

René Char's "Fureur et Mystère": Poésie Engagée?

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awakening of a social conscience. To the poem 'Histoire naturelle', Char supplies this ending:

Le spectacle déchirant du chien qui lève la patte
 dans la cour d'honneur de la caserne
 Fait penser aux vieillards tenus en laisse par les uniformes
 La bonne soupe pour le joli monde de l'abattoir

These are interesting because here for the first time the poet's attention is drawn away from himself and towards a specific animal (in contrast to the mythical *Animal* of 'Sosie', a poem of 1928). Most of Char's early verse (*Les Cloches sur le cœur*, *Le Tombeau des secrets*) had consisted of self-centred and self-directed meditations of the *Spleen et Idéal* type of confessional verse as it was brought over into the twentieth century by Apollinaire. 'Histoire naturelle' adds a new dimension of social realism.

In *Ralentir Travaux*, Char tries the two roads indicated in the first surrealist manifesto: on the one hand, the way of violence, madness, suicide — a path traced by Lautréamont, 'en dehors de toute préoccupation, esthétique ou morale'. And on the other, the narrow road of *Le devoir et l'inquiétude*, a road that Eluard had taken as early as 1917:

Le devoir et l'inquiétude
 Partagent ma vie rude.
 (C'est une grande peine
 De vous l'avouer.)

Which route will Char follow? Neither, I believe. His home, his childhood had formed the man who was to assume, at every turn, the role of the leader: the 'chef de bande' among children, editor of a journal (*Méridiens*, 1929), captain of a Resistance detachment (1942-4), and solitary ruler of his home in Provence since 1952. Independent, reserved, clear-sighted, aware of society's imperfections but chary of easy, ready-made solutions 'dans le labyrinthe du politique et du social': such is the Captain of Céreste and the author of *Feuillets d'Hypnos*, the poet of *Les Matinaux*: 'Je n'ai ni chaud ni froid: je gouverne. Cependant, n'allongez pas trop la main vers le sceptre de mon pouvoir' ('Centon', in *Les Matinaux*).

Among Char's pre-war verse, one poem in particular, 'Tous compagnons de lit' (*Dehors la nuit est gouvernée*, 1938), has been read as Char's new socialist manifesto. A recent critic writes: 'As expressed by "Tous compagnons de lit", this particular act of living provides a basis for unifying all men . . . The assimilation of "je" into "nous" offers a more general and yet more familiar frame of reference. The plural "nous" reflects the unity of man and poet against the common menace.'¹ The author goes on to speak of Char's 'exaltation of communal action in *Feuillets d'Hypnos*' and of the 'current of fraternal feeling in *Dehors la nuit est gouvernée*'.

The poet's *je* is not mentioned anywhere in 'Tous compagnons de lit', and is not assimilated into, but replaced by the first person plural. The poem is built, in the main, around a dialectic of *nous* and *vous*. The *vous* is plural and represents a group of inferiors who may be seen, but not heard. The 'compagnons de lit' of the title are defined as:

¹ Virginia A. La Charité, *The Poetics and the Poetry of René Char* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1968), p. 83. The vagueness of this statement is characteristic of the book as a whole, which should be consulted with caution.

Pourvoyeurs d'or mais à peine moins chétifs
 qu'une motte de chiendent dans un hectare en friche
 Ils étirent enfin ce présent digne d'eux
 Qu'un devenir de maîtres leur brisait.¹

Though the social status of these 'pourvoyeurs d'or' is not indicated, they remind one of the 'équipe d'ouvriers' who in 'Les Rapports entre parasites', a poem of *Abondance viendra* (1934), 'équarriait la boue, cette autre pierre précieuse'. The earlier mud becomes 'une motte de chiendent dans un hectare en friche'. In both cases, those who would take mud for gold are set in contrast to the upper class, the masters, the poets, *nous*. Char speaks of the 'Sommeil fraternel' already celebrated by one of his early mentors, Heraclitus, who wrote: 'Les hommes, dans leur sommeil, travaillent fraternellement au devenir du monde.'² Char points to the 'outils infranchissables conquis sur la paresse et l'exploit de travail' and to the 'beauté populaire aux horloges innocentes'. He seemingly sings the new reign of the proletariat.

In 'Tous compagnons de lit', the silent, antiphonal *vous* are called upon to torture and, finally, to kill the superior *nous*:

Chers allongés qui avez amené le sang prestigieux
 sur des hauteurs où ne se montre guère
 l'amertume
 Vous réparez vite dans l'écrin de vos lois la
 place chaude que nous y aurons un instant
 occupée
 Mieux
 Vous nous frapperez d'interdiction vous maltraitez
 nos figures amovibles³
 Est-ce exact l'oasis commence à briller par delà
 la décollation de la mer végétante guenille
 théâtrale
 Notre langue commune dans l'éternité sous le
 toit gardien de nos luttes c'est le sommeil
 cet espéranto de raison
 Nous ne tolérons pas d'être interrompus par la
 laideur comédienne d'une voix
 Nous ne nous avouons pas vaincu quand dans
 l'homme debout le mal surnage et le bien
 coule à pic.

In this fourth and final stanza of the poem, who is the *nous*, the 'sang prestigieux' lifted to the heights 'où ne se montre guère l'amertume'? The word *amertume*, we remember, is a 1949 variant of the poem which again sends us back to 'Les Rapports entre parasites'. Here, in 1933, the poet was summoned to 'bâtir une postérité sans amertume'. And in this same text which called upon the slaves to strangle their master, the poet himself was identified with that master and, perhaps, even with Christ: 'Entre les cuisses du crucifié se balance ta tête créole de poète. La lave adorable dissout la roche florissante.' Clearly, the two poems have an identical theme and structure.

¹ All quotations are taken from the 1949 edition of *Dehors la nuit est gouvernée précédée de Placard pour un chemin des écoliers* (Paris).

² *Héraclite d'Ephèse: Traduction nouvelle et intégrale avec introduction et notes par Yves Battistini: Avant-propos de René Char* (Paris, 1948), Fragment 87, p. 47.

³ The word *amovibles* given in the collection is a misprint. The 1937 manuscript shows the word *amovibles* which I substitute here (Catalogue de l'Exposition Maeght, 1971).

I think we witness in 'Tous compagnons de lit' a struggle between the poet's conscious intentions and his subconscious feelings (and the assumption will be verified in a grammatical or typographical slip). On the one hand, and in keeping with the spirit of the times, Char would use the collective *nous* to speak of all ordinary mortals. He would sing the 'exaltation of communal action', the 'utilité collective' by fusing *nous* and *vous* into one group of equals, 'tous compagnons de lit . . . chers allongés'. All members of this group would share one common language, 'cet espéranto de raison', the confused and artless language of dreams that Breton had advocated in the new poetry by, of, and for all people.

