to cries of sorrow. In Venice in Ramo dei Morti, he hurls, "tout est faux y compris l'amour" (all is false including love). Then, passing through the desert of Gobi 28, he finishes by weeping with rage in his "Poème à crier dans les ruines:"

Crachons veux-tu bien
Sur ce que nous avons aimé ensemble
Crachons sur l'amour
Sur nos lits défaits
Sur notre silence et les mots balbuties
Sur les étoiles fussent-elles
Tes yeux

Let us spit if you want
On what we loved together
Let us spit on love
On our unmade beds
On our silence and the stammered words
On the stars that could have been
Your eyes

After that:

Rien ne va plus Où suis-je
Ma main rencontre dans la nuit
Rien plus que la gémissante muraille

Nothing goes Where I am
In the night our hands meet
Nothing more than the wailing wall

Such was Aragon's spirit when I found him in
September, 1928, at Cyrano or Montparnasse. He was like
a soul in pain, slept in hotels, at random, wandering
through his own ruins, unguided:

Il n'aurait fallu
Qu'un moment de plus
Pour que la mort vienne

It would not have taken
Much more than a moment
For death to come

Aragon then came to live at 54 Chateau Street,
Paris, in a small house, still at the beginning of 1928,
belonging to Jacques Prévert and Yves Tanguy. It had been rented to the widow of a rag-picker by Marcel Duhamel who had made the arrangements in 1925 for his two friends. He had just sold me the lease and all the furniture.

The two rooms on the first and only floor were decorated in the style created by Pierre Chareau, a little before 1925, and the Art Deco Exhibition: white walls of grained parget, lamps concealed under plaques of milky alabaster, painted posters done by Jean Lurçat, where among the birds and musical staves, could be read, "Celui qui aime écrit sur les murs" (Those who love write on the walls). My room, formerly that of Prévert, looked out on the Montparnasse commercial depot. The other, facing Bourgeois Street, had an unobstructed view. There Aragon settled, at the beginning of autumn, 1928.

On Chateau Street one arose most often at three or four o'clock in the afternoon. After an apertif in the evening at Cyrano and sometimes after a soiree in the studio of André Breton, 42 Fontaine Street, we would stroll late in the night through Montparnasse, chiefly to the bar of La Coupole, a large cafe recently constructed, on the square with the wood and charcoal warehouse.
We would find ourselves at the stroke of two or three o'clock in the morning in the large ground floor room in the rag picker's shop transformed into a studio and decorated by Yves Tanguy. On the walls some large advertising posters, stolen, a sort of "collage" which proclaimed: "On ouvre et on porte en ville" (We work and deliver locally) or "Les légumes secs sont arrivés" (The dried vegetables have arrived). Under a loggia between two moleskins, a fur demon, abandoned there by Raymond Queneau, shared a throne with a green locomotive. There we would occasionally find some intellectual vagrant sleeping. The "café-crémistes" (hangers-on) of Montparnasse could sleep at Chateau Street if they knew that a communal key, easy to reach from the street, hung behind a dormer-window which was always open, airing the water-closet decorated with crucifix, ciboria and plundered kepis.

We would talk without end in the communal room, where, beneath an aquarium and a puppet theater, a bizarre home-made electric phonograph often played, put together by Tanguy with a little motor meant to light a bicycle lamp. There we would play jazz records brought from New York by Marcel Duhamel, "The Man I Love," sung by Sophie Tucker, or "Saint Louis Blues," "My Blues," as Aragon loved to say. He would sometimes read to us from
Charles Cros, Henry Bataille or Apollinaire. He would tell us twenty episodes of his life not yet put into his poetry: the family drama of his birth; Saint-Pierre Street in Neuilly where he had spent his infancy and where he still had a room in his mother's home; his studies in medicine in Paris; the war that he had fought; the months spent in Alsace and Germany after the Armistice; his encounter in 1917 with André Breton at the Val-de-Grâce Hospital; the dissensions of the affair of the "lettres anonymes" (anonymous letters) at the "soirée du Coeur à Barbe" which annihilated the Dada movement; Berlin penetrated in 1923 by the agents of Schupos; the calm splendor of Holland; the Eiffel Tower Hotel in London; Spain with Ronda la Ronde cut in two by the blow of a sword from a "tajo;" Italy, and her Venetian tragedy.

Thus Aragon would go, for several weeks, "errant dans Césarée" (wandering in Césarée), often covering his distress with the plaster mask of pretense:

L'amour est mort j'en suis tremblant
J'adore de belles idoles
Des souvenirs lui ressemblant

Love is dead I am trembling
I adore beautiful idols
Some memories look like him
could then recite to himself, the loser in love, wandering "à travers son beau Paris / Sans avoir le coeur d'y mourir" (across his beautiful Paris / Without having the courage to die). I retrieved a crumpled paper on which Aragon had written in October, 1928:

If someone comes to see me, or he or she is looking for me, I have returned to Montparnasse, unable to endure this sorrowful house. I will return. Louis.

One evening when he was in Montparnasse, in order to flee Château Street, in order to flee from himself, they introduced the poet, Vladimir Maľakovski, to him at the bar of the Coupole. The next day, November 5, 1928, at the same place, he met Elsa Triolet. Aragon had a hard time, the first time she came to Château Street, to open the door for her; the communal key, hanging in its usual place, having slipped from his hands at the moment when he reached for it. Soon she was established in the room whose wall proclaimed, "Celui qui aime écrit sur les murs" (Those who love write on the walls), of which he felt compelled to write, evoking the month of November, 1928:

Tu m'as trouvé dans la nuit comme une parole irréparable
Comme un vagabond pour dormir qui s'était couché dans l'étable
Comme un chien qui porte un collier aux
initiales d'autrui
Un homme des jours d'autrefois empli
de fureur et de bruit

You found me in the night like an irreparable word
Like a vagabond who to sleep must lie in the stable
Like a dog who wears a collar with someone else's initials
A man of bygone days filled with fury and noise

Aragon also said, speaking of this month, when celebrating the eleventh anniversary of the Russian October:

Tu vins au coeur du désarroi
Pour chasser les mauvaises fièvres
... Je suis né vraiment de ta lèvre
Ma vie est à partir de toi

You came to the heart of the disorder
To pursue the evil excitement
... I was truly born from your lip
My life began with you

We did not call her Elsa at that time, but Ella (an abbreviation of her given name). She lived with him on Château Street until the beginning of 1929. There they gave a grand soiree in honor of Maiakovski, and we celebrated the year's end by transforming, Aragon and I, the nook under the loggia into a grotto decorated with golden flowers bought in Saint-Sulpice Square.

After that, they moved into No. 5, Campagne-Première
Street, in the heart of Montparnasse, into a large atelier without comforts, whose loggia room (the bedroom) opened in the rear onto the garden of a convent:

Au biseau des baisers les ans passent trop vite

On the beveled edge of kisses the years pass too quickly

Let us pass over the two years when an immortal love bloomed, over our meetings at Campagne Street, over several vacations spent with them "tout près de Saint-Michel-en-Grève" (close by Saint-Michel-en-Grève) (Côtes-du-Nord).

In 1930, on the eve of the thirteenth anniversary of October, the three of us met again in Moscow.

A Guendrikov Pereoulok nous étions tous ensemble assis
Autour de la table dans la pièce commune comme si
Dans l'encadrement de la porte il allait à l'instant paraître

At Guendrikov Pereoulok we were seated together
Around the table in the common room as if
In the door frame he would instantly appear

Maïakovski had committed suicide five months
earlier, but his shadow still lived in the little apartment of Guendrikov Pereoulok. His clothes were still arranged in the armoire where he had contrived a trap in the door in order to avoid having to open it. A teapot with flowers, blue and red, was placed on the round table, not far from the wall telephone on which the poet had arranged to have an extra long wire so he could walk everywhere in the apartment while speaking on the instrument. Nothing has changed since. The apartment, furnished as it was, is a part of the Maiakovski Museum.

At the end of 1930, George Sadoul and I were in Russia. We were in Russia more willingly than elsewhere, much more willingly. (L.A., 1931).

The reason for our voyage was most certainly the desire to know the country of Socialism. Aragon also wanted to meet Elsa's sister, Lili Brik, Maiakovski's wife whom he had known in Berlin in 1929. So far as I was concerned, condemned to three months in jail (by default) for insulting a first-year student at the Saint-Cyr School, I believed myself trapped by the police, and I left for Moscow as a "réfugié politique" (political refugee), trembling as I crossed the border.

Today to go to the U.S.S.R. is like going to
Brittany. In 1930 it was a great adventure. The country had long been isolated from the world by a "cordon sanitaire" (quarantine); since 1925 there had been very few "pélerins de Moscou" (Moscow pilgrims), journalists and others. The train trip took nearly three days with only a stop-over at Berlin.

The three of us planned to meet there at the end of September. The unavoidable delay for a visa having kept me in Germany, I did not arrive in Moscow until mid-October. Louis and Elsa waited for me at the station. After the "dur" (hard) third-class train journey which took twenty to thirty hours from Warsaw, I descended under a grey and rainy sky onto muddy and badly paved streets.

We hoisted ourselves with my suitcase into an old cab with cushions full of holes which was driven by an "izvostchik" with a beard in a dirty touloupe. On the long itinerary conducted by Guendrikov Pereoulok, one could see quite a few horse-drawn vehicles, the rare Rolls-Royce of the ambassadors, the transitory Renault taxis and walking on the pot-holed sidewalks, a crowd dressed in dark clothing, threadbare, darned, and patched. I had never left the West; I discovered with stupefaction this huge oriental village and the towers of the Kremlin from which were not yet flown the imperial
eagles, those great weathercocks of forged iron. In the streets of the former commercial district, one could see boxed old-fashioned goods in dusty and fly-specked cardboard cartons behind the cracked glass of the shop windows. The same absence of merchandise could be observed at Mostorg, a huge store with six floors built in the neogothic style near the Bolchoi Theatre.

J'aurai toujours devant les yeux le Mostorg de mil neuf cent trente Grande halle mal éclairée et rien du tout ou presque en vente Comptoirs déserts avec une maigre marchandise dans un coin Que les gens comme du brouillard se contentent de voir au loin Sous les longues banderoles de toile rouge à lettres blanches Ou sur la pauvreté de tout l'avenir prenait sa revanche Des paysans dépayés des femmes demandant les prix

I will always see the Mostorg--930 miles--
A great market badly lit and nothing for sale--or almost nothing--
Deserted counters with meager merchandise.
The people in a fog content to look at it from afar
Under long banners of red linen with white letters
Where the poverty of all the future takes its revenge
And displaced women peasants demand the price

One or two weeks after my arrival in Moscow, Aragon
was invited to the Second International Conference of Revolutionary Writers which was being held at Kharkov from the sixth to the fifteenth of November. On the advice of Elsa they invited me also, who had published only a few articles, no books. We left Moscow, with Elsa, in a special train, all sleeping cars, filled with writers from twenty-two countries and four continents. At some stations we were welcomed by male choirs and red flags.

Our participation in the congress at Kharkov led the Surrealist group into a disagreement which contributed to the rupture of March, 1932. Of the numerous and complex events from November, 1930, to March, 1932, of which it has become possible today to speak of without passion, I will withhold here only those which do not have a direct bearing on the poetry of Aragon.

The congress ended, our special train carried the writers on an excursion to Dniepr. Through a rather lukewarm "St. Martin's summer," it took us across the northern lands of the Ukraine towards a dam under construction called Dnieprostroi (and when finished Dnieproguess). This visit to a dam site did not particularly excite us. Rather we rejoiced in entering the country of "Cosaques Zaporogues, ivroges, pieux et
larrons" (Zaporogues Cossacks, drunks, pious ones and robbers), of whom Apollinaire spoke in his *Chanson du Mal-Aimé*.

And then, on the morning of our arrival discovering a great disorder of concrete mixers, crushed rock, a river not yet mastered, trains loaded with expensive cement, steam shovels, chaotic earthworks where thousands of young men and women worked, it was:

Tout comme si j'avais reçu la révélation physique  
Du sourd à qui l'on apprend un jour ce que c'est que la musique  
Du muet à qui l'on apprend un jour ce qu'est l'écho  
L'ombre a pour moi pris la clarté des nuits qu'a peintes Dovjenko  
Je me souviens C'était alors un film intitulé *La Terre*  
Le clair de lune était si beau qu'il n'y avait qu'à se taire  
Il s'échappa du serre-tête une mèche de cheveux blonds  
Grande fille couleur de pierre au fond de la pile d'un pont  
Qui creusait la boue et le fleuve Elle s'arrête elle s'étonne  
De tant de gens sur le chantier 0 Dnieproguess 0 pluie d'automne  
0 grand barrage d'espérance

All as if I had received a physical revelation  
From the deaf one learns music  
From the mute one learns an echo  
Darkness has taken the splendor from the night  
I remember It was a film entitled *La Terre*  
The moonlight was so beautiful that
there remained unsaid
Locks of blond hair escaped from
hard hats
Tall girl--stone-colored at the bottom
of the bridge--
Who excavated the mud and the river She
stopped astonished
So many people on the dam site 0
Dnieproguess 0 autumn rain
0 great dam of hope

Yes, it was this day in November at Dnieprostroy
that Aragon's life (and mine) took a decisive turn
without us having exchanged any words because:

Comment trouver les mots pour exprimer
cette chose poignante
Ce sentiment en moi dans la chair ancré
qu'il pleuve ou qu'il vente

How to find the words to express this
poignant thing
This sentiment in me anchored in flesh
that weeps or blusters

Was it while still in the Ukraine or after our
return to Moscow that Aragon told me his idea for a
poem? U.S.S.R. (so says the French), S.S.S.R. (so says
the Russian). He also told me that each of his four
parts defended and illustrated the slogans of the
U.S.S.R. at that time. He finished his poem before
leaving Moscow and entitled it Front Rouge, a
translation of the German revolutionary greeting Rot
Front. We had learned from some German writers,
delegates to Kharkov, the gesture of the raised fist as opposed to the raised hand of the Fascists.

We left the U.S.S.R. around December 10, 1930. Aragon and Elsa stopped over in Brussels for twenty-four hours. I would arrive in Paris before them to carry to Brittany and our Surrealists friends the news from Kharkov which would not be well-received. Three months of violent conflict was to follow.

The union of the group seemed reestablished by the following spring when Aragon wrote several revolutionary poems which formed the major part of Persécuté Persécuteur, printed at the end of October, 1937. The book opened with Front Rouge, published at the same time in Littérature de la Révolution mondiale edited in French at Moscow by the organizers of the Kharkov Congress. This review was seized in Paris in November and, on January 16, 1932, the examining magistrate Benon found the poet guilty of exciting the military to disobedience and provoking to murder through the means of anarchist propaganda. The offender was liable to five years in prison.

Thus began L'Affaire Aragon. Under this title, the day after the indictment, the Surrealist group published a tract which named those "who on the sole intellectual and moral value represented by Aragon, if not by us,
would love to join their protests to ours."

The Surrealists declared themselves "liable for the totality of the poem Front Rouge since moreover, in the terms of the indictment, it is the totality of this poem which is to be held back."

Their manifesto which, after having recalled the intended proceedings against Baudelaire for Les Fleurs du mal, spoke of the "ridicule in which a legislation had been exposed which in its impotence had called on Rimbaud and Lautréamont to account for destructive impulses which had spread throughout their works, these impulses assimilated for the occasion of varying crimes against the common good."

They were indignant that lyric poetry, which did not know how "vivre que de representations extremes" (to live except through intense representations), could be exposed to judicial persecution and they concluded:

Considering the small intelligence of the poetical texts that one can find among those who no longer pretend to judge according to artistic or humane qualities, but according to THE LETTER, so as to be able to oppose such and such articles of law, there is cause to wonder if for the first time the poet himself is not going to cease to be free, is not going to be directed to pay a true moral desertion for the right not to spend his life in prison.
This thesis exposed (it seemed by the pen of André Breton) was summed up in the protest that the manifesto countersigned:

The guilt of Aragon . . . constitutes in France a deed without precedent. We rise against an attempted interpretation of a poetical text to judiciary ends, and let us claim the immediate cessation of the proceedings.

This text must collect in three or four weeks more than three hundred signatures among the most widely varying French intellectuals and also among those in Belgium, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Spain. But some, convinced of the guilt of Aragon, refused to sign the proffered text for different reasons. They were mostly poor excuses, but not from Romain Rolland who thus explained his attitude:

I do not approve the terms of the protest that you have sent to me. I do not approve of them, for the true honor of Aragon and the Surrealists. I did the honor of distinguishing you from the rest of the writers while you took the liberty that nothing of what you wrote could not be 'literature,' that all that you wrote must be action. It was not suitable that you took refuge behind the screen of poetical "symbolism" or "interiorism." We are the combatants, we are armed. We are responsible for our arms like our
working class or soldier companions. Instead of denying them we have continued to lay claim to them. Each one of us must be judged, individually, for those he uses. The ground for defense must be chosen elsewhere. February 4, 1932.

Some days previously, four Belgian Surrealists (Réné Magritte, E.L.T. Mesens, Paul Nougé, André Souris) had also chosen another line of defense. Notably, in the tract that they edited January 30, they said:

It is not unreasonable that the bourgeoisie feel themselves threatened by certain poetical texts. The poem begins to play to the fullest effect. Word for word there is no longer the word that holds. The poem takes shape in the social life. Hereafter the poem incites the defenders of the established order to use towards the poet all the means of quiet repression for the authors of subversive attempts. But the same blow that unmasked the bourgeoisie also unmasked the gratuitousness of the ideology of liberty that had till now so carefully been held together. This liberty that has been accorded to the poet has for a long time been able to establish itself on the incomprehension of the reader. The clearsightedness of the reader automatically sweeps away the interference of police and the law.

The four signers of this tract had entitled it La
Poésie transfigurée. They considered *Front Rouge* a decisive turning point in the evolution of French poetry.

In *Misère de la Poésie* that he published at the beginning of March, 1932, André Breton referred particularly to the Belgian tract when he posed the central question of his brochure:

> Does *Front Rouge* mark a change in an extremely clear orientation whose course we believe can be assigned to poetry in our time; is this course going to be muddied, modified? Granted, as a matter of fact, that the formula will be new, workable, universal enough... such a poem would enable us to very nearly perceive the place of resolution which captures the conscious thought of man and his lyrical expression... It would invite us to break, without more delay, with the indirect language which has been the case in poetry up to now. It would determine us on a program of immediate agitation, so that, in verse as in prose, we could not without cowardice escape from ourselves. I will be, my friends like me will be, too happy to accept the omen of certain historical considerations nor can we abandon these great hopes.

The incriminating poem had been displeasing to Breton as soon as he had read it (at the beginning of 1931, I believe), but his criticisms remained confidential for a year while he and Aragon did their
best to find a new basis of understanding, which led them to publish with their friends various tracts treating the Colonial Exposition, colonial repression in Indochina, the beginnings of the Spanish Republic. But the circumstances of an indictment and the various responses of the protestors—or not—having placed a poem in the center of Surrealistic actuality, André Breton could not finally keep from voicing his disapproval and wrote in Misère de la Poésie:

In returning to Front Rouge and the artificial antithesis in which one could endeavor to place it with the best that he has written, I must state that he did not open the poetry with a new voice. It would be in vain to propose it to today's poets as an example to follow for the excellent reason that in like domain a point of objective departure can only be a point of objective arrival and that in this poem the return to the exterior subject and particularly to the passionate subject disagrees with all historical lessons which today break away from the most advanced poetical forms. In these forms, there was an age (cf. Hegel) when the subject could no longer be indifferent and it even ceased being posed a priori: a strength to me, considering also the style of this poem, his continual reference to particular incidents, to the circumstances of public life that finally remind me that it has been written during Aragon's sojourn in the U.S.S.R. from which he could not find an acceptable solution to the poetical
problem posited in our time, but like an exercise, in part, as captivating as one could want, but without a future because poetically regressive as otherwise said for a poème de circonstance.

The poème de circonstance (poem written for the occasion) fell like a knife and sliced the debate in such a fashion that the rupture found itself consummated. These three words must haunt for a long time those who in 1932 belonged to the Surrealist group.

The last time I met Paul Eluard, a few weeks before his death, was by accident in Geneva, where he led a conference on the "poésie de circonstance." He declared himself partisan and he referred to a statement of Goethe's: "I have never written poèmes de circonstance."

Beyond the "circonstances" of a rupture, L'Affaire Aragon was found to present a "problème poétique" (poetical problem). Had Front Rouge opened or not "à la poésie une voie nouvelle" (a poetry with a new voice)? Or, at least, did it furnish "une solution acceptable" (an acceptable solution)?

According to Littré, a circumstance is a "particularité qui accompagne un fait" (peculiarity which accompanies a fact), but in a larger sense the circumstances are "les choses du moment actuel" (the things of the real moment) and taken in a rhetorical
sense they comprise "those things which have a rapport with the person, with the thing, with the place, with the means, with the motif, with the manner and with the times."

The most beautiful poem by an inspired writer, L'Union libre by André Breton, certainly seemed to me to have been determined by the "chooses du moment actuel" (things of the real moment) since it is a very faithful portrait of a woman.¹

Speaking at Geneva of circumstances and poetry, Eluard gave the key to a famous line from Capitale de la douleur: "Je suis belle parce que mon maitre me lave" (I am beautiful because my master bathes me), spoken of a little dog. Upon learning this "secret de fabrication," (secret of manufacture) will the reader find this verse less touching and mysterious?

Returning to Aragon, had not several poems from La Grande Gaîté been dictated by circumstances or events? The Surrealists had not merely challenged "Crachons veux-tu bien / Sur ce que nous avons aimé crachons sur l'amour" (Let us spit if you want / On what we loved together), but once having understood the circumstances,

¹ All these pages were written six months before the death of Breton.
they were no longer shocked by the poem.

Me voici sur mon trente et un
Parait
Que les petits cochons
Les petits cochons
Ne m'ont pas mangé
Allons
Les grands cochons
Me mangeront

Here I am in my thirty-first year
Seemed
That the little pigs
The little pigs
Did not eat me
Let's go
The big pigs
Will eat me

The title of the above poem, "97 / 28," clearly explained the "circumstances." It had been written by Aragon, born in 1897, and so he had just in October, 1928, attained his thirty-first year.

Several months after his rupture with the Surrealists, Aragon purposely published under the title Aux enfants Rouges, (Bibliothèque Antireligieuse, 1932), a series of quatrains "de circonstance" (from circumstance). One of them said:

C'est rue Lafayette, au 120
Qu'à l'assaut des patrons résisté
Le vaillant Parti communiste
Qui défend ton père et ton pain
Lafayette Street, at No. 120
Resists the assault from the employers
The valiant Communist Party
Defends your father and your bread

A historian studying this poem today could cite the influence of Maïakovski, whom Aragon admired as early as his Surrealist era, that he had written the poems in order to sell the commercial products of the young Soviet state.

