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THE POETIC QUEST OF ANDRE FRENAUD

The Ohio State University

Ph.D.

1980

McCluney, Moira Dixie

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THE POETIC QUEST OF ANDRE FRENAUD

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
1980

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To my parents
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I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Pierre Astier, for his long and patient guidance during the writing of this dissertation. I would like to thank my reader, Dr. Charles G. S. Williams, for the time he most generously devoted to this endeavor. And I would like to thank my reader, Dr. Charles Carlut, for the initial inspiration which led me to Ohio State and a dissertation on French poetry. Finally, I would like to thank André Frénaud for his unfailingly warm and gracious encouragement.
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INTRODUCTION

André Frénaud was born on July 26, 1907, in Montceau-les-Mines, a small mining town in Burgundy, France. His father was the local pharmacist and the family was traditional, middle class and "bien pensant."

After secondary school studies in Dijon followed by a year of philosophy at the university there, Frénaud moved in 1925 to Paris where he took courses in literature, philosophy and law. For two years he was a lawyer in training at the Paris Bar. Then, against his parents' wishes, he spent a year at the university of Lwow, in what was then Poland, as a foreign teaching assistant. During his return voyage to France he stopped briefly in Czechoslovakia. In 1935 Frénaud traveled to the Soviet Union, visiting Moscow, Kharkov and Kiev. He was thinking of becoming a member of the Communist Party when the Moscow trials began that same year. His disillusionment with their unjustness was such that he never again considered the idea.

Frénaud wrote his first poem "Epitaphe" in 1938 at the age of thirty-one. The following year he was mobilised and in 1940 he was taken prisoner in Germany.
He worked in a stalag in Brandenburg until he was able to escape, using false papers, in 1942.

Frénaud's work had been published in the *Cahiers du Sud* beginning in 1940, but first attracted considerable attention in 1941 when two important poems, "Les rois mages" and "Plainte du roi mage" appeared in the review *Poésie 42*, accompanied by an introduction by Louis Aragon declaring André Frénaud to be one of the great French poets.

Upon his return to France, Frénaud joined such writers as Pierre Seghers and Paul Eluard in the literary milieux of the French Resistance and saw his work published in several clandestine anthologies which, like Seghers' series *Poésie 40, Poésie 41*, etc., gave a special place to the poems of prisoners of war: *Poètes prisonniers, L'Honneur des poètes, and L'Honneur des poètes: Europe.*

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1 The series of poetry magazines *Poésie 40, Poésie 41*, etc. was founded in 1939 by the poet and publisher Pierre Seghers. At first it was called *Poètes Casqués* and published poetry written by soldiers, some, like Aragon, already famous. As *Poésie 40* it widened its range of contributors, but continued to carry a section reserved for "Poètes prisonniers." During the second world war it was the most important magazine of French poetry and one of the mainstays of the intellectual resistance under the German occupation. See Jean Rousselot, *Dictionnaire de la poésie française contemporaine* (Paris: Larousse, 1968), p.195. *Poètes Prisonniers*, a special issue of *Poésie 43*, was published in Avignon, in the unoccupied zone of France. *L'Honneur des poètes* was published by the clandestine Press Les Éditions de Minuit, in Paris, in 1943
Since the war Frénaud has lived in Paris. Until his retirement in 1967 he worked for the Ministry of Transportation. He has traveled widely in Europe. As a member of the literary organization COMES (Communita Europea dei Scrittori) he worked to keep channels open between writers of Eastern and Western Europe. He read his poetry in Canada and the United States in 1967 and in Ireland in 1977. Also in 1977 the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (Beaubourg) devoted an exposition to his books and manuscripts, as well as to the special bindings and art work associated with certain editions.2


2 Frénaud's last book, Notre inhabileté fatale, reveals much about his life as a poet. Other biographical details mentioned here come from studies by Wiedmer and Clancier, an article by Valdimir Brett, Segher's book La Résistance et ses Poètes, all of which are listed in the bibliography, and from interviews most kindly granted this writer by André Frénaud in July of 1977 and May and June of 1978.
There are two full-length studies of Frénaud, both written some years ago. Georges E. Clancier first published his small book on Frénaud for the Seghers' series "Poètes d'aujourd'hui" in 1952. In the new edition of 1962 he proclaims Frénaud's work a "poésie de la totalité humaine" (p.90). After situating it firmly within the tradition of French poetry, he goes on to discuss the various aspects which most readily propose themselves to the reader: the joys and sorrows of love, the poet's relationship to his father and to other people, his predilection for the heroic and the mythic dimension, and the "irruption des mots" so characteristic of his poetic style.