Subconsciously, however, the poet sets himself apart from the sleepers, begs them to be excluded from their group: 'Vous réparez vite . . . la place chaude que nous y aurons un instant occupée'. These are imperatives of the kind that the poet gave in 'Les Rapports entre parasites' and 'Assez creusé'. And again, he sees in himself the master, the Christ-like figure, offering himself up to be stoned, to die the martyr's death: 'Vous nous frapperez d'interdiction vous maltraiterez nos figures amovibles.' For as he leaves the surrealist chapel, Char knows that there is one thing better than simulated dream.

The last stanza of 'Tous compagnons de lit' reminds one of Sandburg's 'Flash Crimson' from *Smoke and Steel* (1920), containing lines like

I shall cry to God to give me a broken foot.
 I shall ask for a scar and a slashed nose.
 I shall take the last and the worst . . .
 And yet — of all 'and yet's' this is the bronze strongest —
 I shall keep one thing better than all else;
 there is the blue steel of a great star of early
 evening in it; it lives longer than a broken foot
 or any scar.
 The broken foot goes to a hole dug with a shovel
 or the bone of a nose may whiten on a
 hilltop — and yet — 'and yet' —
 There is one crimson pinch of ashes left
 after all; and none of the shifting winds
 that whip the grass and none of the pounding
 rains that beat the dust know how to touch
 or find the flash of this crimson . . .

The main difference between the two poems lies in the fact that Sandburg, the socialist, has room for God. Char does not, but the attitude of the two poets towards their own creation — and the definition of poetry it implies — are similar in the lines quoted. The poet must offer himself up as a martyr so that from his blood may spring the flash of crimson that is poetry. The poet is the superior being who, not unlike Christ, must take upon himself the sins of the world. His blood must flow like lava to break up inert matter, to bring flowers from dead rock: 'La lave adorable dissout la roche florissante.' An aphorism of *La Bibliothèque est en feu*, written nearly twenty years after 'Tous compagnons de lit', sums up the early poem in one sentence: 'La beauté fait son lit sublime toute seule, étrangement bâtit sa renommée parmi les hommes, à côté d'eux mais à l'écart.'¹

The question has never been raised why in two parallel *passé composé* constructions near the end of 'Tous compagnons de lit', there is participial agreement in

¹ For Char, the words *beauté* and *poésie* are synonymous.

one case and not in the other. The last two lines of Stanza Four began, we remember:

Nous ne tolérons pas d'être interrompus . . .
 Nous ne nous avouons pas vaincu (*sic*) . . .

The two half lines rhyme, but only for the ear. A mere misprint? Nothing but a typographical slip? Then why does it occur, one might ask, in both the 1949 and the 1971 editions? In a letter to the author (28 February 1974), Char states: ' "Nous ne nous avouons pas vaincu", faute non intentionnelle, faute d'inattention. Il faut lire *vaincus*.' However, the October 1936 manuscript¹ and the original 1938 edition both show two singular past participles, and there are other examples of non-agreement in Char's poems. In 'Cruauté', for example, the poet writes: 'Nous nous galvanisons dans les cendres qui nous ont vomis', a line not unrelated to the verses quoted from Sandburg and from 'Tous compagnons de lit'. 'Versant', another poem of *Le Marteau sans maître*, opens with these lines: 'Donnons les prodiges à l'oubli secourable / Impavide'. The last adjective does not make much sense in the framework of the poem if read as a modifier of *oubli*. In a recent text, Char asks: 'Sommous-nous . . . plus végétal que la fleur du mirabilis?' (*La nuit talismanique*, 1972). It is interesting to note that Char is often deliberately ambiguous. He chooses invariable adjectives as modifiers of the ambivalent *nous* or references to parts of the body, which would use the singular in any case. Another text of *La nuit talismanique* begins: 'Verbe d'orages raisonneurs qui ne se cassent pas, qui demeurent suspendus au-dessus de notre tête comme une banquier à court d'argent'. Often, the second partner in the *nous* alliance is not a human being, but an inanimate object, as in these lines, also from *La nuit talismanique*: 'O ma petite fumée s'élevant sur tout vrai feu, nous sommes les contemporains et le nuage de ceux qui nous aiment!'

There is more than a typographical slip in 'Tous compagnons de lit'. The poem that the critics would read as the 'exaltation of communal action' really ends in the celebration of a singular *nous*, the royal *we* incarnated by the man at the top, the *homme debout*. Mentioned here for the first time, this *upright* man (in the physical and moral sense) will become Char's symbol for the superior being, the master, the poet. In a radio address of 15 August 1946, Char defined the concept of truth (and beauty, and poetry) as follows: 'Des mots échangés tout bas au lendemain de 1940 s'enfouissaient dans la terre patiente et fertile de la révolte contre l'oppressé et devenaient progressivement des hommes debout . . . Miracle de la conscience, de cette sensation de l'évidence qui, selon Claude Bernard, a nom vérité'. Char will accept his equals, men like Louis Curel de la Sorgue, 'un homme à présent debout, un homme dans un champ de seigle, un champ pareil à un chœur mitraillé, un champ sauvé' (*Feuillets d'Hypnos*). But while he apparently hails the 'compagnons de lit', he finally admits that there is no room at the top for the parasites, the fatalists, the idle pessimists, for them that sleep the hollow sleep of straw:

Le grand bûcher des alliances
 Sous le spiral ciel d'échec
 C'est l'hiver en barque pourrie
 Des compagnons solides aux compagnons liquides
 Des lits de mort sous les écorces . . .

¹ Published in the Catalogue of the Exposition Maeght.

Sur la paille des fatalistes
 L'écume d'astre coule tout allumée
 Les rêves se regardent jouir¹
 Il n'y a pas d'absence irremplaçable

(‘Chaîne’, in *Poèmes militants*, 1932)

A text dating from 1953 (in *Le Rempart de brindilles*) which I read as a reflection on the years 1940–45, perhaps explains why the poet chose to exchange roles with the partisan. In a string of infinitives which are really self-given imperatives (a device typical of Char), man's role is defined as follows:

Echapper à la honteuse contrainte du choix entre l'obéissance et la démente, esquiver l'abat de la hache sans cesse revenante du despote contre laquelle nous sommes sans moyens de protection, quoique étant aux prises sans trêve, voilà notre rôle, notre destination, et notre dandinement justifiés. Il nous faut franchir la clôture du pire, faire la course périlleuse, encore chasser au delà, tailler en pièces l'inique, enfin disparaître sans trop de pacotilles sur soi. Un faible remerciement donné ou entendu, et rien d'autre.