But Aragon in 1927 barely knew the name of Maïakovski and knew nothing of his work which was still untranslated when he had written:

De mon crayon trempé dans le Vittel
Je veux écrire un poème immortel
À la gloire du Petit Beurre LU

With my pen soaked in Vittel
I shall write an immortal poem
To the glory of Petits Beurres LU

These two advertising slogans--already cited--were followed by these four lines:

Ils me rappellent une dame aux yeux bleus
Je pense à elle très longuement
Et ça met un frein à l’inspiration
Du moment

They reminded me of a woman with blue eyes
I think of her longingly
And thus must put a curb to inspiration
For the moment
A generous friendship and the unhappy accidents of my life led us to lose our lodgings, my first wife and I, in 1932, at the Chapelle-Éragny home of this "dame aux yeux bleus" (woman with blue eyes). I often wrote in a dining room where were always placed on the buffet, along with some very beautiful paintings by Chirico and Tanguy (destroyed by the Wehrmacht during the war), several bottles of Vittel and some packages of Petits Beurres LU. While munching on them, I would recite to myself these seven lines entitled "Très mauvais." Their true photographic exactitude made them "vers de circonstance" (lines of circumstance) in the limited sense that Stéphane Mallarmé chose in order to design the poems written by him about pebbles and fans.

Certain poems from Feu de joie (1919) could be considered poèmes de circonstance (poems of circumstance). For example, "Soifs de l'Ouest" which was inspired by the American West, (like the letters from Jacques Vaché) or "Charlot mystique" which recounted with precision the synopsis of a film by Chaplin, The Floorwalker (Charlot chef de rayon, 1919).

But there was no such allusion in this book to contemporary events. "Pur Jeudi," for example, published without a date forty years later would probably be located by annotators in 1924-1925, so much so did this
pre-Dadaist text resemble before its time the automatic writing of dawning Surrealism. In *Feu de joie*, written at Val-de-Grâce in 1917 to the Germany of 1919, in passing through the trenches, all allusion to the war had been isolated, systematically, because "Nous ne voulions à aucun prix avoir figure d'anciens combattants" (At no price did we want to have the old combattants). (L.A.).

The difference between this first collection and the *Mouvement perpétuel* is that public "circumstances" dominate in *La Grande Gaité*. Many of the poems adopt the tone of violent protest against the established order taken by the Surrealists from the War of Rif (1925) and from their manifesto, *La Révolution d'abord et toujours*.

Thus could not the polemic against *La Marche lorraine* date this "portrait" from 1948 but not from 1925:

Rêvé de l'auteur de la Marche lorraine  
Pensé à l'aurore aux Bourgeois de Calais  
Pour l'apéritif lu La Jeune Parque  
Tout l'après-midi fredonné Je cherche  
Après Titine et le soir Le Petit Quinquin  
Je suis M. Faralicq le commissaire bien connue

Dreamed by the author of the Lorraine March  
Thought at daybreak from Bourgeois to
Calais
For an aperitif read La Jeune Parque
All afternoon humming I search
After Titine and the evening Le Petit Quinquin
I am M. Faralicq the well-known commissioner.

If one could feed into a cybernetics machine the index of some thirty or forty thousand lines published since Front Rouge by Aragon, their statistics would establish without a doubt that one is far from always finding a "référence continuelle à des accidents particuliers, aux circonstances de la vie publique" (continual reference to some particular accidents, to circumstances of public life). So, thus would the electronic brain take an allusion to a novel by Elsa Triolet, the words Mille Regrets,¹ in Le Mouvement perpétuel (1924). Cybernetics would also perhaps assign these lines to the post-Hiroshima era:

La Radioactivité, le spectre 743 la Persuation
Elle est pareille au sperme et à la poussière

¹ This title was borrowed by Elsa Triolet from Guillaume Apollinaire, to whom the poem, Un Air embaumé, from Mouvement perpétuel, paid homage.
Radioactivity, the specter 743 the
Persuasion
Is equal to sperm and dust

It would not be remiss in any case to "prouver" (prove)
the date of the Age of Astronauts by this proposal:

Mais tout ce que j'entends en ce monde
est pareil à un bruit de scie
Romeu Lunik hopchet
Entre deux feux qu'on est pris entre
deu fexs

But all that I understand in this world
is equal to a noisy saw
Romeu Lunik hopchet
Between two fires one is caught
between two fires

These six lines date, however, from 1928 and are excerpts
from La Grande Gaîté (Futur antérieur, p. 97 and Ramo
dei Morti, p. 101). There Aragon was "Poète-Prophète"
(Poet-Prophet) certainly by chance.

The circumstance is an essential source for Aragon,
but one would not know how to reduce his poetry to the
single circumstance which inspired him. If it is not
sufficient to have good feelings in order to write good
literature, the worst circumstances (public or private),
could inspire the worst poetry. It is also the desire to

1 It is necessary, for correct understanding, to
read this line "Rome l'unique objet . . ." (Rome the
unique object).
attain the eternal while isolating some "accidents particuliers" (special accidents) of an epoch.

It is not sufficient, surely, to be inspired by the circumstance in order for a poem to be excellent; certain ones from Persécuté Persécuteur and from Hourra l'Oural, are for the author himself questionable. But the resort to public circumstances which, from Homer to Victor Hugo, from Arthur Rimbaud to Guillaume Apollinaire, has not ceased to inspire poets who could give to their verse, sooner (Les Châtiments), or later (Les Mains de Marie-Jeanne) an exceptional public resonance.

Thus was the case with Front Rouge. It was "carried to the foreground of poetical actuality and benefitted from a curiosity in which one could not take advantage of any other poet long ago," observed André Breton in March, 1932.

If all was not defensible in Front Rouge, that Aragon does not love, he was not less a poetical event since he contributed to the determination of the principal evolution in his works and the works of others, as proved by the progress of history, the progress of the history of France, the progress of the history of French poetry.

Historical circumstances had not inspired all the
poems of Persécuté Persécuteur. Lycanthropie contemporaine, for example, appeared to have nothing, or nearly nothing, of "la vie publique" (public life). Besides, if the subject of Mars à Vincennes is the inauguration of the Colonial Exposition, in this month of 1931, the poet often evoked there another thing than the immediate actuality. Having spoken in Troubles saccovanzettiques in August, 1928, he continued:

Les troubles
Expression merveilleuse comme les armures des chevaliers armoricains
Quand Arthur délivrait à chaque pas des reines
Chevelures forêts et vous allures folles des lutins dansant sur les mares

The riots
Marvelous expression like the armor of Amoricain knights
When Arthur freed queens with each step
Forest tresses and you crazy aspect of elves dancing on the ponds

Does not the manner of these four lines lead Aragon to Brocéliande? Further, preceding the investigation of "collage:" Upon opening a Parti Mutuel Urbain, one finds nine lines which announce Le Crève-Cœur and his nuit du Moyen Age:
Nous sommes toujours au temps des lepreux précédés de cliquettes
Nous sommes toujours au temps de l'hérésie albigeoise
On roue encore en Grève
Et le vendredi saint les athées à leur porte
Doivent grillier des harengs pour masquer
L'odeur des viandes qui trahit la démonialité poursuivie
Aux murs du Louvre sont cloués les coeurs des gentilshommes
Qui levèrent les yeux vers des majestés dont la bouche
Etait une églantine

We have always lepers preceded by clanking
We have always the heresy of the Albigeois
They still break upon the wheel in Grève
And on Good Friday the atheists to their door
Must nail the herrings to mask
The odor of meat which betrays the pursuing demonality
To the walls of the Louvre are nailed the hearts of noblemen
Who raised their eyes to the majesty whose mouth
Was an eglantine

The first voyage in the U.S.S.R. had inspired Aragon to create Front Rouge. With his second sojourn in 1932, which lasted six months, he brought back Hourra l'Oural written after a trip to these mountains where Europe ends, and where there was an enormous metallurgy under construction. A shroud of silence buried this collection. During the pre-war period one had to speak
all the less of Aragon as a poet, as he had just taken
his place as a novelist with Les Cloches de Bûle (1933)
and Les Voyageurs de l'impériale. Nevertheless, from
1933 to 1939 Aragon wrote a certain number of poems
that he published in various reviews under his own
name and also under pseudonyms.

In Hourra l'Oural some poetical innovations were
specified, already outlined in some verses of the 1920's
like the return to extravagant rhymes which appeared in
three lines of "Vains regrets d'un temps disparu:"

Là-bas Non plus loin Là-bas Lorsqu'
On vous aura dit qu'aujourd'hui
Cela prend le nom de Sverdlovsk

Over there No farther Over there When
They will have told you today
That takes the name of Sverdlovsk

One finds also in Hourra l'Oural, if not some
sonnets or long poems in alexandrine, then some
quatrains in octosyllables regularly rhymed ("Chanson
pour le Sovkhoze," "Ce que répond le camarade Fidelev," etc.). This search had numerous precedents, less
flaunted. This return to a classic prosody, added to
the writing of two novels, rang like a challenge,
because these two literary forms were condemned by
Surrealism, as belonging to a century already completed.
Puis la vie a tourné sur ses
  talons de songe
  Que d'amis j'ai perdus

Then life turned on its dream talons
That of friends I have lost

Yes, life had turned. At the time of Front Rouge
this communal life, still located on Campagne-Première
Street, was accurately written of later in Elsa Valse
(1942) in the alexandrines "ternaires" (triplets):

Achetée à crédit la machine à écrire
Nous tous les mois dans un bel embarras
On n'avait pas le sou qu'il est de chérir

Tu faisais des bijoux pour la ville et le soir
Tout tournait en collier dans tes mains d'Opéra
Des morceaux de chiffons des morceaux de miroir

J'allais aux marchands de New York et d'ailleurs
De Berlin de Rio de Milan d'Ankara
Ces joyaux faits de rien sous tes doigts orpailleurs

Bought on credit the machine to write
We put every month in a beautiful encumbrance
One had not a sou that is dear to cherish

You made jewels for the city and the night
All turned into a necklace in your hands at the Opera
Pieces of chiffon, pieces of mirror.

I sold the merchants of New York and others from Berlin, from Rio, from Milan, from Ankara. These jewels were made from nothing, under your fingers.

The evolution of Aragon had deprived him of all regular means of support. Elsa had begun to make des colliers beaux comme la gloire (necklaces beautiful like fame and glory), and carrying a black broker’s valise, sold them to the Parisian haut couture and to foreign merchants. In 1933 Aragon had become an "information générale" (general information) journalist (in the slang of the profession 'chiens écrasés' [crushed dogs]), but it was for L’Humanité.

"Que d’amis j’ai perdus" (those friends I have lost), the choice between his old friends and a militant Communist activity had been a torture. Those who think that the years of 1929 and 1930 were "le bon temps" (the good times) can imagine that Surrealism at the time of the "années folles" (mad, foolish years) was a joyous escapade for the young carefree people, mystified or convinced, but always overflowing with warmth and good humor.

The movement which attracted nearly all the best writers of a generation was not a simple literary school.
Even more rigorous in its ethical principles than aesthetics, it managed to impose in many domains a new conception of the world. Each evolution of its doctrine had entailed ruptures and "excommunications," of which André Breton had drawn up the balance-sheet, at the end of 1929, in the Second Manifeste du surréalisme. Artaud, Prévert, Vitrac, Desnos, Leiris, Limbour, Naville, G. Bataille, and twenty others were withdrawn or had been censored. We were left with several "sympathisants" (sympathizers), a dozen "militants" at the beginning of 1930 when the Revolution surréaliste (Surrealist Revolution) changed its title significantly to Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution.

We had been able to believe that these two terms were always dialectically bound. But abruptly the contradictions were apparent. It had been necessary to choose between two conceptions of the "Revolution." This alternative surely posed a "question de vie ou de mort" (life or death question). It did not involve, as had been written in Paillasse fin de "l'Affaire Aragon" (March, 1932), a chantage sentimental inacceptable (unacceptable sentimental blackmail), but a sincere and desperate attempt to conciliate two conceptions considered complementary but not irreducible.

One could ask, like in a Surrealist investigation
of 1925, the question "le suicide est-il une solution?" (is suicide a solution?) during this long drama of one hundred acts. The poems of Aragon neither dragged in exorcism nor condemnations without appeal. It is more to the Surrealists than to the Dadaists that these stanzas from "Yeux et la Mémoire" were directed:

Mais j'aurai beau savoir comme on dit à merveille
Quelles gens mes amis d'alors sont devenus
Rien ne fera jamais que je prête l'oreille
À ce que dira d'eux qui ne les a connus

Je jure qu'au départ c'était comme une eau pure
L'avril escompt-t-il les récoltes d'été
Et nous n'attendions pas du monde je le jure
Plus que la salamandre aux flammes n'eût prêter

But I will have beautiful knowledge like they admirably say
Whatever people my former friends have become
Nothing will ever make me give ear
to what will be said by those who have not known them

I swear that at the end it was like pure water
Does April reckon on the harvests of summer
And we will not await the world I swear it
More than the salamander could impart to the flames

"Les doigts orpailleurs" (the gold-seeking fingers)
of Elsa had left Campagne-Première Street for a two-room
apartment, No. 18, Sourdière Street, furnished with white wooden furniture. At the time of the Popular Front, in Marché-Saint-Honoré Quarter, Aragon published nearly all his work in Ce Soir that he founded and edited with Jean-Richard Bloch from 1937 to September, 1939.

Puis la vie a tourné sur ses talons de rage

Ce qui pourrait se danser quand César suit mal
A pour dévorer les chacals qu'il voudra vous
Mais quel tourvillonne qu' tombeau de Lazare air

Then life revolved on his claws of rage

What follows could be to be danced when Caesar evil
Has for you devoured the jackals that he wanted
But what whirled through to of Lazarus wind the tomb

The time of Crève-Coeur and "Amants séparés" had come which began with the deadly "drôle de guerre" (the phoney war).

On the eve of my mobilization, I had assisted at the meeting where Aragon had announced to the collaborators from Ce Soir the prohibition of the newspaper by the government, and I had asked if we were
never to see it again. Will we not yield tomorrow with all our friends, be in the war, be under the blows of a threatening political repression . . . ?

A furlough, however, permitted me in mid-December, to meet Elsa again when Louis had just left after an escapade in order to rejoin his unit, the 220th R.R.T. at Crouy-sur-Ourcq. He had written three poems in October that Jean Paulhan had published the first of December in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*.

"Vingt ans après," "J'attends ta lettre au crépuscule," "Le temps des mots croisés" are most certainly first love poems which Aragon dedicated to Elsa with "chaque battement de mon cœur" (each beat of my heart). But some who read them during the winter of 1939-1940 discovered there the heartbreak of separation other than those of separated lovers.

Publishing *Les Yeux d'Elsa* in March, 1942, Aragon specified there, at the end of his bibliography, "These poems reflect enough of the unhappiness of the times to be dated better by that than by the exact reference to the month or place."

Later, in 1944, he wrote speaking of the *Musée Grévin* (which dates from 1943): "Not one of these verses could have been written in 42 or in 44. The blow of 1942 was not yet in full force, in 44 hope had taken a
This preciseness must be supported by a review of the events from June to September, 1943, and claims the benefit of explaining the genesis of his verses in these polemic terms: "We live in an age where reigns this strange honest conception that poetry is not from circumstance, that what has been said by Goethe that poetry begins when the circumstance is lost, and that the more one understands a poem, the less poetical it is. That the poetry explained loses its poetical character. Etc. . . ."

In order to understand all the beauty and all the secret resonances of the first poems in Crève-Coeur, written at the end of 1939, it is convenient, therefore, to compare them with the circumstances. In December, 1939, when I had failed to meet with Aragon, he had written "Les Amants séparés" which begins with these lines:

Comme des sourds-muets parlant dans une gare
Leur langage tragique au coeur noir du vacarme
Les amants séparés font des gestes hagards
Dans le silence blanc de l'hiver et des armes
Like deaf-mutes speaking in a station
Their tragic language in the black
heart of an uproar
Separated lovers make wild gestures
In the white silence of winter and weapons

One discovers other separations than that of lovers,
in these lines and others. It was not only couples that
the drôle de guerre (the phoney war) had separated.
Those who had assisted at the last meeting of Ce Soir,
dispersed by their mobilization, found themselves
"quelque part en France" (somewhere in France), in the
middle of the unknown, "comme des sourds-muets parlant
dans une gare" (like the deaf-mutes speaking in a station), reduced to silence.

"Dans le silence blanc de l'hiver et des armes"
(in the white silence of winter and weapons), he was
forbidding the soldiers of the Rhine and the Marginot
Line to shoot a single bullet at the Wehrmacht Nazi; but
one war intensified itself on the "front intérieur"
(home front) against the Communists, presented by the
press and the government radio as "les complices et les auxiliaires d'Hitler" (the accomplices and helpers of Hitler).

At the beginning of October, thirty-nine Communist
deputies had been imprisoned in the Santé. If in "Les
Amants séparés" the poet speaks of "lettres tristes à
mourir" (sad letters of death), this was through others because Elsa had learned covertly of the arrest of political friends, or their internment, since the "loi des suspects" (law of suspects) of November 18 permitted without trial "assigner à résidence forcée" (assignment to an enforced residence).

From "Vingt ans après" written October, 1939:

Au vestiaire de l'oubli Mille Latudes
Refont les gestes d'autrefois dans leurs cachots

In the cloakroom of the forgotten Thousand Latudes
The ancient exploits done again in their cells

The poet most certainly speaks here of those who, like him, were mobilized in 1939 as in 1919, but he thinks also of other Latudes, those in the Santé or elsewhere, those of October and those in the foreseeable future. Pierre Georges who had been known since the liberation of Paris as "Colonel Fabian" was tortured in his cell December 9, 1939.

The letters from Elsa, the conversations by word of mouth, the newspapers, the radio had also taught him in October that certain ones, yesterday our brothers, sometimes through a "crise de conscience" (crisis of conscience), but too often for ignoble motives, had
abandoned the cause which under the worst conditions remained ours with a passion which came out in these lines:

Je ne suis pas des leurs puisqu'il faut pour en être
S'arracher à sa peau vivante comme à Bar . . .
Je ne suis pas des leurs puisque la chair humaine
N'est pas comme un gâteau qu'on tranche avec le fer

(Octobre 1939)

I am not with them since it is necessary
To shed one’s living skin like at Bar . . .
I am not with them since human flesh
Is not like a cake that one slices with the iron

(October, 1939)

Without a doubt the "Je ne suis pas des leurs"
(I am not with them) becomes after four stanzas a "Je suis à toi" (I am with you), and the flesh here is first that of lovers. Those who heard "Le Temps des mots croisés" at the Comédie-Française, December 1, 1939, when Madeleine Renaud had the courage, perhaps unconscious, to read this poem, understood it then, above all, as a lament to couples separated by the war.

Nevertheless, the last stanza sounded like a clarion call which said:
Je veille Il se fait tard La nuit
du moyen âge
Couvre d'un manteau noir cet
univers brisé
Peut-être pas pour nous mais
cessera l'orage
Un jour et reviendra le temps
des mots croisés

(Octobre 1939)

I am old It grows late medieval night
Covers with a black coat this
broken universe
Perhaps not for us but the storm
will cease
One day and the crossword puzzle
time will return

(October, 1939)

The "mots croisés" in October, 1940, became the
word "Croisés." The poem "Les Croisés" ended with
these two lines for which all the other stanzas had
been written:

Et blessés à mourir surent
qu'Eleonore
C'était ton nom Liberté Liberté chérie

And wounded to the death knew that
Eleanor
Was your name Liberty dear Liberty

The "nuit du Moyen Age" (night from the Middle
Ages), during this last quarter of 1939, deepened like
a prison. It was evident that the editor of *Ce Soir*
could not at that time legally publish, under his
signature, an article obviously political, where he
would have to state his faithfulness to his cause and
to his ideas.

But Aragon, during these tragic weeks, could not
keep quiet about his convictions even if, in order to
speak in the present indicative, prose was denied him.

"The clear-sightedness of the reader involves
automatically the intervention of the judge and the
politician" had been written in 1932 by four Belgian
Surrealists. They had overrated the intelligence of
some men charged with intellectual repression, above
all, in a troubled period and troubled when "la vache
ne reconnaît plus ses veaux" (the cow no longer knows
her calf).

In the poetical domain "un point de départ
objectif" (a point of objective departure) does not
obligatorily lead to "un point d'arrivée objectif"
(a point of objective arrival). A "sujet passionnant"
(thrilling subject) could be expressed amiably by
enamored passion so that during a somber epoch the
"problème poétique" (poetical problem) could be laid
down in a new fashion.

The profound significance of the verses published
by Aragon during the "drôle de guerre" (the phoney war)
of 1939-1940 escaped censorship, but was fully understood
by many readers, so much the more moved by this poetical
voice which was the only one able to legally make itself heard in the time when reigned "Ô soleil de Minuit" (O sun of Midnight).

For a century, since Nerval, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, the ruling classes considered modern poetry to be as mad and incomprehensible as Impressionism, or later, Cubism. Later Symbolism, Dadaism and Surrealism had contributed to perpetuating this idea that poetry was an unintelligible puzzle for the "bourgeoisie," most certainly, but even more so for the "larges masses" (common masses). Aragon profited, then, as early as 1939, from this circumstance in order to speak to certain readers over and above uncomprehending judges.

We returned to Paris on March 31, 1940, where I spent several days on leave. Eight days later a decree from Serol motivated by "la persistance des menées communistes" (the persistance of Communist schemes) decreed the death penalty for the authors. We had, a little before, Aragon and I, met together with our friend, Leon Moussinac, in fear for him. Already guilty of such "menées" (intrigues), he was arrested April 27, and a cell in the Santé was for him the first station in a long calvary to death.

During our meetings in March and April, Aragon, in order to design the poetical method which would permit
him to make himself understood by many despite censorship, employed the word "contrebande" (contreband or smuggled goods) of which I immediately understood his meaning. Aragon thought for a long time about this "contrebande." He had adopted in Hourra l'Oural and in other poems published in reviews, notably in the Couplets du Beau Monde (1933), a classic prosody with eight-syllable quatrains and with masculine and feminine rhymes, strongly orthodox.

This return to traditional forms was not dictated by defiance, nor by reaction, but by a profound purpose. At the beginning of the 1930's, and above all, after the seizure of power by Hitler in 1933, Aragon had thought that the eventuality of war was imminent and would be directed, one way or another, against the U.S.S.R. It was impossible under these circumstances to forecast that poetry could become a means of "parler à la foule" (speaking to the world), in one way or another. Even on the condition of using regular verses and rhymes most frequently, those to which the common masses are habituated, they still balked at the search of the avant-garde.