Marianne Wiedmer, in her doctoral thesis of 1969 (University of Zurich) seeks to show how the poetic universe of André Frénaud is constructed, a universe determined by the poet's tragic sense of life. She begins by describing its various physical attributes: thickness, heaviness, strangeness, silence and coldness. She discusses the central theme of the quest for being, and comments on the discontinuity characteristic of both the poet's world and his poetic language. She concludes with a section on the poet's language.

3 Two master's theses have been written on Frénaud in France: Conception Germán Llacer, André Frénaud, poète de la Résistance, Maîtrise de lettres modernes, Université de
In 1979 Bernard Pingaud published, under Frénaud's name, a series of interviews originally recorded for transmission on the French radio program France-Culture. In their final, expanded, form they give the poet's commentary on his own work, and offer informative insights into the genesis of certain poems.

Two long articles have been written on Frénaud. In one, dating from 1964, Pingaud distinguishes different levels in a poetic enterprise which the poet has already declared "dérisoire." In the other, published in 1945, the poet Jean Lescure suggests that poetry often anticipates world events. He emphasizes that although Frénaud's poetry seemed to reflect the disasters of World War II, in fact, its dark unquiet tone had been established from the time he began to write in 1938. He notes that Frénaud's poetry turns to concerns "à hauteur d'homme," exploring the problems of the human condition rather than evading them, as prewar poetry had tended to do.

There are numerous shorter articles and reviews by such distinguished poets and critics as Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Cecil A. Hackett, Georges Limbour, Jacques Réda, Raymond Queneau, Alain Bosquet, Raymond Jean, Philippe

---

Jacottet and Yves Bonnefoy.4

André Frénaud recognizes Baudelaire and Rimbaud as the primary influences upon his poetic formation. Like Baudelaire, he finds in the misery of the human condition, be it the loneliness and the poverty of the city, unhappiness in love, or man's inhumanity to man, the raw material for his poetry. And like Baudelaire he posits the existence of a "profonde et ténébreuse unité" which he pursues unceasingly, while requiring of himself an implacable lucidity about the possibilities and the artistic demands of the poetic enterprise he has undertaken.

When Frénaud returns throughout his work to the theme of the "roi mage," and when he declares himself a "voyeur de l'absolu", he recalls Rimbaud's desire to attain the state of "mage" or "voyant". Frénaud's revolt in the face of his human limitations, his sense of alienation resulting from the coexistence within him of a mysterious poetic power which does battle with his more social, conventional self, and his persistent conviction that there is a more genuine life to be lived somewhere else, all these characteristics link him to Rimbaud, from whom he takes the expression "notre inhabilité fatale", the title of his series of interviews with Bernard Pingaud.

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4 The works referred to are listed alphabetically by name of author in the section of the bibliography devoted to critical works on Frénaud.
In an anthology of French poetry published in 1955, Wallace Fowlie wrote:

Since 1940, French poetry has drawn its themes more directly from the tragic quality of contemporary events: blood, catastrophe, hope, than it did in the periods of Baudelaire or Mallarmé. And yet this poetry is far from being a reportage or direct transcription. The lesson taught by Mallarmé that there is no such thing as immediate poetry is to such a degree the central legacy of modern poetry, that the younger poets move instinctively toward the eternal myths, like that of Orpheus, which are just beyond the event, the first reactions and the first sentiments. The myth is man's triumph over matter.\(^{5}\)

Now Frénaud's poetry, appearing in print in the years after 1940, did indeed draw certain themes from the tragic quality of contemporary events. It presented, among other things, a "poète prisonnier" who had been, in reality, a prisoner during the war. It described his departure from France, hard labor in a foreign land, and the longing for home. Subsequent poems appeared on topics ranging from the Spanish Civil War and the defeat of Poland, to Stalinism and the absurdity of much of contemporary life. Frénaud's poems are not, however, simple transcription or reportage. The concrete facts of contemporary events serve as outward signs of what are, for Frénaud, spiritual events: the loss

of, the exile from, and the search for Being. As Fowlie has pointed out, modern poets have absorbed Mallarmé's lesson that there can be no immediate poetry. Frénaud does not seek to convey his experience of Being directly or explicitly. Rather, like the poets cited by Fowlie, he has moved instinctively toward the eternal myths, which to the degree that they give form to the formless and the inexpressible, are man's triumph over the problem of matter.