These, the realistic calculations of the intelligent man aware of the evils and the dangers of his age, these and the healthy *Selbsterhaltungstrieb* — coupled with the poet's deeply rooted love for his homeland — this is what drove Char to the *maquis*. It was to keep his sanity that the poet, in his own words, escaped (*échapper, esquiver, franchir*) and exchanged the security and warmth of his 'island' home for the cold and vulnerable mountain tops of the Basses-Alpes. Char the strong, the sane man, the fundamental optimist could not find employment — literally or figuratively — in the weak and stagnant society of his day. *Oisif, désœuvré*, these are key words in *Le Marteau sans maître*, and they describe not only Char's own state, but the general tenor of the society in which he lived: 'Pessimistes aux abois, un mot-percuteur: désœuvré. Nombre d'autres touchent, esclaves, leur ration de fouet' (*Moulin Premier*).

Hypothétique lecteur
 Mon confident désœuvré . . .

(‘A la faveur de la peau’, in *Poèmes militants*)

Here Char's parody of Baudelaire ends. He does not find 'son semblable, son frère' and cannot share in the materialistic pessimism that was his intellectual heritage, nor live in the state of cowardly inertia it fostered. 'L'univers de la matière est plus mensonger que le monde des dieux. Il est loisible de le modifier et de le retourner' Char declares in *Outrages*, a series of aphorisms dated 1944–67. He, the healthy man, cannot breathe the poisonous vapours of corruption, despotism, injustice exhaled by the 'confidents désœuvrés', the 'compagnons de lit'. In a sense, Char acts out in *Fureur et Mystère* and in the *maquis* of Céreste the role he had assigned to himself ten years earlier. Only now that he has come face to face with death, he no longer wants to be appointed the sacrificial lamb. Now that oppression on the one hand and anarchy on the other ('l'obéissance et la démente') are threatening to bring about the actual extinction of justice, the poet must forge for himself a new moral code and a new life. Now that the war is on and death never more than a second away, Char has no time for the intellectual luxury of meditations on suicide or the slayings of martyrs: 'Enfin disparaître sans trop de pacotilles sur soi. Un faible remerciement donné ou entendu, rien d'autre.' Char's

¹ This line was omitted from subsequent editions.

new attitude, which is, in fact, more fraternal than his early aspirations to martyrdom, is a by-product of the changed times and circumstances.

'Fantôme sans asile, aux actions sans mérite . . . Vous sentez-vous ainsi?' (*Moulin Premier*). This is the question Char faced in 1935, near the end of his surrealist venture. And perhaps ironically, the *maquis* provided both the *asile* and the *actions*. Though the experiences of Céreste did not, of course, change Char's basic make-up, they did lend a new dimension to his poetry. By 1940, it was no longer possible for the poet to withdraw from the crowd. He could not remain the solitary romantic figure, 'grande brouette des marécages' of *Le Marteau sans maître*. Char now was forced into direct contact with other, ordinary people and these, creatures of flesh and blood, seem to replace the earlier 'hommes emblématiques' of his poetry, the symbolic heroes with their awesome capitals: *le Balancier*, *le Borgne*, *l'Écumeur de mémoire*, *l'Élagueur*, *l'Équarisseur*, *le Justicier des courants humains*, and the *Novateur de la lézarde* (all from *Le Marteau sans maître*).

The words *frère*, *sœur*, *compagne*, *compagnon*, *compère*, *semblable* (n.), *tu*, *vous* (singular) are used with increasing frequency in *Seuls demeurent*, along with the group *secours*, *secourir*, *secourable*: 'La plage qui chaque hiver s'encombrait de régressives légendes, de sibylles aux bras lourds d'orties, se prépare aux êtres à secourir' ('Calendrier', my italics). Char would like to be the 'frère secourable' of those that serve with him the common cause of the *maquis*. But he still looks upon himself as 'l'exclu et le comblé' ('L'Eclairage du pénitencier'), different from and superior to the ordinary *maquisards*. He even reverts to the old manner of his first aphorisms by referring to himself with the reverential 'le poète': 'Le poète est retourné pour de longues années dans le néant du père. Ne l'appellez pas, vous tous qui l'aimez.' This is the 'Début du partisan'. The poem in which Char tries to describe his own place in the *maquis* bears the title: 'L'Absent', the absent one who is qualified as 'ce frère brutal mais dont la parole était sûre, patient au sacrifice, diamant et sanglier, ingénieux et secourable', and who is to be found 'au centre de tous les malentendus tel un arbre de résine dans le froid inalliable'. The poet has turned partisan, has been linked at last to the 'différentité des chaînes de chaque être' ('Ne s'entend pas'). A new era has begun.

Already in 1930, in the letter addressed to 'Chère Artine', the poet had written: 'j'ai l'impression que vos rêves majeurs ne m'atteignent plus comme par le passé, dans toute ma chair vive. Notre rencontre remonte à Octobre 1929. Depuis cette date les hippodromes ont cessé de m'être favorables' (*Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, 3). The diary of Hypnos continues the leave-taking. The peasant partisans of the *maquis* have no use for the 'souris de l'enclume' (*Feuillets d'Hypnos*, 52) and the 'marteau sans maître'. The threatened men of Céreste find no comfort in the old Pythian oracles. Reality has replaced dream, and action, prophecy.

The earlier note of joyous sacrifice has gone out of Char's Resistance poems. Nausea and fear, anguish and solitude, these are components of *Fureur et Mystère* that critics have overlooked. In a very real sense, the *maquis* was for Char a prison in which he was caught like an animal in the closed circle of the arena ('Et chaque nuit le même manège se répétait dont j'étais le témoin sans nom et la victime'). Tacked to the wall of this prison, the poet kept an 'image' that was never to leave him again, the *Prisonnier* of Georges de la Tour:

La reproduction en couleurs du *Prisonnier* de Georges de la Tour, que j'ai piquée sur le mur de chaux de la pièce où je travaille, semble, avec le temps, réfléchir son sens dans notre

condition. Elle serre le cœur mais combien elle désaltère! . . . La femme explique, l'emmuré écoute. Les mots qui tombent de cette terrestre silhouette d'ange rouge sont des mots essentiels, des mots qui portent immédiatement secours. Au fond du cachot, les minutes de suif de la clarté tirent et diluent les traits de l'homme assis . . . Le Verbe de la femme donne naissance à l'inespéré mieux que n'importe quelle aurore.