This proposal neither excluded the seekers nor the avant-garde completely, but was orientated towards the new forms which became popular in the noble meaning of
this adjective. In 1939 these fears were realised. During the "la drôle de guerre" (the phoney war), this troubled epoch, the trouble was everywhere, above all in the conscience, and many honest people would no longer know "à quel saint se vouer" (to which saint to pray). Aragon, himself, would pray notably to "Santa Espina," in a poem of March, 1940, which began with this quatrain, very regularly counted and rhymed:

Je me souviens d'un air qu'on ne pouvait entendre
Sans que le coeur battît et le sang fût en feu
Sans que le feu reprît comme un coeur sous la cendre
Et l'on savait enfin pourquoi le ciel est bleu

I remember with an air that one could not hear
Unless the heart beat and the blood was on fire
Unless the fire recaptured like a heart under the ashes
And one would finally know why the sky is blue

This "Santa Espina" was a very typical "contrebande." Aragon's message, incomprehensible to many, was strongly directed to those who, in 1937-1938, had heard, in the meetings for the Spanish Republic, the cobla, "La Bisbal," playing a Sardinian air, which carried this title, and which had been
widely broadcast on records.

When Aragon said, "O Sainte Espina 0 Sainte Espina recommence" (O Saint Espina O Saint Espina start anew), he evoked the Spanish anti-Fascists "levés avant le jour" (getting up before daybreak) and was thinking, moreover, of Paris rather than Madrid, as was said also in his conclusion:

> Et l'on verra tomber du front du Fils de l'Homme
> La couronne de sang symbole du malheur
> Et l'Homme chantera tout haut cette
> Si la vie était belle et l'aubépine en fleurs

> And one will see the brow of the Son of Man fall
> The crown of blood symbol of woe
> And the Man will sing aloud this time as
> If his life were beautiful and the hawthorne in flower

A new element surprisingly became evident in "Santa Espina" which could then appear thereafter under the unwonted guise of a "sans-dieu" (godless one), the "Merveilleux chrétien" (Marvelous Christian). The circumstance named it, since this Catalan dance air has Christ's crown of thorns for a theme. He renamed it also, more broadly, since a few months previously numerous Catholics, including priests, were found at the end of the civil war in the ranks of the Frente
Popular, fought against Franco and his Hitler and Mussolini allies. For tomorrow:

rénover la romance
Rendre la voix aux bois chanteurs
qui se sont tus

revive romance
Make the voice of the woods sing
with the voice of the slain

Must it fail to repel by blasphemy the hands which could one day be extended? Consequently, besides pagan and medieval myths, Christian myths became encompassed into the poems of Aragon, during the period of 1939 to 1940, a position which naturally enlarged in the following years so that one could see united in the Résistance:

Celui qui croyait au ciel
celui qui n'y croyait pas

Those who believed in the sky
those who did not

Written in March, 1940, "Santa Espina" remained unpublished until April, 1941. The Hitler offensive of May, 1940, prevented its publication in a review. But for attentive and intelligent ears, the "contrebande" was not less clear than the poems published December 1, 1939, in La Nouvelle Revue Française.
Le Crève-Coeur is necessarily composed of poems written half during the "drôle de guerre" (the phoney war), and half after the armistice of June, 1940. Even those who know these verses almost by heart are likely to make mistakes on their dates. Speaking in 1963 of his film Hamlet, the Soviet Gregori Kozintzev told me that he had wanted, above all, to describe a world of terror and oppression. I asked him if he were acquainted with a poem by Aragon which had used the Elseneur theme in the same manner. As he did not know it, I recited some lines for him from "Romance du temps qu'il fait," adding that being written during the Occupation, these lines denounced Vichy more than Hitler. I committed the same error that certain ones (perhaps myself already) did who, discovering it at the beginning of 1941 in Le Crève-Coeur, simply thought that this poem alluded to Pétain:

Le Roi n'a pas voulu la guerre
Il préfère les tragédies

The King did not want war
He preferred tragedies

stigmatized the "collabos" (collaborators):

Rosenkrantz, Guildenstern, Fantoches
Vous qui tuez pour de l'argent
Celui qui vous fut indulgent
Rosenkrantz, Guildenstern, Fantoches
You who kill for money
Those who were lenient with you

expressed the remote hope of Libération:

Et lui reste sourd aux fanfares
Dont la nuit pourtant se timbra
O trompettes de Fortimbras

And deaf he remains to the fanfares
On which however the night has fallen
0 trumpets of Fortinbrass

"Le temps qu'il fait" (the time of which he spoke)
was, however, that of March, 1940, and not in 1941 as
is witnessed by the bibliography of Crève-Cœur and the
allusions of his lines to Hitler's attack against Norway.

One such error of interpretation is sufficient to prove
that the "contrebande" was already, during the "drôle
de guerre" (the phoney war), a form that one began to
call, in 1940-1941, Résistance. It is for this profound
reason that Le Crève-Cœur was a collection of perfect
homogeneity, one equal spirit inspiring the poems before
and after June, 1940, their "contrebande" constructed
by indirect means against two successive forms of
repression or oppression. This unity also appeared in
two readings of poetical "contrebande" that were La Rime
en 1940 and La Leçon de Riberac (published at the
beginning of June, 1941).
At the beginning of April, 1940, that:

Sur le petit et le grand Belt
La mort passe avec ses amants

On the Small and Great Belt
Death passes with his lovers

the fear, justified, that the German offensive against Denmark and Norway would soon be succeeded by a campaign against France, and would send Aragon and his unit to the Belgian front.

Several days earlier, in Paris, he had informed me that he had for some time been drafted by a light motorized division as chief of a section of stretcher bearers.

At the end of May, I learned that his D.L.M. had, as early as the tenth, dashed across Belgium. Also, at the beginning of June, on the Sommes front near Poix (where by coincidence had unreeled a part of La Semaine sainte), I learned over the radio that the battle of Dunkirk was lost. I did not doubt that Louis would be found taken prisoner in this "poche" (net) and I believed that I would never see him again.

After the great dispersion of the debacle on September 21, 1940, at Carcassone, we were, however, reunited in the small furnished apartment which he
shared with Elsa. She put me up for several nights on a mattress on the floor.

One day in a small restaurant we had as a guest a young unknown (to me). He came from Avignon where he sold supplies for cafes and restaurants. His name was Pierre Seghers.

If I had continued to keep my journal of the war after July, 1940, I would have been very guarded in noting this conversation at noon, these innuendos. Pierre was, as a matter of fact, proposing to Louis that he supervise Poésie 40, the monthly review which had just succeeded Poètes casqués published "aux armées" (with arms) in which had appeared February 20, "Les Amants séparés," then April 20, La Rime en 1940.

The purpose that was assigned to the new review as early as 1940 must have been expressed by Seghers with all necessary prudence in the preface, published under the occupation at the beginning of 1944, and which said:

During these provisional and difficult times we have not ceased to work in order to maintenir. Poésie 44 again thanks her readers and friends who, understanding our difficulties as well as our intentions, give us their encouragement and their confidence.

The use of the verb maintenir constituted a litote. It means résister (to resist) to a reader who can
understand the intentions of Pierre Seghers. Aragon accepted the proposition from Carcassonne. It had touched him very deeply, arriving unexpectedly at the moment when one awaited Hitler's assault against England, when Free France had just seen her landing at Dakar miscarry, when Gringoire wrote:

Communist propaganda reconstitutes itself with other individuals . . .
One must strike at the summit.
Communist agitation must be beheaded in order to deprive it of its chiefs.
(September 26, 1940)

Hundreds of arrests, from Paris and Marseille, will follow soon after this appeal. But one can not imagine that three months after Pétain's armistice, Aragon could reestablish his "liaisons" (contacts). Alone, without any "consigne" (order), he decided the orientation of his poems, the order of their words, his contributions to various publications.

As early as Carcassonne, Aragon had established a plan of "légal" (legal) literary Resistance. His difficult struggle during the "drôle de guerre" (the phoney war) had proved to him that he could continue to express his deepest sentiments through his poems. Under the new conditions created by defeat, the Hitler occupation, the Pétain government, the Gestapo and
Vichy censorship, it had been necessary to organize "légalement" (legally), by the use of poetry, a movement of literary Résistance which would utilize fiction and the contradictions of the "Free Zone" in all types of various publications.

I was very surprised when Aragon handed me the issue of Figaro published the day of our first meeting after Dunkirk, September 21, 1941, and showed me, signed with his name, a short poem, "Les Lilas et les Roses," on which he had made corrections. They were attributable to "tradition orale" (oral tradition). Aragon had read this poem to Jean Paulhan, who had then transcribed it from memory, and had it published by Le Figaro.

In the frightened silence which followed the great catastrophe, these thirty lines were an enormous repercussion in which one finds the echo in the article published about Le Crève-Cœur, at the beginning of 1941, by André Rousseau. The critic from Figaro recognized that these lines had marked the beginning of a "nouvelle floraison poétique" (new poetical flowering), that they were "une sorte de grâce accordée à l'âme de la France" (a sort of grace accorded to the soul of France). The critic also believed that they fixed:
The brilliant minutes of blood and tears when French hearts were able to crystallize their will to have no life except French life.

Following this article several letters from readers accused Le Figaro of "favoriser le propagande communiste" (favoring Communist propaganda); André Rousseau responded that he had not meant to provide "any approbation of political activity which formerly had given Mr. Aragon another activity than literature," but would hold back none of his admiration.

"On nous a dit ce soir que Paris s'est rendu" (they told us tonight that Paris has surrendered), a line from "Lilas et les Roses," now sings in all memories like "L'enfant avait reçu deux balles dans la tête" (the child received two bullets in the head) that had been written in days gone by, directly and simply, by Victor Hugo.

Aragon's phrase made the beginning of the occupation bring tears to the eyes of all like the "Tapisserie de la Peur," "Enfer les Mines," or "Complainte pour l'orgue de la nouvelle Barbarie" which described the debacle, the massacre of civilians by the Messerschmidt, in "La nuit en plein jour du nouveau Walpurgis."

Aragon, who had admired Maiakovski for having been the loud-speaker of the Revolution, had thus been able
to become the loud-speaker of assassinated France when Hitler boots trampled her soil, when Vichy reaped the benefits of defeat. The accused were, however, the "mauvais maîtres" (evil masters), writers and film producers.

In "Richard II 40" the poet replied to these diatribes:

Taisez-vous oiseaux querelleurs
Vos chants sont mis en quarantaine
C'est le règne de l'oiseleur

Shut up you quarreling birds
Your songs are quarantined
It is the reign of the fowler

in order to add immediately:

Il est un temps pour la souffrance
Quand Jeanne vint à Vaucouleurs
Ah coupez en morceaux la France
Le jour avait cette pâleur
Je reste roi de mes douleurs

It is a time for suffering
When Joan came to Vaucouleurs
Ah cut France into pieces
The day had thus a pallor
I remained king of my sorrows

This poem, which called for "bouter" (booting) the foreign armies out of France, had been written at Carcassonne like "Ombres" which attacked Vichy even more directly. Aragon read these poems to me in September.
While the walls of the "Free Zone" were covered with posters proclaiming "Je hais les mensonges qui nous ont fait tant de mal--Phillipe Pétain" (I hate the lies which have caused so much evil--Phillipe Pétain), I heard him say in a loud voice:

Leur sang ressemble au vin des mauvaises années
Ils prétendent avoir mangé trop de mensonges
Ils ont l'air d'avoir égaré la clef des songes

Their blood resembles wine from bad years
They pretend to have eaten too many lies
They appear to have lost the key to dreams

Had they also lost the key to songs? These pure verses were published in Le Crève-Cœur and put on sale without hindrance in all the bookstores at the beginning of April, 1941, in those zones which were occupied or not. This book was all the rage when Gringoire and twenty other journals congratulated Vichy on having "déjoué le complot communiste" (frustrated the Communist plot).

This small thin book of seventy-five pages ended with an essay, La Rime en 1940, a treatise on poetry that completed, at the beginning of 1941, La Leçon de
Ribéراق. In 1940 and 1941 Aragon did not allow himself "aller à écrire" (to write) in prose, except on his own verses. He signed his name B. d'Amberieux on his articles in *Poesie* 41-42 on the artists (Gromaire, Matisse, Lurçat) and those on the other poets as Georges Meyzargue.

*La Rime en 1940* that Seghers had published in *Poètes casqués*, April 20, 1940, (before the defeat and the occupation) was, above all, particularly dedicated, as indicated by his title, to a defense and renewal of rhyme, notably under his "enjambée" form. The essay had another meaning, specified thus in the first paragraph which said:

> Poetry is a scandal to those who are not poets . . . It is not the least of their crimes in the eyes of those who pursue the poets of the Republic, that those who surrender to the confines of thought and song as a pastime baffle practical reason . . .

Disconcerted by "raison pratique" (practical reason) and in order to find the way to express a will of the Resistance in spite of censorship (prematurely) was the design that was specified in these last lines:

> Poetry, the more it rhymes, is a doorway to that which says nothing. A day will come, I am very sure, when that will be clear for everyone,
as today the designs of a Victor Hugo are clear which were ignored by Hugo himself at the time of Nourmahal-la-Rousse, and which nevertheless led him righteously through the battles fought in the potato fields of words to the superhuman rock of Guernesey, without which, or almost without, posterity would not have recognized him.

"Dans le champ de pommes de terre des mots" created a cascade concerning "de" which does not conceal the clear objective that fascinated Aragon, as the example, not of Barrès, but of Hugo. He had chosen Guernesey and the opposition to the official authorities, but the new Châtiments that he began to publish soon made him print them in Belgium and peddle them in his shirt-sleeves. He drafted them in such a fashion that their poetical technique opened a door "sur ce qui ne se dit point" (on what was not said), but which was understood by the watchful reader.

Using this method of "contrebande," La Leçon de Ribérac, written during the occupation, was broadened and made more specific. Aragon found himself in this small city near Périgueux, with the survivors of the 3rd D.L.M., on the day when the defeat was consummated, and when Pétain's shameful armistice was signed.
But it happened that we plunged out of hell, this June 25, 1940, like the Paschal dawn of the year 1300, like Dante and Virgil, and so at Ribérac it could be said of their resemblance: "And there was our exit to see the stars again."

When Périgueux was already occupied by the Wehrmacht, how could one find an "issue pour revoir les étoiles" (exit to see the stars again)? "Or, Dante, dans son 'Purgatoire' a parlé de cet Arnaud Daniel qui fut gentilhomme de Ribérac" (Well, Dante, in his "Purgatoire" spoke of this Arnaud Daniel who was a nobleman from Riberac). This historical reference served Aragon as an exergue to a long erudite essay. It appeared to have reference to the thirteenth century, to the troubadours, to courtly poetry, but the true subject was the poets of 1940 and their works.

Arnaud Daniel was the creator of "Clus Trouver," the closed art, in appearance reserved to a few initiates, but Dante and Petrarch recognized it as their master so that their poems were able to have a direct limpidity. The deviation from the thirteenth century then led Aragon to pose, with Gabriel Audisio, the question "La Poésie pour tous est-elle une utopie" (is poetry for you a utopia)? And he responds:
... can one not see that in the hermetics of contemporary poetry, one will not hold cheaply a simple summons to the poets to have the clearest explanation, but if it is society which is responsible for the development of poetry, it will be necessary to change society in order to change the poets, and not to quarrel with poets, in the naive desire to ameliorate society...

La Leçon de Ribérac, published in Les Yeux d'Elsa, leaned on minstrels and courtly morality in order to give the key of this book, "Here the cult of the woman is in accord with the man's mission to enlighten this errand of truth and justice." After having recalled Giono's formula, "Vivre à plat ventre" (Live on an empty stomach), he opposed Chretien de Troyes and his "Il vaut bien mieux mourir / A honneur, qu'à honte vivre" (He would rather die / For honor than be ashamed to live), after having taken issue with those who said, "that there are some tasks more pressing than the study... of the poets of our twelfth century), after having Perceval and Tristan salute "Le Chevalier vermeil" (The Rose Knight), after having recalled that the minstrels had "for the first object love, and the love of women inaccessible because married to those jealous of their honor," Aragon concluded:
The "clus trouver" (the closed art) permitted poets to sing to their ladies even in the presence of their lord. It was not so closed that other poets could not be, and it has produced for the world great poems which never die.

Becoming the continuator of Arnaud Daniel, the singer of Elsa then counseled the utilization, as he had since September, 1939, of "l'hémétisme de la poésie contemporaine" (the hermetics of contemporary poetry) in order "changer la société" (to change society), in order to secretly continue the struggle against Hitler and the Vichy government.

These remarks were restated in 1942 in "Ce que dit Elsa," speaking occasionally with antiphrasis:

Tu me dis Notre amour s'il inaugure un monde
C'est un monde où l'on aime à parler simplement
Laisse là Lancelot Laisse la Table Ronde
Yseult Viviane Esclarmonde
Qui pour miroir avaient un glaive déformant

Tu me dis Laisse un peu l'orchestre des Tonnerres
Car par le temps qu'il fait il est de pauvres gens
Qui ne pouvant chercher dans les dictionnaires
Aîneraient des mots ordinaires
Qu'ils se puissent tout bas répéter en songeant
You tell me Our love if it inaugurated a world
A world where one loves to speak simply
Lead there Lancelot Lead the Round Table
Isolde Vivian Esclarmonde
Who for a mirror had a distorted sword
You tell me Lead a small orchestra from Tonnerres
Because as things were the poor people
Who cannot search in the dictionaries Loved the ordinary words
That they could repeat while dreaming

This advice had already been followed in Les Yeux d'Elga in which the first stanza of "Plus belle que les larmes" had exploded like thunder:

J'empêche en respirant certaines gens de vivre
Je trouble leur sommeil d'on ne sait quel remords
Il paraît qu'en rimant je débouche les cuivres
Et que ça fait un bruit à réveiller les morts

By breathing I prevent some people from living
I trouble the sleep of those who do not know remorse
It seemed that in rhyming I undo the brass
And this makes enough racket to raise the dead

This diatribe had a principal destination: Drieu la Rochelle. La Leçon de Ribérac had been published at
the beginning of June, 1941, in the review, Fontaine, that Max-Pol Fouchet edited at Algeria. At the end of that month, Hitler attacked the Russian L'Emancipation nationale by Doriot, champion of the "Croisade contre le Bolchévisme" (Crusade against Bolshevism), which later published an article by this old friend of Aragon. Speaking of La Leçon de Ribérac, he insinuated that he failed to understand the meaning of the "Chevalier vermeil" (Rose Knight). ¹ At the beginning of 1943, General de Gaulle had to read on Radio-Algiers some lines from "Plus belle que les larmes," a poem which had been published legally for the first time in North Africa under conditions interesting to recall.

In 1942, Admiral Esteva, resident general of Tunisia, in conflict with the German Armistice Commission, searched for a way to turn aside from "réveiller le sentiment patriotique" (the arousal of patriotic sentiment). One intermediary came to see Aragon in Nice, where he was living lawfully with Elsa, to ask him to publish a weekly newspaper at Tunis on various subjects. It would have been difficult, and even dangerous, to oppose this official demand with a

¹ We have published the essence of this text by Drieu la Rochelle. We send the reader to pp. 141-143.
dry and definite refusal. Aragon, therefore, profited from this circumstance by publishing in this Tunisian newspaper, his response to Drieu la Rochelle: "Plus belle que les larmes" that he had just finished. Then he addressed it to the Swiss weekly, Curieux, letting them know that this poem, having already appeared, could be reproduced without fear of sanction by a newspaper sold freely throughout the "non-occupied" zone, as were also Les Yeux d'Elsa and Brocéliande, edited by Albert Béguin at Geneva. While utilizing the Swiss as Voltaire or Diderot did the Dutch, Aragon continued to publish his poems in France in Poésie 40, 41, 42, in Confluences edited at Lyon by René Tavernier and Auguste Anglès, and in L'Arbalète by Marc Barbezat.

One of the noblest songs of the Résistance, which should be recited in the courtyard of the Invalides for the twentieth anniversary of the Liberation, "La Rose et le Réséda," was published, I am positive, for the first time, not at Geneva or London, but legally in a Marseillais daily, without censorship from Vichy and the Gestapo. The Vichy government and the Gestapo understood nothing, duped by "une solide éducation surréaliste" (a solid Surrealist education), but also because they were without communication with the authentic French patriotism of 1942. The same
"contrebande" was used in Algeria where the "pieds-noirs" were in the majority of Pétainist fanatics, but also there was, notably, a group of partisan writers gathered around Max-Pol Fouchet and his review, Fontaine. Aragon naturally did not have a monopoly on poetical "contrebande." Fontaine also published "Liberté" by Paul Eluard. The censors had not read this poem through to the end and had only seen a song of love. Our friend, Eluard, had also utilized Seghers' facilities in the Southern zone and his "l'obscurité poétique" (poetical obscurity) in the occupied zone in order to legally publish his explicit Résistance poems in the collection, Poésie et Vérité, and placed on sale in the Parisian bookstores.

At the end of 1940, Aragon had been able to renew his "liaisons" (contacts), notably through the intermediary, Georges Dudach, who crossed the line of demarcation several times in 1941 in order to bring us the first two, and the only issues of La Pensée libre, that we were entrusted to distribute, Louis from Nice, me from Toulouse. Dudach, shot in May, 1942, by the Germans, served as a guide to Elsa and Aragon when they returned for the first time to an occupied Paris in June, 1941. They crossed the line of demarcation without hindrance but were all three arrested about one
kilometer from there by a German patrol. This patrol had been recently put in action because three days earlier, June 22, Hitler had attacked the U.S.S.R. The prisoners were interned at Tours, in the cavalry barracks, Borgnis-Desbordes. Aragon wrote while there, "Richard Coeur de Lion," which was published at Neuchâtel (Switzerland) in March, 1942, and which began with these stanzas:

Si l'univers ressemble à la caserne
A Tours en France où nous sommes reclus
Si l'étranger sillonne nos luzernes
Si le jour aujourd'hui n'en finit plus
Faut-il garder le compte de chaque heure
Hâïr moi qui n'avais jamais hâï
On n'est plus chez soi même dans son coeur
0 mon pays est-ce bien mon pays

If the universe resembles a barracks
At Tours in France where we are secluded
If the stranger ploughs our fields
If the day today is no longer finished
Must it keep the count of each hour
Hate me who had never been hated
One is no longer at home even in his heart
0 my country is it really my country

Freed, by luck, a little after July 14, 1942, Louis and Elsa met with various friends in Paris, notably Edouard Pignon, Danielle Casanova, and Georges Politzer who directed the sector of intellectuals in the occupied zone in the National Front, and Jean
Paulhan, who accepted the leadership with Jacques Decour of a clandestine periodical, Les Lettres françaises, which replaced La Pensée libre. But simultaneously with the printing of his first issue in January, 1942, Decour was arrested by the police along with Politzer, Dudach, and Solomon. They were shot in May, 1942, at Mont Valérien by the Nazis. When the news of their death reached him, Aragon wrote this "Art poétique" which begins with these four lines:

Pour mes amis morts en mai
Et pour eux seuls désormais

Que mes rimes aient le charme
Qu'ont les larmes sur les armes

For my friends shot in May
And for those even now alone

Let my rhymes have charm
Like the tears on the rifles

This poem, also published in Switzerland by Curieux, (August 16, 1942), could circulate legally in the "zone libre" (free zone). If one ignored the shots of May, 1941, one could believe that Aragon questioned the deaths of May, 1940. In order to explain how the hostages from Châteaubriant died in October, 1941, Aragon had drafted a report that we had spread clandestinely and which was soon read over the radio
from London, Brazil, Canada, etc. But he praised "légalemente" (legally) in Brocéliande, (Neuchâtel, December, 1942), a martyr from Mont Valérien and several other friends shot by the Nazis or guillotined by Vichy.