Much has been written about the relationship of poetry, language, symbolism and myth to human experience. Ernst Cassirer referred to myth, art and language as symbols, but pointed out that they were not so in the sense of being "mere figures which refer to some given reality by means of suggestion and allegorical renderings."

Rather they are forces which produce and posit a world of their own. They are born of the "primitive power of subjective feeling" and they "prepare the soil for the great synthesis from which our mental creation springs."

Mircea Eliade has noted that in primitive cultures myth is a "pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral

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7 Cassirer, p. 35.
8 Cassirer, p. 43.
wisdom." In such societies myths "constitute the sum of useful knowledge." They "give a meaning to the world and to human life" without however making any claims to morality or goodness.

This "odyssey of the mind," the genesis of symbolic forms, has been of particular interest to psychoanalysts. Writing about poetry, Carl Gustav Jung said that poets "are always the first to divine the darkly moving mysterious currents and to express them, as they can, in symbols that speak to us," and Aniela Jaffé, writing in the Jungian tradition, claimed that it was "the aim of the modern artist to give expression to his inner vision of man, to the spiritual background of life and the world." Now the poet's inner vision goes beyond his own personal biography; Jung asserted that there exists as part of the psyche a "collective unconscious" which "retains and

10 Eliade, p. 125.
11 Eliade, p. 145.
12 Susanne K. Langer in her translator's preface to Cassirer, p. IX.
transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind." It contains in concentrated form the entire succession of imprints which have determined the psychic structure as it now stands. "These imprints present themselves in the form of mythological motifs and images, appearing often in identical form and always with striking similarity among all races." They are, like the instincts, innate and inherited. "They function, when the occasion arises, in more or less the same way in all of us."17

The tendency to form such representations of a motif is an "archetype," and such representations can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern.18 So too, the figures of the poet's creation, although they express a personal world, take their forms from the collective storehouse of patterns determined by his heritage and his time.

In her 1934 book, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, Maude Bodkin proposed an hypothesis for investigation formulated in terms suggested by Jung, that "archetypal patterns or images are present within the experience

16 Jung, Psychological Types, pp. 169-170.
17 Jung, Man, p. 7.
18 Jung, Man, p. 67.
communicated through poetry, and maybe discovered there by reflective analysis."19 In her examination of motifs such as rebirth, paradise, hell and the hero, she claimed that the poet "performs for the community...the function of objectifying in imaginative form experience potentially common to all, but exceptionally deep and vivid."20

The contemporary critic Northrop Frye seeks to outline a few of the "grammatical rudiments of literary expression"21 in a similar way when he claims that the structural principles of Western literature are to be derived from the "archetypal and anagogic criticism"22 of our Classical and Christian heritage. He thinks of the patterns he discovers as both myths, since all of them derive from myths, and as archetypes, a word which "has been used since Plato in the sense of a pattern or model used in creation."23 Seen in this light, literature as


20 Bodkin, p. 327.


a whole is "the direct descendant of mythology."24 Now the "primary understanding of any work of literature has to be based on an assumption of its unity."25 According to Frye, this unity is that of a mythological universe which presents "a vision of reality in terms of human concerns and hopes and anxieties"26 and keeps the "mythological sense of a panoramic view of the human situation, a perspective to which the greatest works of literature invariably return."27 The myths or archetypes of this vision make up the "more important group of stories in the middle of a society's verbal culture."28

Frye divides these stories into four narrative categories which he calls the romantic, the tragic, the comic and the ironic or satiric;29 The first of these, romance, "is the structural core of all fiction...it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest."30

24 Frye, "Literary Criticism," p. 68.
27 Frye, "Literary Criticism," p. 68.
28 Frye, Scripture, p. 7.
29 Frye, Anatomy, p. 162.
30 Frye, Scripture, p. 15.
It is romance which provides a useful framework in which to view Frénaud's poetry. Its basic plot is that of the quest and its accompanying adventures. It has three main stages: the perilous journey, the crucial struggle, and the exaltation of the hero.  