Reconnaissance à Georges de la Tour qui maîtrisa les ténèbres hitlériennes avec un dialogue d'êtres humains. (*Feuillets d'Hypnos*, 178)

To the poem 'Gravité' from *Dehors la nuit est gouvernée* (1938), Char adds at this time (1945) the subtitle 'L'emmuré'. Like the passage above, 'Gravité' describes the 'homme abrupt dans sa prison' who awaits the healing and redemptive powers of woman, the liberation through love. One day, Char will come to know 'le Verbe de la femme [qui] donne naissance à l'inespéré'. One day he, too, will be able to join with Georges de la Tour in the celebration of the red terrestrial angel. For the present, however, he must learn to live in the company of men ('Vivre avec de tels hommes'), peasants, workers, whose physical strength and beauty he may admire, but whose spirit he cannot penetrate. One of these, a *garagiste* from the Vaucluse, remembers:

Je considère que Char était extrêmement handicapé par rapport à un homme comme moi. Je veux dire que je suis un homme normal, normal en tout. Physiquement, moralement, intellectuellement. Lui, au contraire, était exceptionnel et, si j'ose dire, anormal en tout; avec la double conséquence que cela dut le rendre particulièrement repérable à ses ennemis, et dut lui rendre particulièrement difficile de se plier aux exigences de l'action en commun.¹

Better than the learned commentators of *Fureur et Mystère* the companions of the *maquis* knew that Char by his very nature was not made for communal action. From the beginning, the poet's place was never really among, but always above the partisans of Céreste, where the reign of Alexander was established:

Écartez-vous de moi qui patiente sans bouche;
A vos pieds je suis né, mais vous m'avez perdu;
Mes feux ont trop précisé leur royaume;
Mon trésor a coulé contre votre billot.

Le désert comme asile au seul tison suave
Jamais ne m'a commé, jamais de n'a rendu.

Écartez-vous de moi qui patiente sans bouche:
Le trèfle de la passion est de fer dans ma main.

Dans la stupeur de l'air où s'ouvrent mes allées,
Le temps émondera peu à peu mon visage,
Comme un cheval sans fin dans un labour aigri.

This is Char's 'Post-scriptum' to *Le Visage nuptial* (*Seuls demeurent*). The poet has been momentarily silenced; he is waiting 'sans bouche', like his fellow partisans, 'acteurs à la langue coupée' ('La Liberté passe en trombe', 1946). His fire has been put out, his treasure (i.e. his poetry) upon collision with the butcher's block (the *maquis*) has sunk to the bottom of the sea. But the poet will not die. He will simply exchange the 'tison suave' for the 'trèfle de fer', and a new leader, the partisan, is born, whose name will not be writ on water. The partisan has come to bring the sword; he

¹ *L'Herne* (March, 1971), p. 203. The testimony is by M. Jean Fernand, 'chef de la Section Atterrissage Parachutage (S.A.P.), département de Vaucluse'.

will be as exacting, as uncompromising as the poet. Char at last has found a place within — and yet outside — his society.

Immediately after the 'Post-scriptum' quoted above, there follows the third section of *Seuls demeurent* entitled *Partage formel*, a collection of aphorisms dealing, in the main, with the nature of poetry and the functioning of the poetic imagination. Structurally, *Partage formel* resembles the earlier *Moulin Premier*, first published in 1936 and appended to *Le Marteau sans maître* in 1945. Char again speaks in short passages of poetic prose and refers to himself in the third person of *le poète*. However, as the title implies, *Partage formel* marks a clear division between Char's surrealist apprenticeship and his new position, defined as follows: 'Après la remise de ses trésors . . . et l'abandon de ses sueurs, le poète, la moitié du corps, le sommet du souffle dans l'inconnu, le poète n'est plus le reflet d'un fait accompli. Plus rien ne le mesure, ne le lie . . .' (LIII). This aphorism and 'Post-scriptum' tell the same tale. The poet has handed over his treasure and has left the sacrificial ground. Char speaks again of 'la remise de ses trésors' in *Partage formel* (XXII): 'Compagnons pathétiques qui murmurez à peine, allez la lampe éteinte et rendez les bijoux. Un mystère nouveau chante dans vos os. Développez votre étrangeté légitime.' I read in this text a juxtaposition of the surrealists' cult of the marvellous and of the new and legitimate *étrangeté* of the partisans. A note from *Feuillets d'Hypnos* (No. 61) further explains:

Un officier venu d'Afrique du Nord, s'étonne que mes 'bougres de maquisards' comme il les appelle, s'expriment dans une langue dont le sens lui échappe, son oreille étant rebelle 'au parler des images'. Je lui fais remarquer que l'argot n'est que pittoresque alors que la langue qui est ici en usage est due à l'émerveillement communiqué par les êtres et les choses dans l'intimité desquels nous vivons continuellement.

Char the idolater has turned iconoclast; he has broken down the false idols of precious stone: 'Fureur et mystère tour à tour le séduisirent et le consumèrent. Puis vint l'année qui acheva son agonie de saxifrage' (*Partage formel*, XIII).¹ Now man is made the measure of all things, man and the seemingly barren rocks of his earth: 'Devant les précaires perspectives d'alchimie du dieu détruit — inaccompli dans l'expérience — je vous regarde formes douées de vie, choses inouïes, choses quelconques, et j'interroge: "Commandement interne? Sommation du dehors?"' ('Mission et révocation', the last text of *Partage formel*, and the only one to have a title).

Feuillets d'Hypnos (1943–1944), dedicated to Albert Camus, forms the centre section of *Fureur et Mystère*. First published separately in 1946, it elicited enthusiastic commentary from people like Etiemble.² The title refers to the pages of a diary kept by Captain Alexandre and his *alter ego*, Hypnos, during Char's service in the *maquis*. Though the poet would have us believe that he wrote these diary notations 'comme une ménagère consigne ses comptes sur un calepin',³ many of the 237 separately numbered entries are aphorisms or prose poems of a high literary order, and there is even one true poem in free verse (No. 221). Given the care with which Char

¹ The word *saxifrage* is an important one for Char who in *La Parole en archipel* will write an 'Homage' to Hölderlin with the title: 'Pour un Prométhée saxifrage'.

² Even when, because of an unfortunate quarrel over Rimbaud texts, Etiemble and Char write each other rather uncomplimentary letters, Etiemble still finds a privileged place apart for *Feuillets d'Hypnos*. See *Le Dernier Couac* (Paris, 1958).