I hear you voices from the victims . . .

You are whom I have believed
No I have not lost the memory of you
iron archer [Timbaud]
Who with a single word can get out of it all one regret
From you no man slandered who aimed at life
Your bright eyes like a pointsman approach
I have lost neither the memory of your philosophy nor caroty hair
Nor yours before age whitened it from having pooh-poohed sleep
Nor the memory of those who sang like a swan
And seemed to be a prince made of this Phoenician clay
Who had never since antiquity found the secret of finesse
Do I know that one day like you I will die but all this
Worth only for you and me companions of my war with me fallen in route

Aragon read these lines to me at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon at the beginning of summer. He spent several weeks there near Pierre Seghers and finished Brocéliande, begun at Nice. This summer of 1942 was exceptionally dry, a circumstance which furnished Aragon with the initial theme of his "prière pour faire pleuvoir" (prayer for rain), then of "la fausse pluie qui tomba sur une ville de pierre" (false rain which fell on a stone city) where one finds these lines:

Voici le nuage

Il arrivait de l'horizon fatigué
comme un oeil d'insomnie
Il arrivait pas plus gros qu'une mouche
Il arrivait comme un pâte d'encre
une image de la persistance retiniennede les paupières...
Il arrivait sur nous à la façon des anaglyphes
Here is the mist

It arrived on the horizon fatigued
like an insomniac eye
It arrived not any larger than a fly
It arrived like a cloud of ink an
image of retinal persistance
under the eyelids . . .
It arrived on us like an anaglyphes

Since the time of Dada and Surrealism, Aragon
kept, and always kept, the care to place on himself,
poetically, "Le bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire"
by introducing into his verse, with everyday words,
the most "vulgaires" (common) expressions, and a
technical and scientific vocabulary, without excluding
the most carefully researched words and mythological or
historical allusions.

The poem, "Nymphée," caused the suspension of the
review, Confluences, in August, 1942. Alerted by the
most obvious allusions, Pétain's censors had consulted
the encyclopedia and learned that Nymphée was the old
name of Kertch, in the Crimea, where the Soviet troops
had just surrendered to Hitler's soldiers. The German
newsreels had shown atrocities committed during this
combat. This discovery merited a letter to René
Tavernier, editor of Confluences, to Max-Fol Fouchet,
editor of Fontaine, and to Seghers in which the Pétainist
Marion informed them that these "coups d'oeil complices
au lecteur averti" (glimpses accessible to the informed reader) "s'ils échappent aux censeurs locaux n'en sont pas moins notés à Vichy" (if they escaped from local censors are not less noted by Vichy).

To those who will reproach me for having borrowed, Aragon had written in 1945 speaking of Brocéliande, from the old Celtic traditions, from the stale old story of Merlin the Magician or from the Druid nonsense of Belleton's fountain, the decor of these thoughts will haunt our terrible night; to those who will reproach me for having made my flag from realism, for not having been the lyric photograph of the years of German tyranny in France, I will respond that he has forgotten the existence of the censor, but I will not be confined or limited.

The recourse to medieval epopees had already been indicated by Aragon in La Leçon de Ribérac. He had read the text to Georges Politzer during their clandestine interview. The "philosophe aux cheveux roux" (philosopher with the carroty hair) approved the use of myths in order to "make the French understand, but not the Germans and their assistants" like the opposition "to the racial myths of the nation's images." And he added that "it seemed necessary to him that one deepened the theme of heroes, French heroes, those who sit at the Round Table with the finest partisans of 1940, from
Gawain to Charles Debarge" (who formed the first
groups of anti-Hitler fighters in the mines of the
North in 1940).

And so the recourse to chivalric romances did not
diminish in the poems during the period of 1941 and
1942 (and their sequels) on a convenient pretext;
instead it has become an essential element of the text.

Some time before 1939, Aragon was already
interested in Chrétien de Troyes. The Paysan de Paris,
turned up again in the Southern zone, took a deep
interest in the troubadours and their epics in the
southern Loire dialects, but not just to mask some
"contrebande" as metaphors. This poet of love and Elsa
searched again in their songs from Toulon and Provence,
for the origions of Love, a sentiment "inventé"
invented in the twelfth century, as noted by Frédéric
Engles.

A true poet, in spite of himself and against all
logic, sometimes finds himself to be a prophet. Those
who knew Brocéliande only in its original edition, dated
December 30, 1942, having understood that "la prière
pour faire pleuvoir" (the rain prayer) named an Allied
disembarkment, next imagined that "La fausse pluie"
(the false rain) which succeeded it, is a description
of that November 11, 1942, when, after the Allied
disembarkment from Algiers, the non-occupied zone was invaded by troops "vert de gris" (green troops). Did not the fourth song end with these lines:

Qui parlait de grêle tout à l'heure
La grêle n'a pas cette couleur
Je vous dis qu'en Egypte on appelait cela des sauterelles

Who spoke of hailstorms every hour
Hailstorms do not have this anger
I mean in Egypt they called them locusts

Nice was not occupied by "sauterelles" (locusts), but by Italian troops, less dangerous. Just the same, Aragon and Elsa left their miniscule apartment, facing the Bay of Angels, on the last train from Digne for a destination then unknown to me, in the high mountains.

Several weeks later, I ceased to be employed on the railroad at Toulouse and began to work "à plein temps" (full time) for the Résistance. They gave me a rendez-vous at Lyon, at the Pierre-Seize platform. I found there an old friend, Georges Maranne, director of the National Front, Southern Zone, who had a long mustache like Vercingétorix matching his bicycle handlebars and with metallic clips holding back his striped trousers. He told me, "You have been designated 'triangle directeur' (triangle director) of the
intellectuals in the former non-occupied zone. I am going to introduce you to the two comrades with whom you will work."

We changed streetcars several times, following the rules of the underground, in order to arrive beyond Monplaisir and the Lumière factories, at the other end of Lyon. In a small deserted street, we found the two expected friends. That day I did not recognize Ternet, our "technique," who had dyed his hair after his recent escape, but I threw myself joyously into the arms of the other thief, Louis, who kept his face and "his extremely grey hair which became him well because it accentuated his Diderot and thirteenth century air" hidden. I had already noted this resemblance in April, 1940.

The long conversation of the "triangle" continued for a long time in the deserted streets where we were walking. And so, violating an elementary rule of the underground, Aragon led me to his retreat in Monchat, two attic rooms, where he was lodged with Elsa, close to René Tavernier and next to the editor's office of the review, Confluences.

I was later commissioned that day to travel for the National Committee of Writers and other national committees of intellectuals (physicians, journalists,
professors, lawyers, etc.) who, in liason with our "triangle," were then being established in the Southern zone.

My ramblings often led me to Lyon, and under the garrets of this villa at Monchat, Elsa had me read the manuscript of his Cheval blanc, then from Amants d'Avignon, and also from Le Conscrit des cent villages which Aragon wrote to the glory of those who formed the underground.

In a small square of Montchat which dominated Lyon, he made me weep while reading to me "Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux." I found this poem atrociously heartbreaking and begged him (very strongly and in vain) never to publish it.

It was also while in this district that we learned of the existence of Auschwitz and the deaths of our friends, Danièle Casanova and Maïe Politzer in that camp. At the beginning of August, Aragon and Elsa, at that moment, were on the point of departing illegally for Paris. In the train on his knees, Louis added more to the great poem that he thought to conclude with these eight lines:

Hélas les terribles semaines
Enflammant ce long été
Cela dure trop écoutez
On dit que Danièle et que Maïe
Ah déféront-ils maille à maille
Notre douce France emportée

Alas the terrible seedings
Bloody this long summer
That last too long listen
They say Danièle and Maïe
Ah will they remove bit by bit
Our sweet fiery France

The poem, "Le Musée Grévin," which Aragon began
at Lyon in June, continued to be written at Drôme.
Judging rightly their retreat in Montchat to be unsafe,
Aragon and Elsa left it on the first of July for a
sanctuary, a small house in the village of Saint-Donat.
I was the only one to know its whereabouts for a very
long time.

The times of illegality had come for his poems.
It was not a question during 1943 or 1944 of publishing
legally, this was in Switzerland, some verses which
named names: Laval, Pétain and Auschwitz.

We took our first steps into illegal issues by
distributing a small typewritten bulletin, named Les
Étoiles, written by Louis, because following the rules
of the underground, the intellectuals organized into
"groupes de cinq" (groups of five), which were rigorously
partitioned. They asked each reader to retype this
bulletin with four carbons in order to circulate five
new copies, and so on, following the method of the
"boule de neige" (snowball), already employed for *Les Martyrs de Châteaubriant*.

When our "technique" spoke to us of a possible clandestine printing establishment, Aragon, scoured Montchat, searching hard for long hours for a publishing house in order to establish "la Bibliothèque française." One of the first pamphlets which bore the name of this firm was *Le Musée Grévin*, published with a paper cover painted yellow and white, done by a printer from Saint-Flour "contacté" (contacted) by Paul Eluard and Ternet. *Le Silence de la mer*, signed François la Colère, was soon after re-edited by the Editions de Minuit. We distributed the publications throughout the Southern zone, *Le Silence de la mer* being the first one.

La Bibliothèque française was supposed to publish, among others, the following slim pamphlets: *Sept poèmes d'amour en guerre* by Jean du Haut (Paul Eluard), *Yvette* by Laurent Daniel (Elsa Triolet) and, from François la Colère, *Neuf Chansons interdites* and *La Façon de vivre et de mourir de Gabriel Péri*.

In the last tract one could read for the first time in print the phrase written by Gabriel before leaving for the place of execution: "Je vais tout à l'heure préparer des lendemains qui chantent" (I go in a few minutes to prepare some tomorrows for those who sing).
Perhaps before singing of the days of the Libération, these words were already becoming famous, like "La Ballade de celui qui chanta dans les supplices" (signed Jacques Destaing and no longer François la Colère). I was far from being the only one commissioned to travel, in order to hawk, through the principal cities of France in the north as in the south, poems printed or typewritten, which circulated afterwards through hundreds of hands . . . The humble "boule de neige" (snowball) engendered streams, then torrents . . . Soon a large river flooded the entire country.

Never since the time of Romanticism, had poetry conquered as vast a public as during these last months of the Occupation. Speaking of the French and the poems born from the Résistance, the American weekly, Life, wrote at that time: "The torture wrung masterpieces from them." This created perhaps an echo to these lines from "En français dans le texte" (published in 1943 at Neuchâtel, Switzerland):

Au cri de France jamais tu
Que l'on torture ou que l'on tue.
A la mort comme à la parade
Et jusqu'aux lèvres des statues
Je reconnaiss mes camarades
Leur cri sera le plus puissant
L'avenir en garde l'accent
To the cry from France never kill
They torture it or they kill it
To the death as to a parade
And even from the lips of statues
I recognized my comrades
Their cry will be the most powerful
The future guards the accent

They recited Résistance poems in the underground, in the prisons, in the torture chambers, in the camps of extermination. Copies fell from Allied airplanes, circulated through the nights of curfew, found their way into the pockets of riflemen before being written on the monuments which would commemorate their sacrifice.

Aragon certainly had not been the only one to create this tidal wave, but he had been one of the first to organize his flood. They would amplify again the tomorrow of the Liberation, when the first volumes of Poètes d'aujourd'hui, prepared under the Occupation, were dedicated to Paul Eluard and the author of Crève-Coeur. Louis Parrot drafted the first one. I would have written the second; I was prevented from doing so by the tasks which would crush me so soon after France rid herself of the Occupiers. I have only now been able to keep my promise "vingt ans après" (twenty years later), and no sooner.

If these hymns, so pure, could burst forth from
the worst conditions of repression, then one can not see the justification of a theory which says that the fetters contributed to the magnification of the talent. The poems of the Résistance would not profit from the constraint; they would protest against it with innuendos that were "legaux" (legal), out loud if they were published clandestinely. They would not speak except in full voice. Ignorant of the bibliographical references, today's reader would not know how to distinguish between "Liberté" (legal) and one of the nine "Poèmes d'amour en guerre" (illegal) by Eluard, nor between "La Rose et le Réséda" (legal) and "La Ballade de celui qui chantait dans les supplices" (illegal) by Aragon.
Rendez-moi mon Paris le Louvre et les Tournelles

This wish accomplished, Aragon returned from Saint-Donat. He was, however, often a voluntary prisoner on Louvre Street where he had undertaken again the direction of Ce Soir and for which he was writing daily editorials.

For example, during that time, one could read "légéalement" (legally) his novel, Aurélien, and his poems of the period from 1939 to 1944. Certain ones of the circumstances of the Liberation, not always happy and easy, which inspired him, like others, were reprinted in Le Nouveau Crève-Coeur.

This collection, published at the end of 1948, did not have the same public resonance as the first; at that time the "guerre froide" (cold war) began to rage. A "chasse aux sorcières" (witch hunt) had not swept France as had happened in the United States; therefore, journals and magazines, for the most part, kept silent about the leftist writers, of whom Aragon was foremost. Some did not abstain from attacking the political poems of Nouveau Crève-Coeur, but they did not allow themselves to cite, for example, Le Chant du Butor, which announced, like Madame Colette in Mes caravanes (1954), the third cycle of his poetical work.
After the war, Aragon was, above all, consecrated to the writing of Communistes, an enormous novel. He recounted there in six volumes, the period from February, 1939 to June, 1940, the debacle of the phoney peace. Gathering documentary evidence with a passionate minutiae about the least details of this deadly epoch, he continued, with so much passion, to collect and read all that had been published on medieval troubadours. He needed their epopees in order to write this epic work of art that he decided to interrupt at the beginning of the 1950's.

During the harsh period of 1948 to 1953, when the cold war attained its climax with the massacred warriors from Korea, the universal fear of an immediate atomic annihilation contributed to misleading, in all countries, some souls who up to that time had been very lucid.

In order that the poet touch afresh an unlimited public, he must await Les Yeux et La Mémoire where the circumstance is more important than in Le Nouveau Crève-Cœur. This book opens his third poetical epoch which is also dominated by Elsa because of the inspiration that she brought him.

Le Crève-Cœur, which bore as a sub-title, Poèmes, Les Yeux et la Mémoire, is defined as a poem (in the singular). His one hundred-sixty pages form a whole
whose dimension is very much "inhabituelle dans la poésie contemporaine" (unusual of contemporary poetry).

Let us give admittance to the word of Aragon who has defined, in a discrete postscript, the genesis of his new work:

This poem has been conceived with the scope of the Cheval roux ou les intentions humaines, a romance by Elsa Triolet which appeared in October, 1953 . . . This romance, before the danger from the disappearance of life that ponders over the land of utilization through the means of annihilation by atomic discoveries, married two opposing themes: that, properly speaking, of the Cheval roux de l'Apocalypse, who is the horse of war and destruction, and those whose intentions humaines, which is also the desire to survive, of infinite progress of the human species, and of his victory at the time over human death, murder, war and over natural death, less foreign, carrying the hardness of our existence for a century and a half, two centuries . . . The multiplicity of rising reflections through the romance, the discussions that these created, led them to develop an unusual fashion in contemporary poetry: the expression of sentiments born from the reading of Cheval roux.

Les Yeux et la Mémoire has most certainly a meaning for the present and the past, but the poem is also a quest for the future, for continued growth. "Chaque mot que je dis appartient à demain." (Each
word that I say belongs to tomorrow.") He arranged them in a series of "sequences" (sequences), this word taken not in the sense of the cinema, but in the ancient meaning, of a "pièce de plain-chant" (plain-song piece).

A long exercise on poetry and life, like the minutiae researched through the sources of the French epopee, has thus led Aragon to write the first song that one could call, "Le Roman d'Elsa," as one formerly said, "Le Roman de la Rose." A romance in the medieval sense was defined by Littré as, "Une narration vraie ou feinte, écrite soit en vers soit en prose" (a narration, true or false, written whether in verse or in prose). In this first song, like in the following from an immense epopee, the prose is a hymn, so that what opens Les Yeux et la Mémoire is:

Mon amour à la fin du monde
Ah qu'au moins ma voix te réponde

My love to the end of the world
Ah at least my voice responds to you

If there he spoke much of Elsa and himself, of their life together and of the flight of time, Les Yeux et la Mémoire is a poem where, according to him, the "côte politique" (political side) dominated. The reference
to the events is direct there, but simply less evident than in certain post-war poems. Having put a final point to his "Miserables" (Miserable Ones) (Les Communistes), the poet has passed a point from where, certainly, all polemics is not excluded.

In this poem where the stanzas of "Comment l'eau devint claire" (how the water becomes clear) proclaim the fidelity of man to his party, to the party that he stayed with for twenty years, he did not deprive himself of specifying the new orientation of his verses or turning in derision from those who would like to reduce literature to a chronicle not from the circumstances taken in their general sense, but from daily newspapers and from his immediate combats, and those who would like to reduce the description to a polemical role:

On m'accuse déjà je ne sais trop comment
De trop aimer les paysages
Est-ce un crime vraiment de dire ce qu'on voit
Partager son amour chanter chercher des rimes . . .

Le paysage Allez je sais ce que l'on dit
Il faut peindre l'histoire il faut peindre la lutte
Et que nous venez-vous en pleine tragédie
Jouer un petit air de flûte
They accuse me already I don't know why
Of too much love for the landscape
Is it a crime truly to say what one sees
To share his love to sing to search for
rhymes . . .

The landscape Go I know what they say
It is necessary to paint history necessary
to paint the struggle
And can you come to us with complete
tragedy
To play a small air on the flute

Whereupon he "plaide pour les rues et les bois
d'aujourd'hui" (pleaded for the streets and woods
today), which before June 19, 1954, did not demonstrate
to him how the Catalonian landscape "les tilleuls
odorants," "le vent de la vallée," "le chèvrefeuille,
"le cri sec des cigales" (the fragrant lime trees, the
wind of the valley, the honeysuckle, the dry cry of
the cicadas) could blend with news learned over the
radio and gave him a profound lyrical resonance, very
different from the announcement made by a speaker or
from a political editorial explaining an event.

The discourse of Yeux et la Mémoire had been in
effect interrupted by a conflict which brought to it a
new tone, a new theme, a new breath.

Le petit poste en galalithe
Dit soudain des mots insolites
Qu'on croyait tombés dans l'oubli
The small radio station in Galalith
Said suddenly in unusual words
That one believed fallen into oblivion

The radio announced that morning, June 19, that
American airplanes, in order to support a coup d'état,
had bombarded Guatemala, causing several deaths before
dawn, one an infant. Louis and Elsa then went to
Amelie-les-Bains on the Spanish frontier "0 pays des
yeux noirs et des ouvriers bleus" (0 country of the black
eyes and raw workmen).

The aggression of June, 1954, reminded the poet of
the military upheaval of July, 1936, which had also been
supported by airplanes and military strangers. His
memory evoked Francisco Ferrer, the coblas (one of them
Santa Espina), Garcia Lorca, the miners of The Asturias.

O si proche et lointaine Espagne
mon souci
Je suis donc revenu pour t'écouter
d'ici . . .
Je suis comme un parent qui te crie
au parloir
Par les grilles des mots insensés
sans savoir
Si l'entendre aujourd'hui te peut
etre donné
A travers les barreaux que sont les
Pyrénées

O so near so far Spain my solicitude
I am then returned so I can listen
to you from here . . .
I am like a parent who cries to you
from the parlor
Through the grills of insensitive words without knowledge
If you understand today you can be given
Across the bars that are the Pyrenees

Spain, Guatemala, Chile (in Le Nouveau Crève-Cœur in the opinion of Romancero de Pablo Neruda): the poetical work of Aragon, it is necessary to insist, is a Chant du Monde (World Song).

Guillaume Apollinaire, who with Hugo is one of the masters to whom Aragon referred the most, had the concern of a geographical unanimity; but, aside from Germany, Belgium and England, he limited himself, above all, to lyrical references. Aragon was always a great traveler. Various countries (Germany, Italy, the U.S.S.R., Spain, England, etc.) have marked different decisive stages in the course of his life. His memory led him very often to these nations and he also alluded to some parts of the world where he had never gone but which had become familiar to him through friendship or through various events.

Another theme deepened with Les Yeux et la Mémoire, that of the flight of time, of age, which becomes:

Le sac lourd à l'échine et le coeur dévasté
Cet impossible choix d'être et d'avoir été
Et la douleur qui laisse une ride
à la bouche

The sack heavy on the spine and the
heart devastated
This impossible choice to be and to
have been
And sorrow which leaves a wrinkle in
the mouth

The unavoidable voyage to old age is a constant in
the parallel works of Elsa and Louis who, as long ago
as 1927, wrote with a raging humor:

Avec son bateau
L'explorateur intrépide
Avait passé le Cap de la Trentaine
A peine eut-il tourné le coin
Qu'il sentit une affreuse odeur aigre
Qui se dégageait de lui-même
Ça commence bien
Dit-il

With his boat
The intrepid explorer
Passed the Cape of Thirty
Hardly had he turned the corner
Than he sensed a shocking bitter odor
Which freed him from himself
So it begins well
Says he

With the passage of years, this theme often became
a confrontation between youth and maturity, between
present and past. The third stanza of Roman inachevé,
a poem of two hundred fifty pages, says:

Sur le Pont Neuf j'ai rencontré
L'ancienne image de moi-même
On the Pont Neuf I have met again
The old image of myself

Presenting in 1956 this second song from "Roman d'Elsa," Aragon, speaking in the third person as he agreed in a "prièr e d'insérer" (request to publish), wrote notably:

Despite its autobiographical nature this poem is more than a "récit-journal" (account-journal) of the memory of the life of the author, a romance which is fatigued . . . One will not find there the political side as in Yeux et la Mémoire or the hours of the Résistance as in La Diane française or Musée Grévin. The private domain, this time, sweeps away the public domain. Even though we have gone through two wars and Surrealism and many strange countries . . . Never more than here, love retains the primary place . . .