It is the nearest of all literary forms to the wish fulfillment dream and is marked by its "extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space." The journey is one toward identity, a lonely spiritual pilgrimage which Jung interpreted as the realization of the potential of the self. It is part of the monomyth of the hero. In Joseph Campbell's words, it "will always be the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find," and at its center is a tale of separation, initiation and return. The hero is not vanishing from all literature as is sometimes claimed. "Rather, a phoenix reborn, he errs as he always has on that ancient tortuous road--

32 Frye, Anatomy, p. 186.
33 Frye, Scriptures, p. 166.
34 Jung, Man, p. 152.
36 Campbell, Hero, p. 30.
passing through dark forests, wrestling with dark powers and strange monsters, waking a sleeping princess—in quest of the fountain of youth or wisdom."37 Modern literature has been deeply marked by the disasters of the twentieth century, and so is "devoted, in a great measure, to a courageous, open-eyed observation of the sickeningly broken figurations that abound before us, around us, and within."38 This observation is usually a personal one, told in the words of an individual speaking to an age for which the old collective mythologies are dead or dying. "Freud, Jung and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive in modern times. In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has his private, unrecognized rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dreams."39 The poet gives expression to his pantheon of dreams and offers a vision of the world in patterns that, although they may not solve its paradoxes, give them recognizable shape.

Critics writing about Frénaud have recognized in poems such as Etape dans la clairière the myth of the


38 Campbell, Hero, p. 27.

39 Campbell, Hero, p. 4.
voyage. But whereas one may see the horses and riders of the poem as mere figures illustrating another subject, or a "scène primitive perçue impersonnellement aux origines," suggesting that the riders belong less to the domaine of allegory than to the irrational depths from which spring the mental structures of the race. It can be said of Frénaud's work as a whole that it consists of "les différentes modalités d'un chant qui s'élève au contact du réel basculant vers le mythe, s'ouvrant à une représentation tragique de tout destin." From the outset his poetry may be read as "a questioning of man's place in a meaningless cosmos" and an expression of despair at the absence of any real answer. "He belongs with other writers such as Pierre-Jean Jouve, Henri Michaux and René Char, to the line of poets who since Baudelaire have regarded poetry as a spiritual and


metaphysical adventure."\(^{45}\)

The subject of this study is the poetic form that spiritual adventure takes in the work of André Frénaud. Its basic core conforms to the pattern of separation, pilgrimage, struggle, death and exaltation traced by Frye and Campbell.

In the context of the Occupation of France it was natural to focus on those elements which made it war poetry. Several years later its philosophical aspects were more obvious to readers interested in the current vogue of existentialist thinking. With the publication of _Étape dans la Clairière_ in 1966 the legendary wanderers already present in the "roi mage" poems of his first collection reasserted their importance, and the mythical aspects of the work came under closer scrutiny.

Frénaud's poetry, then, may be read as the adventure of a present day quester in a threefold manifestation as prisoner, philosopher, and mythic hero. Each avatar of the seeker adds dimension to the spiritual enterprise.

The first three chapters of this study of Frénaud's poetry explore the themes of the prisoner, the philosopher and the mythic hero. The fourth chapter focuses

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on those poems which speak directly of the quester as poet, and the final chapter discusses Frénaud's poetry in terms of its structure, language, vocabulary and tone.
CHAPTER I

The Prisoner

Louis Aragon's introduction to "Les rois mages" and "Plaintes du roi mage"¹ in the September issue of Poésie 42 suggests that in these two poems of the recently liberated prisoner of war André Frénaud it is the "cortège de prisonniers ses compagnons...qu'on retrouvera derrière Gaspard, Melchior ou Balthazar."²

Years later Georges Raillard still reads the poems as "dits graves et troublants de la vie prisonnière."³

Cecil A. Hackett observes that the subsequent publication of "Brandebourg," "L'Avenir ou l'automne" and "La Route" (pp. 101, 106-108, 110-114) in the special issue of Poésie 43 entitled Poètes Prisonniers had an immediate impact, on what was then a necessarily limited public for

¹ André Frénaud, Les Rois mages (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), pp. 128-141. Further references in this chapter to this work appear in the text with page numbers only indicated.


their "resistance" value. Such poetry carried "le sceau des stalags et des oflags" and for many the name Frénaud, which had appeared so suddenly, belonged to one who was first of all "prisonnier en Allemagne."