³ Reported by Pierre Berger, 'Conversation avec René Char', *La Gazette des Lettres*, 15 juin 1952.

generally revises his texts, it is unlikely that these leaves were as he says, 'plus souvent survolées que relues'.¹ But the poet was aware of the objections that could have been raised, in some quarters, to the artistic activity of the partisan who claimed to have left poetry behind. The times have changed. The days when one could send home from the front, without qualms, the glorious hymns to war found among Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, those days are over. Char published nothing during the years of his military engagement, and when the *Feuillets d'Hypnos* do appear in print, they are prefaced by a sort of *in apologia*:

Ces notes n'empruntent rien à l'amour de soi, à la nouvelle, à la maxime ou au roman. Un feu d'herbes sèches eût tout aussi bien été leur éditeur. La vue du sang supplicié en a fait une fois perdre le fil, a réduit à néant leur importance . . .

Ce carnet pourrait n'avoir appartenu à personne . . .

Ces notes marquent la résistance d'un humanisme conscient de ses devoirs, discret sur ses vertus, désirant réserver l'*inaccessible* champ libre à la fantaisie de ses soleils, et décidé à payer le *prix* pour cela.

Surrealism has left its imprint on Char who, in a way, tries to answer in his war journal the contradictory demands of Breton's manifestoes. First of all, the poet disclaims any artistic merit. Anyone, he says, could have written these notes; anyone and no one. The very choice of his *nom de plume* (Hypnos) recalls Char's 'sommeil fraternel' of 'Tous compagnons de lit'. The purpose of *Feuillets d'Hypnos* was not to enrich French literature by yet more aphorisms or prose poems, nor to bring glory to their author. And secondly, Char's notebook, while it was to be a document of social and political protest, was yet to remain a book free from dogma, 'discret sur ses vertus' and following no party-line. This, however, does not place *Feuillets d'Hypnos* outside or above all aesthetic and moral preoccupations. Instead, Char pleads, quite simply, for a new humanism conscious of its duties, and, to the poet's mind, these duties include not only the Resistance organized on the mountain tops of the Basses-Alpes, but also the 'résistance d'un humanisme . . . désirant réserver l'*inaccessible* champ libre à la fantaisie de ses soleils, et décidé à payer le *prix* pour cela' (Char's italics).

Nothing but the 'efficacité de chaque jour' has any value or meaning for the men of Céreste who will be judged according to how well they serve that 'efficacité'. Char's men remember:

Et de fait, sitôt mis en présence d'Alexandre, je compris que je ne connaîtrais pas le découragement avec ce camarade . . . Il me jaugea, tandis que de mon côté également je le jaugeais. En trois jours, j'avais pris une leçon mais lui étais devenu dévoué . . . J'étais désormais prêt à exécuter strictement les missions qu'il m'ordonnerait, quels que soient les risques pourvu qu'elles soient franches et précises . . . C'est ainsi que nous passâmes lui et moi un pacte à la vie à la mort qui dure encore.²

Char's idea of the efficient ruler — and, therefore, a definition of his own newly assumed task — can best be deduced from a letter that Hypnos wrote to his *adjoint*, laying down the principles of conduct for the ruler and the ruled:

Stoppez vantardise. Vérifiez à deux sources corps renseignements. Tenez compte cinquante pour cent romanesque dans la plupart des cas. Apprenez à vos hommes à prêter attention, à

¹ I have seen a typescript of *Feuillets d'Hypnos* with many manuscript corrections in the poet's hand. My discussion of *Feuillets d'Hypnos* is based on the 1962 printing in *Fureur et Mystère*.

² *L'Herne*, p. 204.

rendre compte exactement, à savoir poser l'arithmétique des situations . . . Avec les hommes de l'équipe soyez rigoureux et attentionné. Amitié ouate discipline. Dans le travail, faites toujours quelques kilos de plus que chacun, sans en tirer orgueil . . . Suggérez les précautions; laissez-leur le mérite de les découvrir . . . Contrariez les habitudes monotones. Inspirez celles que vous ne voulez pas trop tôt voir mourir. Enfin, aimez au même moment qu'eux les êtres qu'ils aiment. Additionnez, ne divisez pas . . . (No. 87)

Be not effusive, but correct. Teach not by doctrine, but by example. Serve not the ideal, but the real. Do not dictate, but inspire, and leave the 'inaccessible champ libre à la fantaisie de ses soleils'. These are the commandments of Char's new moral code. They are the ingredients of a new humanism conscious of its duties, the anguished existential humanism 'précédé d'aucun testament' (No. 62), not securely anchored in any book of laws, but daily exposed to the merciless tides of reality.

To the *maquisards*, that reality was a matter of life and death, and this is the only truth that 'le Capitaine Alexandre' tried to teach his men, many of whom undoubtedly joined the Resistance inspired by a narrowly defined idealism. Char says of them:

Ils se laissent choir de toute la masse de leurs préjugés ou ivres de l'ardeur de leurs faux principes. Les associer, les exorciser, les alléger, les muscler, les assouplir, puis les convaincre qu'à partir d'un certain point l'importance des idées reçues est extrêmement relative et qu'en fin de compte 'l'affaire' est une affaire de vie et de mort et non de nuances à faire prévaloir au sein d'une civilisation dont le naufrage risque de ne pas laisser de trace sur l'océan de la destinée, c'est ce que je m'efforce de faire approuver autour de moi. (No. 38)

This lesson postulates that the complexity of life cannot be reduced to prefabricated ideologies and that we cannot hope to formulate — much less, to know — any absolute truths. Man's salvation, however, is not in knowing, but in asking questions, in keeping alive his conscience and his consciousness: 'Fidèles et démesurément vulnérables, nous opposons la conscience de l'événement au gratuit' (No. 164). The *gratuit* ceases to exist in man's awareness thereof, and even death acquires meaning, as in the light of it, man defines his life: 'Juxtapose à la fatalité la résistance à la fatalité. Tu connaîtras d'étranges hauteurs' ('Le Bulletin des Baux', in *Le Poème pulvérisé*).