This song is very often a cry of sorrow.

The 1950's were years of "révisions déchirantes" (agonizing revisions). The grandeur of Roman inachevé came to him through the process of having expressed this agony aloud.

It is not necessary to confuse sorrow and despair. To acknowledge suffering does not imply here that afterwards it remains only to die since one has bungled his life; as if there were an iternary, individual or
collective, which follows a motorway, well-lighted, guaranteed against all accidents, as if the most elating march ahead would be exempt from contradiction and tragedy. Alas, no! Does one attain the summit with never a stumble? It was not for those who "les drames de l'époque de Stalin" (the tragedy of the epoch of Stalin) once revealed, would consider that it was not their affair, but for those who "jusqu'à aujourd'hui en restent profondément marqués" (until today remained profoundly branded).

"Even if they ignored all," said Aragon to Francis Cremieux, "even if they were innocent in the sense that one could be ignorant of war crimes, if one could be innocent of a war led by one's people, they feel guilty, however, of not having understood."

To those, whether from the left or right, who accused him in this connection of pessimism, the poet responded loud and clear:

Quoi je me suis trompé cent mille fois de route
Vous chantez les vertus négatives du doute
Vous vantez les chemins que la prudence suit
Eh bien j'ai donc perdu ma vie et mes chaussures
Je suis dans le fossé je compte mes blessures
Je n'arriverai pas jusqu'au bout 
de la nuit 
Qu'importe si la nuit à la fin se 
déchire 
Et si l'aube en surgit qui la verra 
blanchir 
Au plus noir du malheur j'entends 
le coq chanter 
Je porte la victoire au coeur de 
mon désastre 
Auriez-vous crevé les yeux de tous 
les astres 
Je porte le soleil dans mon obscurité

How I am deceived one hundred 
thousand times travelling 
You sing the negative virtues of 
doubt 
You vaunt the roads that prudence 
follows 
Ah well I have thus lost my life and 
my slippers 
I am in the grave I count my wounds 
I will not arrive until the end of 
the night 
Of what importance if the night 
destroys itself at the end 
And if the dawn while arising who will 
see it whiten 
More black from unhappiness I hear 
the cock sing 
I wear victory in the heart of my 
disaster 
Have you burst the eyes of all the 
stars 
I wear the sun in my obscurity

To wear on his lute, through an obvious reference, 
the "Soleil noir de la mélancolie" (the black sun of 
melancholy) is thus far from signifying, like in Nerval, 
"Ma seule étoile est morte" (my only star is dead). In 
the course of this long poem passed and repassed the
the whole of one life.

. . . She is before me on
the table
She is like a heart of flesh torn
away panting lamentable a stiff to
the medical students thrown out for
dissection

These are not only "sept épées aux claires
douleurs" (seven swords of bright sorrows) which are
in this panting heart. A thousand wounds reopen under
the eyes of memory because "On vient de loin disait
Paul Vaillant-Couturier" (title of a poem from Yeux et
la Mémoire):

Déjà mes yeux sont pleins de vermine
et de mouches
La nuit emplit déjà mon corps défiguré
Lentement les fourmis ont habité ma
bouche
De mon armure noire envahie par la
froid
Pourrai-je murmurer mon histoire
farouche

Already my eyes are swarming with
vermin and flies
The night already overwhelms my
disfigured corpse
Slowly the ants have inhabited my
mouth
From my black armor overrun with
cold
Could I murmur my grim story

It begins with a difficult childhood, next here
is the first war, his "cheminement maudit" (covered
approach), the first departure from Paris for the army, "ma plaque de fer au poignet" (my iron wristband). Sometimes his courage seemed to fail; but the poet, however, recovered his song, "Allez va-z-y la mécanique, allez va-z-y la mélodie" (Go, as the technique goes, go, so goes the melody). Here are the battlefields, next the Armistice, the Rhine and this song that soon hummed on the radio:

Entre le quartier Hollenzollern
Entre la Sarre et les casernes
Comme les fleurs de la luzerne
Fleurissaient les seins de Lola

Among the Hollenzollern district
Among the Sarre and the barracks
Like the alfalfa fields
Bloomed the breasts of Lola

"The words took me by the hand" and then began "The great night of words." Here are the fervent times of Surrealism, the "anger of twenty years," Berlin in 1923 where against the workmen's political meetings "The burden of Schupo was cast off," Eluard leaving "Paris and his life one haggard morning," Desnos "speaking of Nerval on the eve of July 14," on the threshold of a new epoch where "the flag of Abd el-Krim is already raised over Morocco," where a grasp of political conscience begins to assert itself with the Rif War.
Je tombe, je tombe je tombe
Avant d'arriver à ma tombe
Je repasse toute ma vie

I fall, I fall I fall
Before arriving at my tomb
I review all my life

Here are the buses, London, the verses of Lewis Carroll and their fascinating "non-senses," Saint Louis Island, hotel rooms, Amsterdam, Spain under Primo de Rivera, Dieppe the day of Sacco and Vanzetti, the vast world.

Here is Italia mea (my Italy) in the time of the Black Shirts, "nulle part le coeur ne se brise comme à Venise la douleur" (no part of the heart breaks like the sorrow of Venice). After which, in a city "dont les paupières étaient bleues" (whose eyelids were blue), another song soon spread everywhere, "J'ai pris la main d'une éphémère."

Elsa finally appeared in his life and in his poem.

Toi dont les bras ont su barrer
Sa route atroce à ma démence
Et qui m'as montré la contrée
Que la bonté seule ensemmence

Je suis né vraiment de ta lèvre
Ma vie est à partir de toi

You whose arms have known to block
The atrocious road to my madness
And who has shown me the region
That goodness alone sowed
I am truly born from your lips
My life comes from you

Here are the times with Elsa: "Rue Didot les tracts distribués à la Belle Jardinière" (tracts distributed at Belle Jardinière on Didot Street), the sudden revelation of the new world in the yards of Dnieproguess, the scorching flames of Reichstag and, in Paris, the motor buses on February 6, 1934, the worker's demonstration on the ninth, Madrid beseiged during the civil war, the defeat, the Résistance, the death of Pierre Unik, a wandering fugitive in the cold Slovak Mountains.

The tone broke suddenly and became a fatrasie, imitated by Duchamp and Robert Desnos:

Voyons parlons d'autre chose
Il y a des esprits moroses
Des esquimaux des ecchymoses

Let us see let us speak of something different
There are gloomy souls
From Eskimos with ecchymosis

Here let us interrupt this itinerary, let us not make an inventory of all the stations of calvary before we arrive at the conclusion of this long song of various rhythms.
Si la nuque de l'homme est faite
pour la poigne
Du bourreau Si ses bras sont promis
à la croix
Le bonheur existe et j'y crois

If the man's nape of the neck is made
for the sword
Of the headsman If his arms are promised
to the cross
Happiness exists and I believe
in it

"C'est cela que je pense et je ne m'en dédis pas"
(It is what I believe and I do not disown it), Aragon
declared in 1964 to Francis Crémiex, speaking on the
radio the evening when Kennedy was assassinated. He
added:

But, however, this line written in
1956, think about it, is a protest
against what threatens and massacres
happiness. How can one not understand
it? In order to write that there is
no happiness in love, it is naturally
necessary that I have the highest idea
of love, of a love that can not be
paid at the price of inhumanity.

Le Roman inachevé was a reverberation comparable
to that of Crève-Coeur. As in 1941, his verses of 1956
would soon sing in all memories. And not only in
memories. At the end of the 1950's many of Aragon's
poems left the printed pages for the microphones where
Léo Ferré, Jean Ferrat, Léonardi and many others
scrutinized them on the air in their fashion.

"Ce refrain peut paraître un tradéridéra" (this refrain could seem a tradéridéra), had he written it in 1939, in order to add soon after:

C'est que sans croire même au printemps
dès l'automne
J'aurai dit tradéridéra comme personne

Without even believing in spring as early as autumn
I will have to say tradéridéra like anyone

If many of his lays have become songs, this was certainly because they speak to the heart with direct words, but also because Louis and Elsa adore songs. Yesterday, the street and caf'conc', today, the record and the radio.

One evening in the summer of 1934, as we were walking in the deserted streets of the outskirts of Saint-Antoine, where in the silence the loud-speakers sang langourously, he scandalized me by telling me that, after all, Tino Rossi remained associated with the popular taste of an epoch, like the passion for the Tour de France cyclist.

In 1937, both were enthused over Charles Trenet, and in 1962, Johnny Halliday, whom many found in shocking bad taste. That they loved Armstrong or
Sophia Tucker, their jazz tunes and their blues, one could overlook, but these French montebanks, these "fleurs bleues" (blue flowers). Phew!

In 1944, when the southwest was liberated, Aragon summoned me, with all urgency, to Toulouse to make arrangements for our friend, Colonel Vincent (F.F.I.), to leave immediately for Périgord. Colonel Vincent was to go there in order to put out of harm's way, if he needed to, La Joconde and the treasures of the Louvre which were stored in a chateau. Also he wished to assist Maurice Chevalier who had been accused thoughtlessly by Radio-London and whom he feared would be molested, shot even, by the Free Fighters. Vincent succeeded in extremis in preventing them from making away with him.

Yes, they deeply love the song, and the song has returned much to them. Nowadays, on the air-waves nearly every day, we hear Louis praise Elsa in refrains which have visibly influenced song-writers and professional singers, popular interpreters of our times.

It is not necessary to deplore it, but to enjoy, because if, according to Lautréamont, "la poésie doit être faite par tous" (poetry must be made by all), it must also be made, sooner or later, for all. From 1925
to 1930 when the volumes of surrealistic poetry became covered with dust on the shelves of the libraries, not one among us doubted that a day would come when surrealistic poems, like Cubism, would flood the streets through the voice of publicity, as happened after 1945, through the means of reproductions in colors.

One did not then speak of "pocket books," but it was for us certain that, sooner or later, hundreds of thousands of cheap editions of Les Illuminations and Les Chants de Maldoror would be printed while, at the same time, awaiting the time to come for the Najda by Breton, for Capitale de la douleur by Eluard, for Le Paysan de Paris by Aragon. It is certainly not unusual that today Le Roman inachevé has inaugurated a new collection of poetical pocket books.

In his first talk with François Cremieux, Aragon was suddenly irritated when his interlocutor spoke of the epochs of his life.

There has not been before or since Surrealism . . . The Surrealists by no means despised reality . . . It was their merit to have proclaimed the spread of poetical domains, to have restored light to these domains, aimed new projections on men who risked being engulfed in oblivion, negligence, incomprehension, ignorance . . . Who else but the
Surrealists have rendered full justice to Petrus Borel, Xavier Forneret, Alphonse Rabbe, Aloysius Bertrand, Philothée O’Neddy and at the end of Romanticism, Lautréamont? And are we not those who welcomed Jarry and Raymond Roussel? Fantômas, the importance of Fantômas emerged from Surrealism, Surrealism helped put the Facteur Cheval and Douanier Rousseau in their place . . . And not only for those who are French. For example, in the English domain, from the black romance of the eighteenth century (Ann Radcliffe, Mathurin Lewis) to Lewis Carroll, is like going from Hauts de Hurlevent to Peter Ibbetson. In the German domain from Hölderlin to Grabbe, Büchner, Achim d’Arnim. And it is necessary to incorporate the contemporary Americans like e.e. cummings, James Joyce whom we encountered, etc. . . . In this literary reality came to be incorporated reality in the general meaning, the poetical reality.

The quotation is long and the names are very numerous. But must it not allow the poet to get it off his chest, when he speaks of an encyclopedic search begun with Surrealism in which he in no way denied, in which he had never denied, the great discoveries of men and their works, as creations? Without the enthusiastic research of this experimental laboratory, he would not have become what he is, a true poet who "parle à toute la foule" (speaks to the crowd) in order to revive the definition of true film producers
like his friend, Louis Delluc.

In *Les Poètes*, which followed *Roman inachevé*, the song arranged itself in the form of a theater play, but in a deliberately unperformable play in a bizarre form, scandalous even, like those pieces which he wrote during the Dada movement, provocations made to incite riots, tomatoes and rotten eggs.

One sees appearing in these two hundred pages, written in the most varying metres, in octodécasyllabes even, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Baudelaire, Nerval and Maïakovski, Lorca, Apollinaire; but in the course of a long prologue which introduces a "Discours à la première personne," he addresses himself to the people on the road:

Ah je suis bien votre pareil  
Ah je suis bien pareil à vous  
A vous comme les grains de sable  
Comme le sang toujours versé  
Comme les doigts toujours blessés  
Ah je suis bien votre semblable

Ah I am indeed your equal  
Ah I am indeed equal to you  
To you like the grains of sand  
Like the blood always spilt  
Like the fingers always wounded  
Ah I am indeed your match

He concluded:
Et ma vie au bout du compte
Se résume au nom d'Elsa

And my life when all is said and done
Comes down to Elsa's name

Her given name appeared for the first time in his poems with those from Crève-Coeur. But he sings not only of her eyes, hands, hair, body, but also her name, the name of a great French writer. The prose of Bonheur et d'Elsa, the conclusion of Roman inachevé, does not content itself with conjuring up life, their life together, it also copies, poetically, several of his works from "Bonsoir Thérèse" to "Rendez-vous des étrangers." The fourth part of the last song of Poètes is from the writer, Aragon, to the writer, Elsa Triolet, "montre la trame du chant" (shows the thread of song) by explaining to her how he composed one of his poems in rapport with his romance, Le Cheval roux.

The fourth song from Roman d'Elsa entitled "Elsa" is very brief. It contains also a false "pièce en un acte et en prose" in which the two characters say almost nothing, until they interrupt the epilogue crying:

Rideau Rideau
Baissez le rideau avant la révolte de la salle
Le rire les sifflets
Rideau
Curtain Curtain
Shut the curtain before the house revolts
Laughter of cat-calls
Curtain

In "Elsa," like in Le Roman inachevé and Les Poètes, many stanzas must naturally become almost songs, such as:

Nous étions faits pour être libres
Nous étions faits pour être heureux

We were made to be free
We were made to be happy

To analyse the parts of this elegy one after the other from this long song of love, from this lyrical commentary on Elsa Triolet's book, Roses à crédit, would be "devenir empailleur de clair de lune" (to become a taxidermist of moonlight). Let us content ourselves by quoting the end of this quatrain:

Car ceux-là qui vont lire un jour Elsa mes vers
N'y peuvent séparer ton nom de l'univers
Et leur bouche de chair modèle ta statue

Because those who are going to read one day Elsa my verse
Can not separate your name from the universe
And their fleshly mouth models your statue
It opens with a quote from Musladi Saadi, the appointed, like, for example, "Giham Katum, qui veut dire la Dame du Monde" (Giham Katum, which means the Woman of the World). This epigraph is also used to introduce the fifth song of Roman d'Elsa, the strangest and the most fascinating: Le Fou d'Elsa. Speaking to Francis Crémieux of this book which he holds deeply to his heart, Aragon had to say:

The events of the first fifty years of this century made us--finally made us--made me fear I know not what weakness of the spirit of criticism in myself. The war in Algeria. It is not sufficient in order to comprehend these men and their animosity to not become Frenchmen partially, or not at all, summing up in a few generalities, one hundred years of colonization. In any case to hold on there is to hold on to a schema. It is doubtless through the events in North Africa that I understood my ignorance, a lack of culture which was not to me, in other respects, appropriate.

What Frenchman knows the history of Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, the Sudan or simply Moslem Spain? In Spain I entered into this Islamic soul where all was strange to me. Probably because Spain was more a neighbor, geographically and intellectually, so that history had established some links, some bridges which facilitated the passage for me.
About 1925 when Surrealism saluted "l'Orient, Orient vainquer" (the Orient, victorious Orient), Aragon had written in his Philosophie des paratonnerres, "The Spain beyond the mountains which originated in the European state, borrowed from the Arab world and paganism, some elements that the Faustian soul could not assimilate." If he had been writing, therefore, with André Breton, as he had in the project, a Troisième Faust, would he not have turned towards the Orient? In his essay of 1927, after having opposed everyone from Marx to Spengler and Salomon Reinach, he, at any rate, concluded:

What is occidental culture if not a class culture? Yes, it is on the decline. But the decline of the Occident is the decline of the bourgeoisie. With the disappearance of its culture, the modern attempt at deification of an entity will go to rejoin the other saint-sulpiceries (Saint Suspice holidays) . . .

And so the mythical Orient that invoked the Surrealists in order to exorcise the Occident, was not, however, significantly Arabian. On an ideal map of the Surrealistic world, erected in 1929, its countries are reduced to a suitable portion, like Africa; whereas the "îles sauvages" (savage islands) of the Pacific are magnified, North Guinea and the Bismarok Archipelago,
Easter Island, then the extreme Orient.

In 1963 Aragon, no longer certain as he was in 1927, indeed very much to the contrary, decided to throw all Western culture on the nettles of annihilation and oblivion because it was "bourgeoisie." Before turning with passion to Arabian poetry, he had listened with Elsa and me at Lili's home in Moscow in 1930 to Mikhail Svetlov read his poem, "Granada," to us. One could find it again a quarter of a century later in a romance by Elsa, Le Rendez-vous des étrangers.

Aragon enters the Arab world through the port of Granada at the moment when Boabdil, the last of the Abencérages, is going to pass through it. Christopher Columbus discovered a new world in the year of 1492 and certainly this accomplishment established the end of the Middle Ages.

Before publishing this song, one of the longest of all French poems, (425 pages), Aragon threw himself passionately into the study of Arabian civilization, of its poetry, even of its language. Not his erudition, but his profound knowledge surprised the best Arabian intellectuals and the most famous Western students of Arabia, like Jean Berque. This might also perhaps have baffled some Western readers if they had not taken pains to consult the lexicon at the end of the book in
order to learn the meaning of words like azib, cha-ir, djahiliya, ech-chitranj, kibla, gazel, hadith, houssab, moutazilite, sadj or radjab.

In order to learn these words and a thousand more essential things, Aragon employed his "Méthode de connaissance: écrire pour connaître, et communiquer à autrui ce que j'ai appris" (method of understanding: write in order to understand, and communicate to others what I have learned). All his life he read for the research of knowledge and its ramifications with a juvenile fury. After Les Voyageurs de l'impériale or Les Communistes, La Semaine sainte is the evidence that proves he does not fail to pass on "au lecteur ni un bouton de culotte ni un bouton de guêtre des personnages de la Maison du Roi ou de l'armée de Napoléon" (to the reader a trouser button or a legging button from the personnages of the King's House or Napoleon's Army).

He next undertook L'Histoire parallèle, a history of the U.S.S.R. on which he spent three years, studying each military battle and all political conflicts also to the last "bouton de guêtre" (legging button). It is his style to think and to work intellectually, but also physically. When he arrived with Elsa for the first time in 1951 in his garden at Seine-et-Oise, he found himself faced, not with a park, but a marshy jungle
where, pretended he, were returned with other game, the beavers of Bièvre, a breed that I believed extinct. He could have stepped in with bulldozers, but preferred to use the pick, the rake, the scythe, the spade, and the shovel. Aragon burned the brush at the risk of perishing there himself, and did not rest until he reestablished the old canalization, drained the marsh, and destroyed the nettles and brambles. He did not rest until the day when welcoming groves and flowering meadows crossed with sanded walkways were spread out for Elsa at the foot of two two-century old beech trees. He is like that; he always listens in order to learn by thoroughly clearing the spirit as the land.

In 1923, Aragon had made a visit to Maurice Barrès. He had always disapproved of Barrès' attitude, but he continued to admire his style and faultless language. And so the famous writer "murmured less for me than for the mask of Paschal with which he was brought vis-à-vis: 'It is certainly the first time I encountered a defense of Boabdil.'"

Aragon kept this "pari de Pascal" (Paschal bet), splendidly, forty years later. By referring himself to actual history and not to its misrepresentations, he showed Mohammed XI, not like a Rey chico, or like a small evil gamin who, according to Barres, "adonné à on
ne sait quelles voluptés" (addicted to one knows not what voluptuousness), but as he was, a hero of Islam, who died seventy years ago in Morocco in a fight against the Spaniards. He was a hero with whom Aragon could, more or less, identify from time to time without, however, "avoir aucun trait commun avec le personnage historique" (having any trait in common with the historical personnage).

At the moment when Aragon plunged himself into the study of Islam, the chance of a progress parallel to his was made as I penetrated, very superficially, into the Arabian world through the means of my specialty: the cinema. During the preparation of the history of the Egyptian cinema I found several adaptations of Medjnoûn et Leïla, a pre-Islamic Bedouin legend, which inspired numerous poems across the centuries.

Thus was I led to rectify one of my numerous errors. On the faith of bits of information coming, however, from Cairo, I had in 1952 characterized a film by Kamal Selim (who died in 1946), Shodaa el Kaharam (1945), as an adaptation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Now today I am certain that this Egyptian film director, the best in forty years, was inspired by Medjnoûn et Leïla and contented himself with a few allusions to the Shakespearian tragedy whose source might well be
beyond mediaeval Italy to pre-Islamic Arabia.

Is it not in any case the epic literature of the troubadours, the search for the origins of courtly love which led Aragon to Granada near Boabdil? His approach was above all of a "tendance humaniste" (humanist bent). Having ascertained his lack of knowledge, Aragon searched passionately for learning along a great current which has greatly enlarged since 1950 with the most varied people struggling for their liberty. These people tend to "désoccidentaliser" (de-Westernize) the culture, to no longer keep it the exclusive lot of the West, to finally look over the frontiers of Europe and the Djebel Al Tariq that we call Gibraltar.

Medjnoûn, which means the Mad One, the possessed, is the nickname of Amerite Keïs an-Nadjî, a poet in love with Leïla. The title chosen by Aragon, Le Fou d'Elsa, is a quasi-translation of Medjnoûn et Leïla. The visionary poet of Granada was called Keïs Ibn Amir an-Nadjî, like the pre-Islamic poet; it is not the Leïla of the past of whom he sings, but Elsa, or rather Elsa of the future. In order to study this thick book and its infinite riches, and it requires a very thick book, and for a non-Arabist, it would require several years of study. But poetry is not a scientific total,
but rather it is composed of a "raccourci qui contient en lui toutes les possibilités, les ramifications de sa connaissance" (an abstract which comprises in itself all the possibilities, the ramifications of knowledge).

Poetry is indeed a way of knowledge, and can touch the heart without explaining its references. One looks for the beauty of "la fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé" (the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaé) without knowing anything of mythological genealogies; one is moved by "Rends-moi le Pausilippe ou la mer d'Italie" (Render to me the Pausilippe or the Italian Sea) without knowing anything of geography. The explications may come after, not before, for example, the professedly pedantic prig for whom the rose is first stamen, pistil, etc. Is it therefore necessary to know all the history of Granada and the Arab world in order to be touched by these lines:

Aussi les avez-vous vu jeter
la pierre au vieux chanteur des rues
Le fou le faux Keï's Ibn-Amir
an-Nadjî qui donne au mot amour un sens tout autre que le leur
Eux qui professent qu'on piétine
la fleur respirée afin qu'elle ne se fane point
Also have you seen them throw the stone at the old street singer
The mad the false Keis Ibn-Amir an-Nadjdi who gives a love word another meaning than they
Those who declare that they who trample the breathing flower finally ted not at all

They do not believe, although possessed by the need to contradict us, that we definitely affirm that poetry is so much more beautiful when it is incomprehensible. We mean rather to say that in order to be truly understood, it must first speak from the heart. The rest comes later. When one has been profoundly moved, one can then search for the why and how.

Yes, prose is like the cinema. A film, if it carries you in its flood of life and emotion, has all the chances of being excellent. Its technical qualities will only become apparent on the second or third viewing when you will have a cooler head. But if, as was said one day by Jean Renoir, one says endlessly to himself during the showing: "Ah, the marvelous movement of pomp, the perfect centring, the splendid elegance of the costumes and decor, the ingenuity of the scenario, etc.," then one could be sure of one thing: the film is mediocre.
Thus one allows oneself at first to be transported in *Le Fou d'Elsa* by "Du fond de la nuit" without knowing that it is a *gazel*, a Persian or Turkish poem. There is no longer any need to know before the first reading that a *zadjal* is a popular Andalusian form of Arabian poetry which precluded courtly love of the troubadours in order to be moved by:

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Celui qui meurt même à la douleur
A qui sans toi le monde est leurre
Et ne retient que les couleurs
Il lui suffit qu'il t'ait nommée

Heureux celui qui meurt d'aimer
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Those who die even of sorrow
Without you the world is an allurement
And retains only your anger
It suffices him that he was named for you

Happy are those who die from love

But the pleasure is enjoyed more if one discovers the source of the pure water, the *charti'* behind the familiar fig tree, the *foundouk* at the Spanish hostel. Poetry, in order to be truly a way of knowledge, must first speak to the soul, the intelligent thought appearing after having been excited by the resonance of song. Otherwise only execrable didactic poetry is created.
If I had written this essay in 1944, I would have been left only with a splendid prologue and I would not have been able to foresee how and to what extent Aragon's universe was going to enlarge and multiply after 1950. Now, in 1966, can I foresee what new poetical continents will be discovered tomorrow by this indefatigable explorer of the world and heart?

A great poet, like the great painters (Titan, Tintoret, Monet), possesses the privilege of always gradually advancing farther and deeper into his work as he becomes older. One will understand a little better the growing breath of Le Roman d'Elsa in song after song by referring to a remark made by Henri Matisse to Aragon in 1942:

He told me: "Well, I guess that I have learned enough now in the sphere of painting to go on to great composition." This was just a few years before his death, when he was a sickly man who lived in bed by necessity and slept little at night. Well, what was the exact age of Matisse? A little more than the age I am now. He was a man around seventy then. When Matisse said that, it seemed so natural. Admirable, but very natural when he said it. Curiously enough, if I consider that now I have a capacity of treating subjects that I could not do when I was younger,
I always recognize in myself a certain skepticism.

Traveling for the Résistance, I met Matisse several times during the period from 1942 to 1944. I remember him at Vence somewhat like God the Father with his white beard, stretched out on the white clouds of his bedsheets, and engraving a linoleum print. While his burin was running, he said to me: "I do something like artistic patinage (skidding)." His hand seemed to me rapid, casual, and detached until the day I viewed his movements as analysed by the camera, in slow motion, so that they then appeared in their harmony like a series of hesitations, decisions, "corrections."

So in spite of his technique of cut and pasted papers, a long illness which continued until his death prevented Henri Matisse from truly coming into his "grande composition" (great composition). Aragon, before reaching his sixty-six years, had been able to surpass him. Which does not exclude his exercises from being "patinage artistique" (artistic skidding), a comparison that does not really matter. Aragon's hand traced then not the arabesque freedoms but wrote, guided and carried by the lucky or unlucky experiences of a long life, stanzas trembling like those of "Voyage
de Hollande" which came to him through reworking the ancient themes, but in order to enlarge and deepen them.

Could one truly find in his work at the beginning of the 1960's, as at the beginning of the 1920's, a frontier separating his poems from his romances (which were also hereafter echoed in those of Elsa's)? The writer who affirms having "jamais fait de différence entre les vers et la prose" (never made the difference between poetry and prose), can only be studied through his designated books like Poèmes et Poésies in the catalogue of his complete works. The sphere of his other works are too multiple, too rich for us to be able to figure them into the anthology which is going to result from "poèmes en prose" (poems in prose) extracted from Voyageurs de l'impériale or from La Semaine sainte. But let us observe, as in days gone by, that Anicet and Feu de joie, Le Fou d'Elsa and La Mise à mort, these two romans (in the two meanings of the word), are truly communicating vessels. This is true not only through the voice of their lyricism, but also through a particular conception of the flowing of time. Certainly the utilization of the "flash-back," or better yet the return into the past like in the cinema and in a number of great literary narratives,
but also the projections into the future like those of H.G. Wells are so that for this poet of Elsa "la femme est l'avenir de l'homme" (the woman is the future of the man).

Also in this fifth song like in the heart-rending Mise à mort, perhaps more poem than romance, one finds an obsession with reflections, with mirrors and their "autre côté" (other side), with projected shadows. Yes, his poems, magnifying themselves, have become romances and his romances, differentiating themselves, vast poems.

And here on my table is his last volume, published in this spring of 1966, the Elégie à Pablo Neruda, where the poet of Chili, says to him:

Ah ce n'est pas le vin qui nait des pieds du peuple
Mon ami mais c'est notre sang
Palpe la nuit palpe la pluie palpe tes pleurs
Nous sommes neige d'or naissant
O poesie

Nous sommes cette sorte atroce de vendange
Nous sommes le chant egorge
Nous sommes cette fin du monde cette danse
De septembre
O pressoir o tambour cruel o pitie de mon ventre
Et pas un vers n'est autre chose que le cri
Ah it is not wine which arises from the feet of the people
My friend but it is our blood
Feel the night feel the rain feel your tears
We are golden snow new-born
O poetry

We are this atrocious vintage
We are the slaughtered song
We are the end of the world this dance
Of September
And not a verse is any different
only the cry

These cries have become those of a people, the cry of the world. The reverberation, the singing, the repetition in echo of the torments, the hopes, the sentiments of a hundred million hearts is not over.

Thus it has become a national song and will become, moreover, an international poetics in those years which will terminate the terrible and fascinating twentieth century. A poetics which will be born, like the other, from Paris and her pavements.
That poetry is scandalous to those who are not poets is what all poets have witnessed, and more than any other, Arthur Rimbaud, who has dominated modern poetry. It is not the least of their crimes, in the eyes of those who would pursue the poets of the Republic, that those who would surrender themselves to the confines of thought and playful song which disconcerts practical reason are like the humble echo of those who believe that the mountain mocks him. I want to speak of rhyme.

That it has been a human invention, an overstepping of expression by itself, and un progrès (an advancement), is undeniable. The extraordinary thing is that a time has come when it is no longer the enemies of poetry, but the poets themselves who condemn it. This natural moment of poetical reflection began with the rhymed witticism of Verlaine:

O qui dira les torts de la Rime
Quel enfant sourd ou quel nègre fou
Nous a forgé ce bijou d'un sou
Qui sonne creux et faux sous la lime?

O who will tell the fault of Rhyme
What dull child or what mad ghost-writer
We conjured up this jewel from a penny
Which rings hollow and false
under the lime?

But in the last fifty years, this dissatisfaction
with rhyme among poets, powerfully aided by the
imitation of the style of Banville which made all of
them an Edmond Rostand of the earth, attained the
negation of its poetical value. However, the point of
view of the Surrealists has peculiar contradictions.
Perhaps the masterpiece of appropriate Surrealistic
poetry must be these "plays on words" that Robert
Desnos, following a vein opened by Marcel Duchamp,
brought to perfection and where all is rhymed, where
the rhyme is taken to its limit, no longer confined
to end-rhymes, but penetrating through the entire
line like in the celebrated couplet:

Gal, amant de la Reine, alla
(tour magnanime),
Galamment de l'arene à la tour
Magne, à Nimes.

This severe criticism of rhyme has otherwise
resulted in its total disappearance in contemporary
poetry. The moment has come to question this subject,
and to search for the reasons for this decline which
affected the poem, but scarcely touched the song.

The distaste for rhyme proved above everything
else that the misuse of words was made into an
objective of pure gymnastics so much so that in the
understanding of most men, rimer (to rhyme), which was
the characteristic of poets, has become, strangely,
the opposite of poetry. Thus it is less so in French,
but not in the other living languages, particularly
where the inflections of tonic accent permit the
unlimited creation of new rhymes. The degeneracy of
French rhyme comes from its fixation, from the fact
that all rhymes are known or seem to be known, and that
nothing new can be invented, and that, in consequence,
to rhyme is always to imitate or to plagiarize, to
recapture the echo weakened from previous verses.

Some poets, at the beginning of the twentieth
century, recognized, with more or less distinctness,
this malady of rhyme and searched for a cure. In order
to speak more grandly, more nobly, Guillaume Apollinaire
endeavored to rejuvenate the rhyme by redefining what
classicists and Romanticists called feminine and
masculine rhymes. Instead of the distinction between
these two types of rhyme made by the presence or absence
of a silent e at the end of the rhymer word, for
Apollinaire feminine rhymes were all the words which
terminate with a pronounced consonant (and thus it was
that the disreputable rhymes that Mallarmé hid in the
body of his verse—Doucement DORT une manDORE—became rhymes rich and allowed), whereas in order to be masculine, rhymes were all those with a vowel or nasal rhyme. Hence the liberty that permitted rhyming between words like exil and malhabile and the disappearance of the Byzantine difference that held between l’oie and loi . . .

All these traditions which are beginning to go in opposite directions from the poets’ experiences like the flowers in the field compared with hothouse flowers show in reality to what degree rhyme is not used. Nevertheless, only the cowardly in heart believe that all has been rhymed and that there is nothing new under the sun which can make it possible to render an unknown sound at the end of the lines. However, scientists have discovered radium, detected helium, iridium, and selenium. And life and history pulverize men in the modern and barbarous crucible. We are now living in 1940. I lift my voice and I say that it is not true that there are no new rhymes, when it is a new world. Moreover, who has brought into the French verses the language of the T.S.F. (telegraph) or that of non-euclidian geometry? Nearly each obstacle with which we collide in this strange war is the country of an unknown and terrible poetry new to the language and
strange. In a universe unknowable through the present ways of science, we touch from a distance through the eccentricity of words, through this method of understanding which is called poetry, and thus this way we have gained for years and years the antagonism of men. And so rhyme recaptures its dignity, because it is the introduction of new things into the old proud language which is its purpose, and that one calls poetry. Thus rhyme ceases to be mockery. Of necessity it partakes of the real world, it becomes the link which binds the things of the song, and makes these things sing. Never perhaps has making these matters sing been a more urgent and noble mission of man than at this hour when it is more profoundly humiliating, more completely degrading than ever. And without a doubt we are many who have a conscience, who have the courage to maintenir (to uphold). Even in these violent times of infamy and scandal, the true human utterance and our orchestra will eclipse the nightingales. At this hour the unreasonable rhyme will become the sole reason. Reconciled with the senses. And full of meaning like a fruit ripened on the vine.

... I cease with my examples, certain of having shown the voice of those who search for new poetical equations, and already I am assured of this wagging of
heads with which it will be accompanied in this spring of 1941. Alfred de Musset, one hundred years ago, protested against the unreasonableness of those who demanded of rhyme a letter of support. He considered them to be enemies of liberty, muzzlers of thought. Manna from heaven would not have been enough to muzzle this dame de pierre who subdued the poet of Nuits, that fault-finder of rhyme! For the last one hundred years, the ignorantine (name of the freres of Saint-Jean-de-Dieu) genre made giant strides, and through a singular reversal of the values of perfectionism of rhyme and technique in today's verse put into service the inexpressible resources of his infinite nuances. Poetry, the more it rhymes, is a doorway to that which says nothing. A day will come, I am very sure, when that will be clear for everyone, as today the designs of a Victor Hugo are clear which were ignored by Hugo himself at the time of Nourmahalla-Rousse, and which nevertheless led him righteously through the battles fought in the potato fields of words to the superhuman rock of Guernesey, without which, or almost without, posterity would not have recognized him.
LA LEÇON DE RIBÉRAC

... it happened that we plunged out of hell, this June 25, 1940, like the Paschal dawn of the year 1300, Dante and Virgil, and so at Ribérac it could be said of their resemblance:

Et là fut notre issue pour revoir les étoiles

And there was our exit to see the stars again

Now, Dante, in his Purgatoire, spoke of this Arnaud Daniel who was a nobleman from Ribérac, and whom they have certainly forgotten ...

... But I will return to Ribérac. There reigned a great disorder of all sorts of people: families just alighting from antique vehicles, one knows not where recruited, with their mattresses on their heads, and who camped there, when not in the barn with the animals; the remains of our division which was only twenty out of every one hundred men who had entered Belgium; some small mysteriously strayed units; groups of workmen in blue; "repliés" (retreats) there on inexplicable orders; gendarmes from the Loire in a large overcrowded car; autos with press-cards on their windshields who carted papers from Messageries Hachette (a printing company).
On top of that, the heat, the green trees, the soldiers who bathed in the Dronne, people in a panic, lost children, women in bright dresses. No, to those who would hold me in the image of Arnaud Daniel, there was not just *l'art fermé* (the closed art), which was this incredible invention of new rules, of disciplines that the poet imposes on himself and varies with each poem, this pattern of rhymes which are not there so much for the sound of one line on top of another because they answer each other after six or eight lines, with a stanza one on top of another, but sometimes at the rate of three per line, two interior rhymes for one end rhyme, or following a variation in their succession which exhausts all the poetic arrangements of one stanza on top of another. No, what enabled me to detach myself from the spirit of Master Arnaud, was that, during a time when my country was divided, and through the language, and in the land, when there had been a king of Paris, and a king of England who kept half of France, and in the North a count of Flanders, in the East a count of Champagne, during a time when my country was still exhausted by the crazy bleeding of the Crusades, which all those before served to replace these enemy princes against the enemies of the nostalgic East, was developed into a poetry which carried farther and higher
than the banners of these princes of French grandeur, and as in the Italy of Virgil and Ovid gave birth to a glory, a new grandeur, which called itself France. I was seized by this idea, when all appeared lost; it gave me courage and confidence in our destiny, and it is for that I will remain forever grateful to Master Arnaud Daniel.

Through him, my soul, my intellect has been completely occupied with this extraordinary period which covers the end of the reign of Louis XII and the first part of the reign of Phillipe Auguste, and that has been called *l'Âge d'or de la littérature française médiévale* (the golden age of French medieval literature).

... It was in the twelfth century that for the first time in poetry appeared the French consciousness, the patriotism of words, which speaks of our country with all the cajolery of love. It was also in this century that the méridionale (southern) inventions attained their grandeur by transforming themselves in the north, in Champagne or in Flanders, so much so that, born in Provence, French poetry in contact with the Celtic imagination gave in Chrétien de Troyes the highest figure of the art of "trouver," the perfect poet, who reunited the grandeur of the novelist with
the strength of the singer. But before coming back to him, I will turn first to courtly morality.

Born in the reign of violence, and in a few years producing an efflorescence without equal, this morality which came indisputably from Provence, was exalted, one knows, in the courts deserted by the Crusaders, around Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughters, Marie of Champagne and Alix of Blois. It was a prodigious reaction to feudal barbarity; it conveyed this trait which was lampooned so much by giving to women their revenge on the morality of their lords, who had been arranging Christianity to suit themselves in order to establish marital hegemony. This unfavorable prejudice, of which I spoke, derived from this courtly morality of which one does not want to remember that in order to sneer at the place given to women was very improperly confused with gynaecocracy or petticoat government which fears society surrounded by neighbors who train themselves in the use of arms . . . .

Courtly morality, then, which is strange, peculiar (replaced in his time and in the cadre of society which gave birth to it) which a Frenchman discredits en masse for what it represents of French prestige, invaded Europe with this enormous new literature at the end of the twelfth century: poetry, the medieval epic and the
French novel. This morality of love is truly the prelude of ideas which will later make France the light of the world. Too often one reduces it to its primary elements, to its first state, just as it was born in Provence, and one doesn't understand that before spreading through Europe it had been renewed, remodeled, amplified in the feudal society of the French north. It carried across Europe a passion for justice, the taste for chivalry, the defense of the weak, the exaltation of spiritual thoughts. And with it, French renown.

To the detractors of courtly civilization, in which they only want to see a petticoat morality, one can put in opposition the famous debut of Perceval, where in the forest, the Innocent, the widow's son, meets other men for the first time, the armed knights. One knows that the mother had wanted to keep her son far from the profession of war, by keeping him in ignorance even about weapons and knighthood. One can imagine, she whose husband had been killed in the last war, swearing to herself: Never that! and advising her friends: Do not allow your children to play with soldiers! From this absurdity we have learned part of the history of the young Perceval, who became the Vermilion Chevalier aux Armes or the Rose Knight. One
can not truly believe that Chrétien shared the sentiments of the widow. But enemy to brutal force, to violence which oppresses, this gives us for the first time in history the lesson of Perceval, and, almost paraphrasing a modern formula, I will summarize it in these words: "A man who does not train himself in the use of arms is indifferent to life," which history has severely confirmed.

Perceval de Chrétien is in several ways different from Richard Wagner's Parsifal (even though it's just the way he loves to kiss the girls). He is the errant knight who protects the women, the feeble ones. Is it not the last expression of individualism when Wagner and Nietzsche come together ideologically, and which gives to Maurice Barrès the occasion of one of his most beautiful reveries ("Le regard sur la prairie" in Du Sang, de la Volupté et de la Mort)? Perceval is the bearer of truth, the giver of justice. He is the highest incarnation of the French people, just as one would want him to be, just as he is when he is worthy of this name. Here the cult of the woman is in accord with the man's mission to enlighten this errand of truth and justice. Is it truly necessary to develop this image so that all French people who are conscious of the history of their country recognize his heroes
foreshadowed in Perceval, even France herself foreshadowed in Perceval? Perceval makes it easier for us to understand our past, but also it is a lesson for the present and the future.

They will tell me that there are tasks more pressing than the study of Chrétien de Troyes and the poets of our twelfth century, and with no difficulty I will agree with them. The same people will tell me that they are perhaps alarmed from seeing me give the highest praise to Master Arnaud Daniel and to his "clus trouver," the closed art. Without a doubt they, like me, have no faith at all in the efficacy of knowledge, but also, and this, too, without a doubt, have I not reassured them, that will they see in my proposal I know not what flight towards the Middle Ages, what distractions that will be, I am eager to say, a veritable récréance (restoration) of the days when we live (I should write: of the days when we die). Will I say that to keep company with Cligès, Yvain, Lancelot, Perceval or Tristan, seems to me far less likely to distract me from my time, my era (Stendhal, if he had known, perhaps would have also said that it was a time of valour, of unrecognized heroism) than to read the works of André Gide, Drieu la Rochelle or Jean Giono. No doubt in today's heroism, in this profound fidelity,
thousands of living examples which would exempt me from the study of Perceval or Tristan. But can one speak of them today? Assuredly not. It is those whom I salute in Perceval, the Rose Knight. And for those who will tell me: "But l'art fermé (the closed art), let us see! Are you not crazy at this point to disown it?" I will remind them that the art of Master Arnaud had love as his primary objective, and the love of inaccessible ladies who were not suitable for a poor nobleman without a fortune, or clerks who became jugglers. These women always had a husband, and even if he were not necessarily jealous of them, he was always jealous of his honor, and he commanded armed men. The "clus trouver" permitted poets to sing to their ladies even in the presence of their lord. It was not nearly so closed as it was for other poets and it was engendered by the world of great poetry where the air calls us forever . . .

Can the French poets of today draw on this pride necessary to our destiny, and prepare themselves for the days when the new Rose Knight will arise? Then their language, prepared in the laboratories of l'art fermé, "by giving to each word an exaggerated importance," will become clear for everyone and for themselves, and this will be the true French aube (dawn), which knows
no frontiers and will rise so high that one will see
the very ends of the earth.

Author's note:

It seems useful to us to quote here the essence
of an article dedicated by Pierre Drieu La Rochelle to
La Leçon de Ribérac in L'Emancipation nationale on
October 11, 1941, so much the more since Aragon replied
to him through his poem, "Plus belle que les larmes."

Let us place these publications in their historical
context, by recalling several events of 1941: June 1,
published at Algeria, in Fontaine, from La Leçon de
Ribérac; June 22, Hitler attacked U.S.S.R.; August 23,
ordinance from Vichy instituting the death penalty for
"Marxist propagandists;" September 5, departure with
Doriot for the Russian front, in German uniform, in the
ranks of the L.V.F.; September 16, ten hostages shot at
Paris including the "Communist officials," Pitard and
Hajje; September 21-22, court martial (Vichy) condemned
to death, for Communist activities, Woog, A. Guyot and
Cathelas, who will be guillotined; Saturday, October 11,
publication in L'Emancipation nationale (editor Jacques
Doriot) of "Aragon" by Drieu La Rochelle, article
published in full page, illustrated with a photograph
captioned thus: "Scenes of mobilization. One of the
street scenes in which Aragon, with several others, has an overwhelming responsibility;" October 22, the execution of fifty hostages from Châteaubriant, Aragon described the martyr in a clandestine text which has since become famous.

One sees in some literary reviews which shelter the political opposition to Marshal Pétain, and the spirit of war at any price and no matter how, some of our new patriots from the last years busy polishing these foreign arms which have served more to expose the fatherland than to defend it. For example, the arms which sparkle on the small delicate anvil of Aragon.

During the war he ceased to be a patriotic writer, according to the Communist watchword, and has only published with affection some love poems; he has also been a very good military physician, which is good, but that does not give him more rights than others. Since the war he has fallen into a marvelous patriotic tenderness and a profusion of national sentiment. That is also good. Or rather that could be good, on the condition of knowing where that will lead us.

There is, for example, an article seen in No. 4 of the review, Fontaine, entitled "La Leçon de Ribérac ou l'Europe française." The words seem exquisitely literary and impregnated with the purest love of the land. It is an encomium of the French Middle Ages, the great epoch of poetry... But there is an if, there are many ifs.