Char believes in the value of man's freedom and in the possibility of meaningful existence. Perhaps it is this basic optimism which lets him come closer to Heidegger than to Sartre. Though, in Char's terms, man's action can have an absolute value only for those that follow after us, it is not devoid of meaning, as it lays the foundation for 'les consciences qui en héritent et la questionnent' (No. 187). Outwardly, man must define his parameters by serving particularized functions in time and space: as poet or partisan, he must engage himself on different roads, in accordance with the necessities of the day. But at the centre, the questioning conscience remains free, free to doubt, to change, to grow. In the *Lettre hors commerce* (to André Breton, 1947), Char writes: 'La permission de disposer, accordée à l'homme, ne peut être qu'infinie, bien que notre liberté se passe à l'intérieur de quelque chose dont la surface n'est pas libre, de quelque chose qui est conditionné.' In *Feuillets d'Hygnos*, Char draws upon one of his favourite symbols, the almond, to paint his picture of man: 'N'étant jamais définitivement modelé, l'homme est receleur de son contraire. Ses cycles dessinent des orbes différents selon qu'il est en butte à telle sollicitation ou non. Et les dépressions mystérieuses, les inspirations, absurdes, surgies du grand externat crématoire, comment se contraindre à les ignorer? Ah!

circuler généreusement sur les saisons de l'écorce, tandis que l'amande palpité, libre . . .' (No. 55).¹

Near the end of *Feuillets d'Hypnos* (as again near the end of *Le Poème pulvérisé*), Char offers up a prayer — a prayer not to God, but to life — that man may come to know the value of his freedom without killing that within himself which makes freedom possible, 'l'amande [qui] palpité', the questioning conscience: 'O vie, donne, s'il est temps encore, aux vivants un peu de ton bon sens subtil sans la vanité qui abuse, et par-dessus tout, peut-être, donne-leur la certitude que tu n'es pas aussi accidentelle et privée de remords qu'on le dit. Ce n'est pas la flèche qui est hideuse, c'est le croc' (No. 220).

I think that Char's role in the *maquis* was more subtle and more complex than either factual accounts of missions accomplished or fraternal eulogies inspired by a narrow idealism can tell. In Céreste, Captain Alexandre was forced to elaborate for himself and for his fellow-men rules of conduct aimed at satisfying the 'efficacité de chaque jour', an 'efficacité' constantly questioned and redefined. Doubt, continual self-examination, humility and faith in the basic values of man, faith in life: these were the things needful to the *maquisards*. It was the unwritten task of their leader to kindle in them hope and faith: 'Ensoleiller l'imagination de ceux qui bégaient au lieu de parler, qui rougissent à l'instant d'affirmer. Ce sont de fermes partisans' (No. 60). In a *Note sur le maquis* dated 1944, Char defined his mission thus: 'Faire longuement rêver ceux qui ordinairement n'ont pas de songes, et plonger dans l'actualité ceux dans l'esprit desquels prévalent les jeux perdus du sommeil' (*Recherche de la Base et du Sommet*).

When the war is over, René Char will not be seen at the meetings of the Anciens Résistants, some of whom he considers as corrupt and morally reprehensible as the enemy they fought. In his journal he notes: 'La qualité des résistants n'est pas, hélas, partout la même! A côté d'un Joseph Fontaine, d'une rectitude et d'une teneur de sillon . . . , combien d'insaisissables saltimbanques plus soucieux de jouir que de produire! A prévoir que ces coqs du néant nous timbreront aux oreilles, la Libération venue' (No. 65). And again: 'Je vois l'homme perdu de perversions politiques, confondant action et expiation, nommant conquête son anéantissement' (No. 69). Typically, Char gives the credit for the success of the Resistance movement to the leaders, the 'hommes intelligents et clairvoyants' that commanded the spoiled children, the poor workers, the fanatics, the 'paysans au patriotisme fort obscur, d'imaginatifs instables, d'aventuriers précoces voisinant avec les vieux chevaux de retour de la Légion étrangère' (*Note sur le maquis*).

True to the friends he made among the partisans of Céreste and among the *loyaux adversaires* on the other side of an imaginary line, the poet yet proclaims no loyalty towards any socially or politically defined group or ideology. No party has been successful in inscribing René Char in its lists. The poet is interested in individual man, not in the credos published by more or less enlightened governments. We remember the promise Char had made to himself in the *maquis*: 'Si j'en réchappe, je sais que je devrai rompre avec l'arôme de ces années essentielles, rejeter (non refouler) silencieusement loin de moi mon trésor, me reconduire jusqu'au principe du comportement le plus indigent comme au temps où je ne cherchais sans jamais

¹ Mauricette Raymond has studied the symbol of the almond in the poetry of Char. 'Le symbole de l'amande', *L'Herne*, pp. 121-3.

accéder à la prouesse, dans une insatisfaction nue, une connaissance à peine entrevue et une humilité questionneuse' (*Feuillets d'Hypnos*, No. 195).

For Char, the war had settled nothing. The basic questions of life and death, right and wrong, good and evil had not been answered by political expediency, and the victor's truth was, for him, as uncertain as that of the vanquished. The poet had succeeded in transforming 'vieux ennemis en loyaux adversaires' (No. 6), but the problems facing both remained the same. No self-satisfied hymns of praise, no apostrophes to a glorious national future follow upon the *Feuillets d'Hypnos*. The simple songs and tales of *Les Loyaux Adversaires*, the third section of *Fureur et Mystère*, go back to the years before World War II. Many of these poems tell of Char's childhood ('Le Thor', 'Cur succesisti?') not nostalgically, but searchingly: 'Que disais-tu? Tu me parlais d'un amour si lointain / Qu'il rejoignait ton enfance' ('L'ordre légitime est quelquefois inhumain'). In the *Lettre hors commerce* to Breton, Char writes:

Ce n'est pas moi qui ai simplifié les choses, mais les choses horribles m'ont rendu simple, plus apte à faire confiance à certains au fond desquels subsistent, tenaces, les feux mourants de la recherche et de la dignité humaine (cette dignité si mal réalisable dans l'action et dans cet état hybride qui lui succède) ailleurs déjà anéantis et balayés, méprisés et niés. La transvaluation est accomplie. L'agneau 'mystique' est un renard, le renard un sanglier et le sanglier cet enfant à sa marelle.¹

In accordance with the promises that the partisan had made to himself in Céreste, the poet returns to his beginnings 'dans une insatisfaction nue, une connaissance à peine entrevue et une humilité questionneuse'. In a beautiful prose poem that has about it the aura of a fairy-tale or of a *récit de rêve*, Char tells the story of a primeval forest 'où le soleil n'a pas accès mais où, la nuit, les étoiles pénètrent'. In this virgin forest, the poet would live the existentialist's life of eternal beginnings, a life perpetually redefined according to the necessities of every day. Here he would forget the doctrines and experiences of the *maquis* that threatened to weigh down and bind those who could not — or would not — break with the past:

Je me gouvernais sans doctrine, avec une véhémence sereine. J'étais l'égal de choses dont le secret tenait sous le rayon d'une aile. Pour la plupart, l'essentiel n'est jamais né et ceux qui le possèdent ne peuvent l'échanger sans se nuire. Nul ne consent à perdre ce qu'il a conquis à la pointe de sa peine! Autrement ce serait la jeunesse et la grâce, source et delta auraient la même pureté. ('Pénombre')

The 'Argument' of *Le Poème pulvérisé*, the next section of *Fureur et Mystère*, transposes the message of the fairy-tale into more explicit prose: 'Comment vivre sans inconnu devant soi? Les hommes d'aujourd'hui veulent que le poème soit à l'image de leur vie, faite de si peu d'égards, de si peu d'espace et brûlée d'intolérance.' Here Char breaks free of the *maquis*. Most of the texts contained in *Le Poème pulvérisé* were written after the poet's return to L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. Against the background of his childhood home are set the new fables, fairy-tales and songs that go back not only to Char's own youth, but yet farther back to the beginnings of man.