Aragon extols a strange Middle Ages. A Middle Ages which seems completely in opposition to the Middle Ages, a
Middle Ages taken according to the Marxist behavior in a dialectical movement so rapid that it is already beyond even him... Next Aragon is going to explicate that this morality [courtly] "is a prodigious reaction to the feudal barbarity." Further he draws attention to Montherlant who believes there exist "some very singular differences between the Christian morality and courtly morality." Aragon seems to ignore that the poetry of the troubadours was a poetry of double meaning, secretly religious, and which conveyed the doctrines of the Albigenses with all the symbols of platonic love...

One asks himself if Mr. Gustave Cohen is not more agreeable to Aragon than to Chrétien de Troyes; in any case, he thanks him for introducing a Chrétien de Troyes who is a wee bit Communistic. "The textile workers make their first appearance in French poetry... A curious tableau of proletarian misery and superfluous industry." Here behind the warm praise of the Middle Ages we see the Communist already reappearing. And not just any sort of Communist, but the militaristic and belligerent Communist of 1935-1939...

In order for this patriotism to be experienced, the question is not of France as an end, but of France as a means. All this indignation, all this compassion for dignity, all these hints that Aragon propagates in literary reviews in order to resist and to harden, are not in the service of France, for which he seems to advocate an exclusive and fanatical adoration. Here is in effect the last words of the article:

"Can the poets... prepare themselves for the time when the new Rose Knight will arise... This
will be the true French aube (dawn), which knows no frontiers and will rise so high that one will see the very ends of the earth." They will see it from Moscow, certainly, this dawn which knows no frontiers. And this rose knight seems to me rather a red knight.

Aragon remained the great imitator that he has always been, the perverse imitator who corrupted all values as he plundered and transformed them into his counterfeit coin, his Russian money and his Russian philosophy, from unrepentant internationalist so that the tremolos on "my country" are only second-hand tricks of literary ninnies.

Pierre Drieu La Rochelle
Preface to *Yeux d'Elsa*

The desire to defend what I have written from unjust criticism is not what guides me here, but rather the solicitude of placing in the great movement of French poetry these verses that I publish, having made them my best. I also want to indicate how far I am from sharing the views of those who do not want this great movement considering that it is in the last stage, and who will easily reproach me I know not for what backward return, what return to an earlier poetry . . . and here with variable literary taste, rank the name from modern Malherbe to one that I will choose.¹ I have too profoundly, and from the better part of myself, participated in the current of contemporary poetry in order to accept that, for the moment, I do not restrain myself to these transitory forms, but endeavor to pursue them, and rich with all the French heritage of the centuries, this experience with divine language. One assimilates this passionate quest born of the need to succeed like others, but which is strange to me. Nothing could be farther from

¹ Rimbaud, Viély-Griffin, Apollinaire or Tzara.
the romantic school, in other words, than what I had
undertaken in these last few years. If my plan
succeeds, one will be able to read "Pour un chant
national" or this part of Cantique à Elsa which
carries the sub-title Ce que dit Elsa. Will perhaps
they understand that my solicitude is greater than
that ascribed to me; and that however far from my
goal I might be, I have endeavored, in the dramatic
states of poetry and the modern world, to give body
to this errant voice, to embody French poetry into
the immense martyred French flesh?

I will keep repeating that in no way is there on
my part the desire to eclipse the poetry that exists,
or the poet who exists; and that I deeply love my
country so that in no way would I not cherish her poets.
I recognize the merits of poetic luck or accident,
still too badly understood and too often discredited.
I attest that they have been invaluable to me, and I
challenge those who would like to amputate the most
foolish dreams in the history of our poetry: they
would kill it in its entirety. But it is on the side
where my voice is likely to become lost that they are
accustomed to quote a phrase from Isidore Ducasse:
"la poésie doit être faite par tous" (poetry must be
made by all). An admirable phrase, and easily divested
of its meaning. In these times when France unites us, 0 poets, France then gives us the measure of this "faite par tous" (made by all), and that, like France, true poetry must be made by all, from the depths of our unhappiness. Let us be the voice which leaves this orchestra of fables, and sing.

Ah, let us sing . . .

In Virgil's meaning I say I sing when I am saying.

Arma virumque cano . . .

"I sing of arms and the man . . . ," thus begins the Aeneid, thus must begin all poetry. I have written and published this book in order to dissipate the benevolent confusion that has been maintained around Crève-Coeur. "I sing of the man and his arms . . ." and in this meaning, yes, I am singing, and I am ready to recapture for our times and my country this program which begins with the Roman epoch, and I have not minted my language for nothing else, for nothing else than to prepare this singing instrument . . . I sing of the man and his arms, and you who find that I am singing them badly, I pray you, sing them better! A great tournament is open, and I am ready to crown the victor, because, in French poetry, the victor will always be France. I sing of the man and his arms--
now is not the time, and it is useless today to ask ourselves as, with my former friends, I take my turn with others who have been asking themselves for twenty years: why do you write? My response is from Virgil. And my song can not refuse to be; because it is also an arm for the unarmed man, because he is the same man whose reason for being is life. I sing because the tumult is not strong enough to drown my song, and as for tomorrow, they can remove me from this life, but they can not extinguish my song . . .

I hope that a day comes when, regarding our night, people will see a brilliant flame, and what flame can I fan except that which is in me? My love, you are my only acknowledged family, and I see the world through your eyes. You render this universe meaningful to me and give meaning through me to human love, consciousness, sensibility. To all those who in the same manner deny blasphemy and love, and that which I love, if they were powerful enough to annihilate the last spark of this fire of France, I raise before them this small book of paper, this poverty of words, this lost illegible scrawl. And of what importance is that which befalls, if, at the hour of the greatest hatred, I have for one instant shown to this mangled country a face resplendent with love?
When I wrote Brocéliande, the Nazis held the upper hand in my country, and in a fashion not at all mythical. They came to kill, with modern rifles under the shadow of Siegfried and Walhalla, men of flesh and blood who were my friends. These men had previously been tortured, and among them, my dear Georges Politzer, a gentleman, who had correctly denounced the lies of the Hitler myth and its utilization for the dominance of man through the brute. Georges Politzer had just published the admirable lampoon, "Sang et Or" in La Pensee libre, in which the death machines which the hangmen tried to surround their scaffolds were demolished.

I had gone to Paris the preceding year, with my wife, in order to meet with Georges Politzer. For people like us, it was a time when the journey from Nice to Paris strongly resembled an outing into the mythical forests of an Arthurian legend. I can still see, after a thousand adventures, the bizarre house where we disembarked in the suburbs of Paris, and where we waited for those who had called us there without knowing who was going to come. A house with a
romantic garden in a deserted lane, where immense statues still attested to the flight of a sculptor, and in a shed in the garden near the street door, I had discovered in the shadow a plaster head. The head was of Sverdlov, first president of the Council of the Russian People's Commissioners. His strange presence at the hour when the conquerors of Paris howled their next victory against Moscow was enough to make the heart beat fast. I can still see the arrival of Politzer, with his spectacles, and his hair dyed a little more red than had been natural. There was with him a woman, whose name lives among us like an extremely pure song, Danielle Casanova, whom the Germans killed in Silesia. We had to speak of many things and so only a small amount of time could be given to the myths. But the myths spoke to us.

It was very beautiful that day. I had brought Politzer an essay written for the review, Fontaine, and one can find it reprinted in the Swiss edition of Yeux d'Elsa, La Leçon de Ribérac. I was, I swear, anxious about what they would think about this philosophy which never separated thought from action. There is in the Leçon de Ribérac an attempt to reclaim our heritage both from history and legend, which could, notwithstanding the notes that prudence could not keep
me from incorporating there, and to add to the confusion, the necessity above all to be understood by the French, but not by the Germans and their followers. I explained to Politzer the depth of my thought and the plan that I proposed to develop: against the racial myths oppose the images of the nation, recapturing thus in another sphere the lesson taught by Maurice Thorey in one of our meetings, at Montreuil, on the eve of the war. Can one not consider with certainty that, like myths, these personages and places where, without ceasing, the caprices of history ravel and unravel in a good part of our medieval literature which all the peoples of Europe, Germans in the forefront, have pillaged? But mythical in the original meaning, French to the letter, which does not prejude the Nazi use of myths. And so Tristan, the French Tristan de Laonnois, arisen from the myth, and his struggle against Morhaut d'Irlande, and the love potion, and the story of the two Yseuts, all those like Roland, Lancelot, Perceval or Renaud are our heritage. In them we seem to recognize ourselves, to recognize the courage and the highest deeds of France and of her people, to illuminate these ancient images or representations of the modern reality of French heroism. These restored myths have the force, the
strength, not only to cause dreams, but to agitate, to give to the action and to the daydream this cohesion, this unity which seemed then, in 1941, so highly desirable. This is what I told Politzer, and what Politzer approved. But he drew attention to a theme in the *Leçon de Ribérac* at which I had only hinted, and which seemed necessary to him to be pursued: the theme of heroes, French heroes, who extend from the Round Table to the first partisan of 1940, from Gawain to Charles Debarge . . . He advised me to return to this theme, and I followed his advice. Peri at that time was still living; they had just arrested him, and I did not know Politzer himself . . . I had followed the advice of Politzer, and what can seem a little obscure in *Brocéliande* came from that conversation. And *Brocéliande*, and not a few of my poems from *Diane française* which followed. And the essay published in the *Controverse sur le Génie de la France* in the *Cahiers du Rhône* under the title, "La conjonction Et."

Moreover, in 1941 and 1942, France completely resembled *Brocéliande*. In the forest, the Vichy sorcerers and the German dragons had given to all their speeches a perverted spell-binding value. Nothing was any longer called by its name, and all grandeur was
degraded, all virtue sneered at, persecuted. Ah, it was a time of bewitched ladies and imprisoned princesses, a time of encounters on the roads, where the knights appeared to rescue old people and children, where one heard funeral hearses running away from mysterious sobs in the castles! And as time went on, greater numbers of nameless knights were armed, who were named Roger or Pierre, Daniel or Jean. Greater numbers of knights arose whose exploits, notwithstanding the armed men and the hangmen, the ogres and the giants, were repeated by word of mouth from one end of the forest of France to the other. So much so was this true that it was a virtual epidemic of heroes, an orgy of exploits, a reincarnation of historical legends; so much so that history confirmed the legend's revival, and as happened to me, writing *Brocéliande*, to find in this poem a reality of which I had not dreamed, an exactitude in the portrayal that had been utterly impossible to attain consciously in July or August, 1942 . . . . 1945
It can be affirmed that we are not made for epic poetry, rather one wishes foolishly to say that since the time of the chansons de geste (medieval epics), epic poems in this style have been renounced in France, that is to say, at least six or seven thousand verses. The strange disappearance of the epic meaning in France through the modifications of the conditions of culture from the time of the jugglers until radio is self-explanatory. There was no deficiency in subject matter or themes in the interminable verse or prose in France, but one does not call them epics for that reason. Indeed the English have *Paradise Lost*, the Germans the *Messiade*, the Portuguese the *Lusiades* . . . but does that truly give them the epic meaning? Do we not have more than twenty-four epopees imitated by Germany, England, the Iberian and Italian peninsulas? I do not believe that we have proved our superiority over our superb neighbors in what Abbé Delille gives epic proportions to in his poem in the *Jardins*. Because the essential, one sees, in epic poetry, is not the fashion of the epopee (and nothing can prevent me from finding in *Paradise Lost* an evil poem, and
Milton a man bored with speaking politely),¹ but the intensity of the epic sentiment, also very well summed up by the "A moi, Auvergne, voici les ennemis!" (To me, Auvergne, here are the enemies!). In a brief poem about the Fall by Hugo:

Ami, dit l'enfant grec, dit l'enfant aux yeux bleus--
Je veux de la poudre et des balles

Friend, said the Greek child, said the child with blue eyes--
I want powder and balls

will remain sublime, in spite of all the sneering, so much so that the memory of tyranny will forever be swept from this earth. Even if, when the circumstances of French life cease to be epic, the judgment that was born ranked these two lines in the abatement of pretentious, bombastic art.

These coarse, unpolished reflections have no other aim than to bring an understanding, not to a lone people who definitely do not have an epic sense, but to that poetry, epic or otherwise, from a people whose heritage is not ordered by the color of the skin, as Negro or white, by the shape of the eyes as the Mongol,

¹ How I have changed my way of thinking.
The poetry of a people is not a heritage in the racial sense of the word, but rather in the national sense of the term. Like the monuments that these people have built, and which are so much the national heritage of a people in the composite sense of the word, that we have here in the sense of Celtic ruins, Gallo-Roman, from Germanic buildings, Roman or Gothic churches, etc. . . . The poetry of a people does not depend on the form of their head or otherwise the hats which the people put on their own heads. And varied like winter and summer hats are the centuries of peace and war. And the French people do not have a more bourgeois than epic sense, because they barter the helmet for the cotton bonnet, even at the risk of getting the helmet back changed in form, or to do battle in a cap or beret when there is neither the time nor the steel to forge helmets.

Circumstances which create epic poetry obviously imply that the epopee is always poetry of circonstance (circumstance). This is perhaps not an original thought, but underlines an oddity: if the epopee, in everyday language, is a noble form of poetry, then poésie de circonstance (poetry written for the event) is an expression which claims with sure disdain, an excuse for verses of inferior genre. And so it has
been justly said that the French did not have an epic sense in the least epic century of our history, a century of defeats and surrenders. When Canada was in the eyes of Voltaire only a few acres of snow, when the absolute monarchy had so little epic sense that it was lost, then the epic sense was passed to the people, who recaptured the French epopee from the fall of the Bastille to the heroic achievements of Valmy, Arcole and Austerlitz. The epic meaning is only another name for poetry in the national meaning.

This is why during the circumstances that presided over the renaissance of the national meaning, one sees the reappearance of the epic meaning. Such was the case in the first forty years of this century which prepared, since thirty-six by the war in Spain, a prelude to this renaissance in the working class. The epic poetry in the works of the poets that the amateurs and the people with "taste" intended to confine to the elegy, like Paul Eluard, among those whose scholarly textbooks will borrow from our epoch several verses comparable to the quotations in what is recapitulated in five to six hundred thousand verses from our chanson de geste (medieval epic), to the heroic sentences that, from Vercingetorix to Timbaud, the heroes of France have found on the battlefields
in front of their executioners . . .

During this summer when heads had foolishly dreamed of autumn, the first news of Auschwitz had reached us. One no longer knows at what point we ceased to be aware of all those whom the enemy had deported. It seemed incomprehensible that the secret of the camp's existence could have been hidden from us so long, so long that the true revelation of what had happened there demanded the invasion of Germany. But Auschwitz was revealed to us in the summer of 1943 through a minor miracle.

It was early in the year that some women from France were leaving the concentration camp at Romainville for an unknown destination. One hundred of them. They had been told that they were being taken to Haguenau, a prison where not long ago they had put Violette Nozière . . . Would they be together? A letter thrown out at their departure from Romainville, a few uncertain pieces of intelligence . . . Suddenly one learns that they are at Auschwitz.

I remember the day when I heard this name for the first time, and how I searched for it on the maps. The comrade who was, as they say, my contact, had told me: "They know where the women are . . . Danielle, Maie, Marie-Claude . . ." "Is Yvonne with them?" He shook
his head. No one knew where Yvonne was. Returning from Ravensbruck, in the spring of forty-five, the survivors of Auschwitz told us that, like Maïe and Danielle, Yvonne had died there.

One hundred women! This number stunned the imagination. An escapee, who had just arrived in France, recounted the hell of Auschwitz. All seemed extremely exaggerated, unbelievable. When one repeated the facts, people looked at you with an air of doubt. When I wrote Musée Grévin, I believed that there had only been one hundred Frenchwomen at Auschwitz. I did not imagine the thousands and thousands of deportees, nor, as had been known in January, 1944, that those one hundred were only a portion, the contingent from Romainville where Danielle, Maïe, Marie-Claude, and Charlotte were, they said, butchered by repeated blows on the head with a shovel. In January, 1944, the statistics were corrected: there were three hundred sixty and possibly seventy-five . . . At least, such were the numbers given to me.

In general, the people were discussing the subject of Auschwitz. Was it not dangerous for those who were there to speak of it? That could anger the Germans. Those who thought thus were very numerous. There are always many people who grasp at straws in order to do
nothing, to avoid publishing tracts, to avoid
discussion, on all occasions, under the pretext
that it is dangerous, not for themselves, but for
others. When I think of those who said all those
years that they must not write so long as the Germans
were in France! And how they looked at you with a
rum eye when you did not listen to them. But, thank
God, there had been others who, not feeling tortured
by this cruel dilemma, listened only to their first
impulse and gave all the publicity which was in their
power to the news that they received from Silesia.
So much so that Auschwitz entered history and legend
two years before Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Belsen.

I wrote the section in Musée Grévin concerning
Auschwitz like the rest of the poem in the summer
months of forty-three, in these months of drought and
false hopes. We still only had meagre and inexact
documents on what had happened in the "camp de
l'exécution lente" (camp of slow execution), as we
had been taught to call it by the first witness who
returned. These documents were responsible for the
underestimation of the number of martyrs in the poem,
and also for a needless change in name in an
alexandrine of classic caesura:
Marie-Louise Fleury who was the first to go

It was only after the liberation of Paris, when the Musée had been printed and reprinted, that I learned that the real name of Mme. Fleury was Marie-Thérèse and not Marie-Louise. I did not have the heart to revise the line because the first tract from the Union des Femmes françaises named, in the summer of forty-three, the missing Marie-Louise. Besides, I had not written this in the Musée Grévin for the case when others would take it up again with obvious inaccuracies from today's viewpoint. And this is not to excuse myself for an altered pronoun. The reality in our poetry that we attained at that time through dangers and difficulties was always jumbled with errors and distortions. One word substituted for another is understandable under the conditions of censorship, when one scarcely had the opportunity to correct the proof-sheet. And thus returned the same conditions as those of the Middle Ages and its unfaithful or ignorant copyists...
JE LUI MONTRE LA TRAME DU CHANT

This text from Poètes comments on
and explains two stanzas of the poem
"Saint Jean à Pathmos"

(Addressed to Elsa)

I am going to tell you how the poem forms itself hoping
perhaps to rival the night

I said that poetry is the soul which transports
knowledge beyond the have that is beyond the given
fact of direct experience from the acquisition of the
enumerative understanding and the poet who creates by
means of a hypothetical image perceived to have started
from reality a rapport never seen by a road which is
both that of musical invention and scientific
imagination as if it were endowed with an unknown
supplementary meaning and is what I attempted to say
just now when speaking of radar poetry . . .

... and perhaps was it this rapping of the beak
at the window shutter that acknowledged Edgar Poe's
obsession with the raven as a solution to the poem
although it seemed to me there was a sort of quackery
to this dry dissection of nevermore from the immortal
nevermore

But here no raven was my shadow the question was
of bird and not this time of his value as a symbol
because the bat which haunted me I could say whence
it emerged

the dialogue with Elsa calls me at this moment

and two times in your writing the bat arose and

I saw at first this frightening scene from Roses à
 crédit where Martine betrayed in front of the man
whom she loves changes herself into a bat fighting
the walls of the room the inner walls of his
unhappiness

and the mystery of this metamorphosis notwithstanding leads me to another bat

by the way there are lamps they call thus

concerning another bat of which you spoke

elsewhere and during a particular time I lost my way
searching for this beast caught in which hair in the
garden in the evening which corridor at the angle of
a ceiling then suddenly I found it again precisely
connected with the word radar in this speech by Saint-
Denis where you precisely make the case while speaking
of poetical creation of this given scientific fact
recently discovered that the bat guides himself not as
we believed with his eyes but by an unknown sense a
radar located in his tongue so that if one shut him
up voila completely incapable of leaving his open cage
like Martine like Martine
and do you not recognize Martine of Pathmos in the speech by Jean the Evangelist
and this flapping of wings by me while I was writing produced this radar poetry both in the unfolding of an insufficient logic in the poem and the intense inexpressible intimacy which comes to me from you like the inimitable echo which arouses me to my depths the rhyme properly speaks of the mental rhythm of love and there is not an apocalypse today for me like that which is in Le Cheval roux I felt that you perhaps loved this in me

All this a mere prologue for what I am going to say

I then reread the preceding lines and found like a great dryness in my throat the feeling of a lack of mysteriousness One thing which is not said until the end One thing which still demands to be born nearby underlying but hidden still still unaccomplished . . .

Author's note:
Here the author exposes the genesis of a quatrain by specifying the discoveries of a beginning poem.
The first line is presented first in this form:
Toute l'expérience humaine est dans ma bouche

All human experience is in my mouth

It is only now that I understand why in this line the blind tongue of the bat flutters. Then the leap of enthusiasm carries me right away to the second line of the stanza which does not rhyme with the first, supplying the alternation with a masculine sonority to the rhyme.

J'ai barre par les mots sur la réalité

I am barred from reality by words.

I was so far from this bat that I placed reliance on playing with bars in a prison courtyard at Neuilly or perhaps balle-teck (teak ball) at the instant when the child throws the bat and runs from one tree to another from one line to another without worrying oneself with the rhyme réalité (reality) easily found in this language (or tongue) with this naturally technical assumption so that this was not one of these substantives of quality which make a common or vernacular rhyme but a past participle for example of a verb like précipiter or anything isolating the
word *électricité* however which presents itself because in my childhood the scientific plaything was not yet radar and isolating myself from the play tree in order to run from *j'ai barre* I begin the following line with a hemistich

Quand je branche le chant

When I connect the song

Author's note:

Various outlines of following lines are spread out here and notably this hemistich

Les mots semblent muets

The words seem mute

Author's note:

Again a series of outlines rejecting one after the other, then the author says:

In the unconscious system of thought that I carry at this time in myself none of the words are mute but blind blind as the bat with a mouth nailed shut All that is worth nothing explains nothing is not clear I bar all until the first line the first line understood . . .
I write at one swoop

Et devant l'échiquier des choses
de nature
Je crée à la façon du joueur

And before the chessboard with
nature's things
I created with play

Suddenly the commonness of the rhymes which present themselves stop me and I dream about that chessboard suddenly perceiving that it is not an object which looms up here by physical analogy with the engine room but the continued unconscious obsession with what occupies Elsa beyond this affair with radar and bat Because I am the witness to her dreams She reads me a book beginning Beyond Luna-Park the book following And perhaps is it because of that I turned my spirit towards Edgar Poe Found again the chess game where the image is like the complicated march of the Knight the poetical invention a combination of pieces the conjecture of the movement of the adversary

At what point do you render an account I think only through you my dear subjectivity At what point if you were not there would I be blind In my cage beating the walls a bat with a mouth nailed shut I no longer see the pieces on the chessboard Discontented I
cross out this incomplete line I try the following

Je les prends je les lève
au-dessus de l’échiquier

I take them I raise them above
the chessboard

holding thirteen feet here box and besides
les prend les lève which It was in my thoughts that
she was these pieces I bar I explain myself
Let us pass on to the following blunders

Author's note:
The poet takes it from the beginning:

J’ai barre par les mots sur la réalité
Le monde est une ardoise où les mots sont des chiffres

I am barred by words from reality
The world is a slate where the words are figures

Poetry like calculations Les chiffres The word chiffre does not have a rhyme in French Except s’empiffre (to stuff oneself) Bad joke I change it to sont des nombres (are numbers)

Le monde est une ardoise où les mots sont des nombres
J’efface je récris
The world is a slate where words are numbers
I erase I recreate

No The slate always retains a little of the thing erased And in the same way something of the erased words live in the background of the lines that I finally keep I choose I bar J'efface je récris I recreate

J'ai beau les effacer ils y laissent une ombre

I am beautiful erase them they leave a shadow

That stops me Because I did not wait the rhyme came thus mechanically into place. I had not thought to rhyme this shadow it glides with the sense and not the sound Me who believed That throws me a doubt une ombre on the mechanism of thought I correct a little

J'ai beau les effacer ils y laissent leur ombre
Blanche comme un regret

I am beautiful erase them they leave their shadow
White like a regret

No
Blanche comme un calcul

White like a calculation

No Spectre blanc (white ghost) No since there is leur ombre (their shadow) and suddenly the line models itself to the réalité of the first in common rhyme which so long had been eluded the bat opens his mouth the radar functions

Pâle comme une mort avant d'avoir été

Pale like a corpse once having been

The quatrain seemed to me to be an obvious thing I reread it with satisfaction

J'ai barre par les mots sur la réalité
Le monde est une ardoise où les mots sont des nombres
J'ai beau les effacer ils y laissent leur ombre
Pâle comme une mort avant d'avoir été

I am barred from reality by words
The world is a slate the words are numbers
I am beautiful erase them they leave their shadow there
Pale like a corpse once having been

Elsa my love it is a laughing matter Because in
the back of this paper you know there were names of poets like household accounts I had written there were some months ago a phrase that you had said

Elle m'a dit
Quand le soleil de l'été s'est retiré de ta peau
Mon Dieu comme tu es blême
Et j'ai regardé le miroir et j'ai vu la mort pâle

She told me
When the summer sun withdraws from your skin
My God how ghastly you are
And I looked in the mirror and I saw pale death

Elsa my love it is a laughing matter

REPENTIR

I opened Roses à crédit a long time afterwards like remorse searching for the scene of the metamorphosis and voila it is Martine and not myself it is Martine who introduced this uproar introduced in order to confuse me on his flying arms and decapitated head the Victory

Martine who finds nothing else in order to speak of her plundered beauty

1 This written a century later.
that the mirror of mockery this to be flown
the Victory of Samothrace
and not myself confused from discovering a gross
origin to my thought
   to be diminished to an echo the unconscious
echo of your words
   and the book is there on my knees with this rule
written there is nothing to discuss
   black on white I have not
invented the Victory of Samothrace
   there on my knees which do not believe your eyes
Cremieux: During these four years, I know, Aragon, that you wrote Le Fou d'Elsa, which you gave me to read; the action took place at Grenada between 1489 and 1492. You know I am curious about this. But then, what kept you in Andalousie for four years?

Aragon: It was, I must admit, very strange. I had undergone a sort of fascination with this country, with these people, with their manners and customs, with their philosophy, with their religion even, all of the components of their civilization and, certainly, to the highest degree with their strict poetry which is bound to the poetry of the Arabs and that of the Persians, at the other end of the Mediterranean.

Cremieux: Where does this fascination come from?

Aragon: Well, far enough. Have I not been passionate about the troubadours from Oc? And are there not bonds of strict kinship between our poetry, I mean that of the Midi de la France (Southern France), and the Arabian poetry of Spain? They argue about it. But the disputes are chiefly of form. They ask who invented the stanza, who the rhyme, the poems of this or that type. For me, what takes possession of the spirit is another thing; it is the relationship of the
soul with this poetry, the analogies in the wording.

Cremieux: Nevertheless, in the highest regard, the differences seem to outweigh the similarities.

Aragon: Yes, certainly, if one simply stops at the exterior aspect! But, for me, I think there is not an unfathomable depth of knowledge between these men, they are born and they die the same in all latitudes, and in all people. Everywhere the heart aches, everywhere they love and they hate. However, exotism, with which we have been truly overburdened, conceals from us these contents, these resemblances. The differences are the differences of decor. It is strange to think that we others, men of the twentieth century, when, from France, we look at the Moslem countries, we still look at them with Christian prejudices, persuaded, without the knowledge even, with the superiority of Christianity (and this I say even for those among us who no longer witness it) over Islamism. In fact, we consider Mohammed, as all our authors have for so long, an imposter, a thaumaturge, and so we have all sorts of inner precautions in ourselves when it is a question of Christ. Even those among us who challenge the historicity of it. Now, the events during the fifty years of this century we have--finally, we have . . . made me fear I know not
what shortcomings in the spirit of criticism in myself.

The war in Algeria . . . It is not sufficient, in order to understand these men and their obstinacy not to become Frenchmen in part, or not completely, from a few generalizations from one hundred years of colonization. In any case, to remain there, was to remain in a schema. It is doubtless through the events in North Africa that I understood my ignorance, a lack of culture which at first did not seem proper to me.

What does a Frenchman know about the history of Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, the Sudan or Moslem Spain? It was through Spain that I entered the intimacy of this Islamic soul where all was strange to me. Probably because Spain was a neighbor to me both geographically and intellectually, contemporary history had established some ties, some bridges, which facilitated the passage. Notice that politics had nothing to do with it. Here the question is of a true human consciousness, of a humanistic tendency. Having realized my lack of knowledge, I was incapable of living there like that. I must learn in order to understand.

Cremieux: I quote you with envy:
Ce qu’il m’aura fallu de temps
pour tout comprendre
Je vois souvent mon ignorance en
d’autres yeux

It takes so long to understand all
I often see my ignorance in other's eyes

Considering me, you will divine my ignorance. So, on what university bank have you installed yourself in order to acquire understanding and knowledge?

Aragon: I would be able, in fact, to follow the courses of a few specialized instructors, but I do not really have the intellect for that. In reality, all my life, considering academia, I much prefer that you allow me to name my method of knowledge: to write in order to know, and through that, communicating to others what I have learned. Without a doubt "écrire" (to write) is for me a different thing than what one imagines: the establishment, the restatement of knowledge, not in a detailed form, not at all like a scientific sum, but like this abridgement, the abridgement of the image, the abridgement of poetry, which contains all the possibilities, all the ramifications of knowledge. If I know how a man eats, how he dresses, what he eats, what he puts on, then my spirit, beyond this concrete acquisition, is able to
perceive one hundred unexpected things which would have been truly inaccessible. In this march of knowledge, this establishment or fixation from the historical components which give a new image to man, is properly spoken of as a realistic march, so that, in a language where these words do not have meaning in the common sense of the word realism, signifies for me the realism, which I think, and that profoundly, is the honor of my life.

Cremieux: They write that, in Le Fou d'Elsa, what is poetry does not have punctuation and all that has punctuation is prose. What do you think about that?

Aragon: It is extremely evident that is a purely ironical definition and I am not mistaken. But it is a more ingenious consideration, perhaps, that those who made it were not thinking, and leads to several observations. And at first, not only for Le Fou, but also in general for my poems concerning the absence of punctuation in the lines. I have been, for many years, the subject of questions concerning this absence and this in no way is going to mitigate them because there are always some people who ask themselves the same questions which were asked of them, or asked of me, their elder. "Why do you omit punctuation and when do you use it?"
Secondly, I could tranquilly answer that I allow myself, and above all, that no one can permit me or not permit me in these matters. Punctuation is, thank God, at least one thing in the world not known to be a commandment. Punctuation has not always existed. In the French Middle Ages, one did not find it in the verses and neither was it found in Latin, nor Greek, nor did the Arabians know it, or only knew it partially and belatedly. Punctuation, the punctuation, as they say: "He puts in or he does not put in the punctuation," appeared only with the printing press, that is to say, when the written text could be mastered by a great number of readers. In our time, there still exists a certain category of ignorant readers. Generally, these are the actors who are exposed to this particular malady, the phrasage (phrasing). But it comes to them from the phrasing itself which is in the punctuated texts. Listen, for example, to how they read Racine in French; you will see that the punctuation serves absolutely no purpose. Why is punctuation not necessary to my meaning in the verse? Because, it ceases there, it ceases in matters of cliche (photographic negative). I wish to say that when one reproduces a photograph in a journal, there is a grille au cliché (grid or pattern similar to a cross-
word puzzle form) that they make and if afterwards, having lost the photograph, one wants to reproduce the cliché (negative) a second time, by clichant (gridding) on the first printing, there is a second cliché (negative) which superimposes itself on the first and the result is that nothing is legible.

Cremieux: The grille is what one calls a trame (cross-ruled screen).

Aragon: Grille or trame, if you prefer, is for me punctuation. Because what is the line? It is a discipline of respiration of the speech. It establishes a unity of respiration which is the line. Punctuation smashes it, breaks it to pieces, gives the reader authority over the phrase and not over the break of the line, the artificial break, poetical, of the phrase in the line. Thus the line counted and rhymed is annihilated by the reader who does not stop at the end of the line, does not sound the rhyme, nor, in general, the elements of the structure of the line: interior assonance, repeated resonances, etc.

The suppression of punctuation had first been practiced by Mallarmé, then, systemically, by Apollinaire. It has come into general use in modern French verse. My critic is right to say that, when there is no punctuation there are verses. He is, on
his part, speaking like La Palice . . .

**Cremieux:** Perhaps you can simplify a little, because it seems to me that your critics want to talk about different forms that you use between the verses counted and rhymed and prose.

**Aragon:** I understand exactly what they mean, recognizing, moreover, that the verses in prose differ in other factors than this sole factor of punctuation. They are trying to say that I also write some verses which are different from prose in their meaning only because of the absence of punctuation. This also deserves scrutiny. Because, in the margin between the verse counted and rhymed and prose, I write as well lines with other dimensions or standards than the dimensions used up to now, but which are not different from briefer lines, I am trying to say, from the viewpoint of the rules. These are lines of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen and twenty syllables. They have said of my line of sixteen syllables that it is, in reality, the style of eight which makes me use it because this will only be a double line of eight that I give for a line of sixteen. One can thus consider it quite true. But how does it happen that people, other authors like myself, do not dream of considering
the alexandrine, and this notwithstanding the heavily marked caesura, like a line with six repetitions? In reality if, among my lines of sixteen syllables, there are some where the break is eight-eight, there are also some of twelve-four, of nine-seven, etc., where the octosyllable is less perceptible to the ear. The measures of fifteen, seventeen, or nineteen syllables have not been, up to now, objects for comment. It is true, however, that the introduction of long lines is accompanied in my works with lines not counted which constitutes long respirations alternating with briefer ones which are not true breaks. And that holds true, I think, more generally for the unpunctuated prose.

Cremieux: Then these lines not counted generally hold true for unpunctuated prose and here you have introduced this idea, perhaps you could tell us what they are, for you?

Aragon: Oh, well, these are in truth some versicles which arose from the tradition of psalms, from sacred texts. One has seen them reappear in the works of poets like Claudel, Saint-John Perse, Patrice de la Tour du Pin. As to how they are not prose, but verse, can be defined for those who do not have the ear. For those who do not, I will say, "le souffle d'entendre" (the breath of understanding). Notice that they
have their place in *Le Fou d'Elsa* and for this reason there is in them an example of an Arabian classic which is the Koran. The Koran is written thus. But it is true that this sort of verse, as well, requires the disappearance of punctuation which would transform it into prose while overthrowing the holding of the voice.
Two roads are born in a year
one of iron the other bare feet
Song of unknown men
in the shadow of a chimney

Nadiejdinski Zavod The factory
leaves the earth with flowers
Spring laughs at our sorrows
The sky with your kindred eyes

The long evenings of August allow stars
to fall one knows not how
very sweetly very sweetly
like eyes in tragedies

The great affair is the flame
The forge as we are hungry
The nights without sleep are endless
The shadow waits for the man with the woman
On the last day of the week
your eyes close my friend
With his procession blanched
the mechanical morning rolls along

The summer finished here is autumn
winter does not like the bare feet
From infants we had come
without demanding anything of anyone

0 world which turns 0! carousel
But at the cashbox the bosses
live from an air of which we die
The snow the snow the snow

(HOURRA L'OURAL, 1933.)
THE SEPARATED LOVERS

Like deaf-mutes speaking in a depot
Their tragic language in the black heart of an uproar
Separated lovers make haggard gestures
In the white silence of winter and weapons
And when at baccarat nights come to make for themselves
The dream so his fingers of fire in the clouds
Cross themselves it is alas on the birds of iron
It is not the lark O savage Romeos
And neither the nightingale in the sky makes the inferno

The trees the men the walls
Beige like the air beige and beiges
Like the memory enclosed
In a world covered with snow
When arrived But love there
Refound however his arpeggios
A sad letter of death
A sad letter of death

Winter is equal to absence
Winter has crystal singers
Where the frozen wine loses all taste
Where the romance has dullness
And the music which constrains me
Sounds sounds sounds the hours
The needle turns and time grinds

My wife of gold my chrysanthemum
Why is your letter bitter
Why your letter if I love you
Like a wreck on the open sea
Make it in the fashion of cries
Evil with cries that the wind will calm
Shuddering with their rhymes
Shuddering with their crimes

My love remains no longer
Than the words our lipstick
Than the frozen words caught in bird-lime
The day which without hope arises
Dream loaf die and is reborn
From moats of the Gesvres Chateau
Where the clarion sounded for me
Where the clarion sounded for you

I will make from these words our unique treasure
Joyous bouquets that one lays at the feet of saints
And I arrange them for you my tender one these bluebells
These suburban lilies the blue veronicas
And the velvet almond branches that they sell
In the May fairs like white bells
Of the lily of the valley that we will not go to
pick before
Before ah all the words burst into flower before
giving in
The flowers lose their flowers blowing in the wind
And close their equal eyes the periwinkles
Moreover I will sing for you so much that resounds
The red blood in my heart which without end will
love you
This refrain can seem a traderidera
But perhaps one day the words that murmured
This used heart this banal heart will be the aura
Of a marvelous world where you alone will know
That if the sun shines and if love shivers
It is without believing even in the spring of the
autumn
I will have said traderidera like no one else

(LE CREVE-COEUR, 1941)
RICHARD THE LION-HEARTED

If the universe resembles a barracks
At Tours in France where we are secluded
If the stranger plows our fields
If the day today is no longer finished

Must it keep the count of each hour
Hate me who had never hated
One is no longer at home even in his heart
Oh my country is it truly my country

I must not look at the swallow
Who speaks in the sky a forbidden language
Neither to withdraw the faithless cloud
This old ferryman with dreams of long ago

I must not say what I think
Nor whisper this air that I love so much
It is necessary to dread even the silence
And the sun like the bad times

They are the force and we are the number
You who suffer we recognize in you
They will have difficulty to render the night more somber
A prisoner can make a song

A song pure like fresh water
White in the way of old-fashioned bread
Knowing to ascend above the manger
So well so high that the shepherds see it

All the shepherds the sailors and the seers
The carriers the learned the butchers
The jugglers of words the makers of images
And the flocks of women at the markets

The people of trade and those who traffic
Those who make steel, those who make cloth
The climbers of telegraph poles
And the black miners each hear it

All the French resemble Blondel
Let that be the name we call it
Liberty like a whirr of wings
Reply to the song of Richard the Lion-Hearted

Written in July, 1941, at Tours. (LES YEUX d'ELSA)
FROM THE FALSE RAIN
WHICH FELL ON A CITY OF STONE
NOT FAR FROM BROCELIANDE

Here is the cloud cried the infant who held a
  celluloid swan on his heart
Here is the cloud repeated the women in the blueness
  of the wash house
Here is the cloud and the cornets of the nuns in the
  hospice
Have turned towards the windows of their fire their
  hope of migratory birds
The men have left small shadowy bars where the
  beverages turn pale
With their shoes too beautiful for the age and their
  black insignia
And in the alleys where the violent odor maltreats a
  kid playing with the emaciated beasts
Has looked from the side of the roofs without seeing
  anything yet and yelping
Here is the cloud

It arrived on the horizon fatigued like an insomniac
  eye
It arrived not any larger than a fly
It arrived like a cloud of ink an image of retinal persistance under the eyelids
A tourist airplane one Saturday evening with the fiction of anticipation
It arrived on us like an anaglyphe
It arrived the cloud it arrives like an enormous fly with a noise of steel
It arrives with sharpened scissors loud in our ears
Cries of the knife-grinders in an infant morning
The sky full of grinding of teeth

What sort of rain then does this cloud bring
Imprudently named what sort of rain
Already the face of summer disrobes to the suffering of locks
Already the immense country rye-colored loses its hunted light
What sort of rain is it then which seems to announce lepers with the rattle
The land fibs and the dry tree simmers
The hail the hail the hail Ah misfortune
On the grain the flower the harvest the windowpanes the sails the wandering strollers
It rains diamonds cut with javelins of maledictions
Beasts with polished articulations
Meager dragons hungry for fodder
Monsters hybridized from iron horses and the wickedness of man
Animals made of rumor and devastation
Whose simple name at this minute escapes those that they kill
With large blue eyes in their green wings so to deceive the sky
Locusts as they called them in Egypt
These are locusts which swoop down horribly on us
And the flesh rends itself into entanglements of wings
The song of the elytron announces with thunder that he has certainly arrived
Others others in the crackling of bones on the crosses
At the crushing of skulls in the kneading-trough of beams
Yes it is the hail and the magicians on the mountain
Will be smashed for having called forth the plague

Where the man made his home and the sweetness of his life
Where balanced the hammock of his days and sang on the fire the teakettle
Where the painted flowers made on the walls the vertigo of reveries
Where rocked the infant of the future and of the memory
There is the hail there is the snout of the green wind there is the labouring claw
There is the grinding of the murderer and the grimace of the martyr
And the rigging of the city breaks up and the stone has criéd mercy

Hail mercy
And the hail has laughed with all the teeth of hail
With all its teeth hail has bitten happiness with full force
Reraised its muzzle of hail with hope pulverized between the teeth
Shook his hair of hail above the growling pallet
Plowing the land with its hands of hail so as to draw from it the dead who sleep within

(BROCELIANDE, 1943)
LIBERATION

Is it the eel or the ablet
Who makes the law of the fish-pond
And since when does the lark
Stalk the sparrow-hawk

Man shoves the wheelbarrow
Woman washes at the sink
On the folded wing the barn-owl
Attests that you dream

(LE NOUVEAU CREVE-COEUR, 1948)
I am going to tell you a great secret. Time is you.
Time is woman.
One must court her and sit.
At her feet time like an unbuttoned robe.
Time like an endless mane of hair.
Combed.
A mirror that the wind misted and remisted.
Time is you who sleeps at dawn when I awake.

It is you like a knife passing through my throat.
Oh can I say this torment of time which does not pass.
This torment of time stopped like the blood in the blue veins.
And it is worse than the interminable desire not satisfied.

Than this thirst of the eye when you walk into the room.
And I know that one must not break the enchantment.
Much worse than feeling you an alien.
Receding.
The head elsewhere and the heart already in another century.

My God the words are heavy indeed. It concerns that.
My love beyond pleasure my love out of range today
out of reach
You who beat at my temple clock
And if you do not breathe I suffocate
And on my flesh balance and alight your step

I am going to tell you a great secret Each word
On my lip is a poor woman who begs
A wretch for your hands a thing which darkens under
your look
And this is why I say so often that I love you
Lack of a crystal clear enough with a sentence that
you put on your neck
To not offend you with my vulgar speech It is
Simple water which makes the disagreeable noise in
the fire

I am going to tell you a great secret I do not know
How to speak of time which resembles you
I do not know how to speak with you I am pretending
Like those very long on the platform of a depot
Which stirs the hand after the trains have left
And the wrist dies away from new burdens of tears
I am going to tell you a great secret I am afraid of you
Afraid of what accompanies you in the evening towards the windows
Gestures that you make words that one does not say
I am afraid of time rapid and slow I am afraid of you
I am going to tell you a great secret Shut the doors
It is easier to die than to love
That's why I give to myself the evil of living
My love

(ELSA, 1959)
I have spent in your arms the other half of life

* 

When in the first day between the teeth of Adam

God put the words of each thing

On his tongue your name dwelled awaiting me

As winter awaits the birth of roses

* 

O my swallow

* 

I am like those who came on the hill.

And captured a partridge in his hands accidentally

He is there knowing only his chance

Ah how sweet the feather is and this fear which beats

* 

Do not speak to me of the sea

To me who has you all my life

Sung

Do not speak to me of your mother

To me who has you all my life

Carried

*
From a corner the masked form
Your face in the other sense
Your step your voice all is gone from me
All is for me an unsuccessful rendez-vous

* 

This double mystery among
The triumphant knowledge
My endless wife that I beget
In the world by whom I am put

(LE FOU d'ELSA)
OH THE GUITAR

Oh the guitar oh the guitar in his throat is my heart enclosed
Me who was only a bastard dog I have only lived with sobs
Oh the guitar when one loves and the other does not love you
That they silenced the poem hear me weep quietly
    On the guitar the guitar

Oh the guitar it makes night better than night
Tears are my sole nectar all the rest is only a noise
Oh the guitar for the dream oh the guitar for the forgetfulness
What's the glass in my hand raise it to the age when they sleep in beds
    Without the guitar the guitar

Oh the guitar my guitar it makes me believe it
This sad air this sad art which helps me to better carry my cross
Oh the guitar of calvary oh the guitar without your eyes
Burn my voice burn my verses oh the guitar to be old

Guitar guitar guitar

(ELEGIE A PABLO NERUDA, 1966)
Here is the mist

It came on the horizon fatigued like
a sleepless eye
It came not any larger than a fly
It came like a cloud of ink an image
of retinal persistence under
the eyelids ... It came on us in the fashion of
anaglyphes

Since the time of Dada and Surrealism, Aragon
kept, and always kept, the care to place on himself,
poetically, "Le bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire"
by introducing into his verse, with everyday words,
the most "vulgaires" (common) expressions, and a
technical and scientific vocabulary, without excluding
the most carefully researched words and mythological or
historical allusions.

The poem, "Nymphée," caused the suspension of the
review, Confluences, in August, 1942. Alerted by the
most obvious allusions, Pétain's censors had consulted
the encyclopedia and learned that Nymphée was the old
name of Kertch, in the Crimea, where the Soviet troops
had just surrendered to Hitler's soldiers. The German
newsreels had shown atrocities committed during this
combat. This discovery merited a letter to René
Tavernier, editor of Confluences, to Max-Pol Fouchet,
editor of Fontaine, and to Seghers in which the Pétainist
Marion informed them that these "coups d'oeil complices"