In 'L'Extravagant', a fable-like prose poem in the same section, 'le Capitaine Alexandre' lays down his post and René Char takes leave of his 'compagnons de lit':

¹ The 'renard' or 'renarde' was Char's emblem in the *maquis*.

. . . Par la nuit d'hiver fantastiquement propre parce qu'elle était commune à la généralité des habitants de l'univers qui ne la pénétraient pas, le dernier comédien n'allait plus exister. Il avait perdu tout lien avec le volume ancien des sources propices aux interrogations, avec le corps heureux qu'il s'était plu à animer auprès du sien . . . Aujourd'hui il rompait avec la tristesse devenue un objet aguerri, avec la frayeur du convenu. La terre avait faussé sa persuasion, la terre, de sa vitesse un peu courte, avec son imagination safranée, son usure crevassée par les actes des monstres. Personne n'aurait à l'oublier car l'utile ne l'avait pas assisté, ne l'avait pas dessiné en entier au regard des autres. Sur le plafond de chaux blanche de sa chambre, quelques oiseaux étaient passés mais leur éclair avait fondu dans son sommeil.

The last 'comedian', he who tried to rouse from sleep the companions of the *maquis*, the partisan has died. The old and fallow earth — trampled down by the feet of monsters — will cover up the past with its false persuasions and stale emotions. The actor has played out his role, and the games are up. Char returns to his old manner of confronting a superior being (in this case, 'L'Extravagant' or 'il') with 'la généralité des habitants de l'univers'. And note that the superiority of 'L'Extravagant' is not based on any merit acquired in the service of Céreste. On the contrary, it is that part of himself which he kept hidden from the 'regard des autres' — and that part alone — which gives meaning to his life and justifies his superiority. 'Comment vivre sans inconnu devant soi?' The birds of lightning that crossed his sleep, the poems softly whispered into the night but never published in the *maquis* will guide the poet into the light of day.

Char has broken loose from his prison physically and mentally. He has escaped death. Nothing now interests him but life itself: 'Illusoirement, je suis à la fois dans mon âme et hors d'elle, loin devant la vitre et contre la vitre, saxifrage éclaté. Ma convoitise est infinie. Rien ne m'obsède que la vie' ('Le Météore du 13 août').¹ For Char, poetry and life are one, and so the poems of *Le Poème pulvérisé* testify to the new light, the freedom that he has found: 'Pourquoi *poème pulvérisé*? Parce qu'au terme de son voyage vers le Pays, après l'obscurité pré-natale et la dureté terrestre, la finitude du poème est lumière, apport de l'être à la vie' (*La Bibliothèque est en feu*, 1956).

In his search for a new meaning to life, Char goes back to the beginnings of Western civilization, to classical Greece ('Hymne à voix basse') and even farther back to the pre-Socratic world of Heraclitus, the world of cosmic harmony where fire, earth, air, water, snake and bird, seagull and shark, could live together as *loyaux adversaires*: 'Il y aura toujours une goutte d'eau pour durer plus que le soleil sans que l'ascendant du soleil soit ébranlé' (*A la Santé du serpent*, v). *Yes and no*, past and future had no meaning in that world: 'Ceci n'est plus, avais-je coutume de dire. Ceci n'est pas, corrigeait-il' ('Suzerain'). Man lived in the eternal presence of the *éclair*, in the *nunc stans* of lyric poetry:

Lyre sans bornes des poussières,
Surcroît de notre cœur
(‘Lyre’)

This is the last poem of *Le Poème pulvérisé* and it sums up very well the message of this section. If man (and his poetry) are to live, they must shake off the fetters imposed upon them by national and ideological frontiers and rise above 'la morne démarche du quotidien' ('L'Extravagant'): 'Né de l'appel du devenir et de

¹ Again the poet refers to himself with the word *saxifrage*, the breaker of stone, for which see p. 531, note 1 above.

l'angoisse de la rétention, le poème, s'élevant de son puits de boue et d'étoiles, témoignera presque silencieusement, qu'il n'était rien en lui qui n'existât vraiment ailleurs, dans ce rebelle et solitaire monde des contradictions' ('Argument', *Le Poème pulvérisé*).

From Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and the *maquis*, Char learned that destruction must be an integral part of creation. Words, elements, forms, ideas, laws, must be perpetually decomposed and reconstituted if life is to continue. Char is perhaps thinking of Rimbaud when he declares: 'Il m'apprit à voler au-dessus de la nuit des mots, loin de l'hébétude des navires à l'ancre' ('Suzerain'). With Heraclitus¹ and Breton he affirms that, in the end, destruction and creation, life and death are all part of the same cycle, and that in man's awareness of that cycle lies his strength, his health, and his humanity:

Le chasseur de soi fuit sa maison fragile:
 Son gibier le suit n'ayant plus peur.
 Leur clarté est si haute, leur santé si nouvelle,
 Que ces deux qui s'en vont sans rien signifier
 Ne sentent pas les sœurs les ramener à elles
 D'un long bâillon de cendre aux forêts blanches.

('Les trois sœurs')

It is but a small step from the obscure forests of primeval existence to the white forests of eternal light, from the hunter of the earth to Orion. In the allegory above, Char reaches a Dantesque serenity; his poem has become pure light.² I do not know whether his good friend Heidegger was thinking of lines like these in one of the poems recently dedicated by the philosopher to the poet. But Heidegger's 'Dank' seems to capture the same serenity, the same landscape, and the same light:

Sichverdanken; Sichsagenlassen das Gehören in
 das vereignend-brauchende Ereignis.
 Wie weit der Weg vor diese Ortschaft, von der uns
 das Denken in fügsamer Weise gegen sich selber
 denken kann, um so das Verhaltene seiner
 Armseligkeit zu retten.

Was aber arm ist, selig wahr es sein Geringes.
 Dessen ungesprochenes Vermächtnis
 gross behaltet's im Gedächtnis:
 Sagen die Alêtheia als: die Lichtung:
 die Entbergung der sich entziehenden Befugnis.³

Le Poème pulvérisé spoke of the destruction necessary to creation; *La Fontaine narrative*, the last section of *Fureur et Mystère* (1947), celebrates the freedom resulting from that destruction. *Le Poème pulvérisé* contained the poems of earth; *La Fontaine narrative* is made up of water, fire, and air. Already in 1945, in his 'Post-scriptum' to *Le Visage nuptial*, Char had attempted the synthesis between earth and sky, water and air:

Le temps émondera peu à peu mon visage,
 Comme un cheval sans fin dans un labour aigri.

¹ For a fuller discussion of Heraclitus and Char, see Philip E. Cranston, 'René Char, poète outil: A l'instant du poème', *French Review*, Special Issue No. 1 (Winter 1970), 17-24.

² Indeed, Char's definition of poetry — 'la finitude du poème est lumière' — might well be applied to the *canti* of the *Paradiso*.

³ Martin Heidegger, 'Gedachtes', *L'Herne*, p. 186.

Even in the apparent bleakness of his *maquis* prison, Char had kept alive the hope that one day he, too, would rise like the winged Pegasus to strike the Helicon from which Hippocrene, *La Fontaine narrative*, would flow.

When the war is over, Char sings the celebration of that fountain and of the sea, the river, the torrent which in the very wake of destruction prepare the bed from which new life will spring. In a text fittingly entitled 'Les premiers instants', he describes his new awakening to life: 'La modicité quotidienne avait fui, le sang jeté était rendu à sa chaleur. Adoptés par l'ouvert, poncés jusqu'à l'invisible, nous étions une victoire qui ne prendrait jamais fin.'¹ Once again, I think the *nous* here is a royal plural. Char is celebrating his own victory, not the one-time conquest of the enemy, limited in time and space. But the continual victory over his 'héritage intellectuel', the idle pessimism of the 'compagnons de lit', a victory over time and space, expressed in the new humanistic creed published by Char in *La nuit talismanique*: 'J'aime qui respecte son chien, affectionne ses outils, n'écorce pas l'arbre pour en punir la sève, ne mouille pas le vin hérité, se moque de l'existence d'un monde exemplaire.'

Like his early mentor Rimbaud, Char has abandoned 'le boulevard des paresseux, les estaminets des pisse-lyres, pour l'enfer des bêtes, pour le commerce des rusés et le bonjour des simples' ('Tu as bien fait de partir, Arthur Rimbaud!'). As always, Char's poetry is a reflection of his life. It is from the solitude of his home in Provence that he bids farewell to the 'compagnons de Paris' and to the partisans of Céreste. Solitude is the price man must pay for his freedom. If he is to be completely free, he alone must choose to doubt or to believe ('A une ferveur belliqueuse'), to love or to hate ('Fastes'), to create or to destroy ('Le Martinet', 'Madeleine à la veilleuse'), to live or to die ('Assez creusé'). The man that would be truly free must break his human bondage. Like the hunter of the earth that finally takes his place in the sky, the poet must find his way out of the *selva oscura* of the earth into the white forests of air.

Fureur et Mystère ends with one of the most unusual love-poems I know, a poem written from the heights 'où ne se montre guère l'amertume' and, like the *Paradiso*, a poem of pure light:

Allégeance

Dans les rues de la ville il y a mon amour. Peu importe où il va dans le temps divisé. Il n'est plus mon amour, chacun peut lui parler. Il ne se souvient plus; qui au juste l'aima?

Il cherche son pareil dans le vœu des regards. L'espace qu'il parcourt est ma fidélité. Il dessine l'espoir et léger l'éconduit. Il est prépondérant sans qu'il y prenne part.

Je vis au fond de lui comme une épave heureuse. A son insu, ma solitude est son trésor. Dans le grand méridien où s'inscrit son essor, ma liberté le creuse.

Dans les rues de la ville il y a mon amour. Peu importe où il va dans le temps divisé. Il n'est plus mon amour, chacun peut lui parler. Il ne se souvient plus; qui au juste l'aima et l'éclaire de loin pour qu'il ne tombe pas?

Love and poetry (which, for Char, are synonymous) must be as free as the sun that defines for all men the hour and the season, but remains itself without time and space: 'Peu importe où il va dans le temps divisé'. Like the sun, love and poetry

¹ 'Les premiers instants' has been discussed, briefly, by Robert W. Greene, 'René Char, Poet of Contradiction', *MLR*, 66 (1971), 802-9.

must circulate freely 'sur les saisons de l'écorce', always serving, yet everywhere above the needs of the day.

In his definition of poetry as pure light, Char has perhaps found a way out of the dilemma of Breton who, in his first Surrealist Manifesto (1924), had pleaded for a new poetry of, by, and for all people, which would yet be free of all moral-aesthetic preoccupations. The sun is not bound by the laws of man, yet everyone partakes of its light: 'Il n'est plus mon amour, chacun peut lui parler'. The sun does not function according to man-made principles of ethics or aesthetics, yet everyone delights in its radiance: 'Il ne se souvient plus; qui au juste l'aima et l'éclaire de loin pour qu'il ne tombe pas?' The poet, likewise, cannot be made prisoner of any literary or political *engagement*, of surrealism or the *maquis*. Like the hero of *La Conjuración*, 'homme-miroir, prince des nœuds', the poet is the mirror and the conscience of the world, 'avec l'énergie de rompre'.

A mon peu d'enthousiasme pour la vengeance se substituait une sorte d'affolement chalcureux, celui de ne pas perdre un instant essentiel, de rendre sa valeur, en toute hâte, au prodige qu'est la vie humaine dans sa relativité. Oui, remettre sur la pente nécessaire les milliers de ruisseaux qui rafraîchissent et dissipent la fièvre des hommes. Je tournais inlassablement sur les bords de cette croyance, je redécouvrais peu à peu la durée, j'améliorais imperceptiblement mes saisons, je dominais mon juste fiel, je redevais journalier. (Letter to Francis Curel, 1948)

The songs of Hypnos are dedicated to cloud and bird, river and sun, expressing the poet's 'affection ténue pour le nuage et pour l'oiseau'. Char's poetry is engaged in the totality of life, in the 'prodige qu'est la vie humaine dans sa relativité'.

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