Now the story of a prisoner of war emerges clearly from the poems of Frénaud's first collection Les Rois mages (Paris: Seghers, 1943). In the first editions the different sections of the book were titled "Poèmes d'avant guerre," "Poèmes de guerre," and "Retour" rather than "Revenu du desert," "Gare de l'Est," and "La vie morte, la vie" as in the versions of 1966 and 1977. Limiting the discussion to poems common to both the 1943 and the 1977 editions, we find the following. (Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers in the text refer to the 1977 edition.) The first of the "Poèmes de guerre" pictures a young man leaving Paris from the Gare de l'Est on September 2, 1939. He seems to have had little time to prepare, for his suit-case has a faulty lock and he is still looking for a locksmith to fix it as he crosses the city. At the station he finds his friends who have come to say goodbye, and they have one last farewell drink together (pp. 83-84).


5 Aragon, "Prisonnier," p. 31.

The young man is a soldier and the next few poems recount "les premiers jours de la guerre." Villages are abandoned as women weep (p. 85). The young man, assigned duty as a "canonier," wonders about the possibility of victory as he scans the horizon (p. 86). He realizes his carefree days are over, perhaps forever, and he may be buried before another summer comes (p. 87). The traditional holiday in memory of the dead, November 1, reminds him that it may soon be in memory of him also (p. 88). Christmas finds him in a pigsty in "Lotharingie" sheltering from both the elements and the enemy fire, his feet and his mind equally numb (p. 90).

There is a brief festive interlude before the disaster. He and his companions spend the evening in a tavern in Diemeringen. The innkeeper's daughter keeps the wine, and their money, flowing. There is much laughter in spite of the fact that, and even perhaps because, the soldiers' equipment is already prepared for the next day's departure (p. 91).

But the "éclaireur de la mort" is watching, waiting, and even through the haze of the wine the "canonier" senses death's silent warning: "Soldat, voici venu le jour de l'accomplissement" (pp. 91-92).

7 Expression taken from the title of the poem on p. 85 of Les Rois mages.
Soon afterward he is taken prisoner and sent to a work camp in Brandenbourgb in what is now East Germany, where it seems as if "la guerre creuse jusqu'aux dunes" (p. 119). As he bends over his spade, hungry from an inadequate diet of potatoes (p. 119), cold in the damp climate, and without news from home (p. 116), his mind turns to the good bread and to the women of his own country, so far away "de l'autre côté" (p. 119).

He dreams of escape. "Je partirai quand passeront les oies sauvages,/ le soldat ne me verra pas." In his imagination he follows the river Elbe across the old German Empire, meeting Faust, drinking wine in taverns on the Rhine, dancing till dawn in Hamburg. "C'est la paix, c'est la joie." When he is jolted back to the reality of his captivity, he stares in surprise at the cold waters of the river. "Pourquoi suis-je arrêté sur les bords froids de l'Elbe?" (pp. 102-103).

Laboring from dawn to dusk on the construction of a road which leads he knows not where--

Comme un rameur sur les galères du roi, j'ai ma place marquée dans la chaîne des wagonnets, de l'aube au crépuscule je remplis et je vide ces mornes sabliers--

he wonders if his friend will recognize the man she said goodbye to in 1939 (pp. 110-111). It seems to him that he
has become some one else, that his old self disappeared one day "en combattant contre le sable" (p. 105). He may dream that Paris lies at the end of the road (p. 110), but in his heart he fears that he and his companions are "captifs à n'en jamais finir" (p. 119).

Given such clear references to the events which Jean Lescure calls "la catastrophe," it is reasonable to concede with him the "sens actuel" of certain of Frénaud's poems. Léon Gabriel Gros was reacting to the tendency of a war-time public to read Frénaud's work as poetry of circumstance when he insisted that "la captivité n'en fournit pas le thème, à peine le prétexte." Cecil A. Hackett remarks correctly that Aragon related the "roi mage" poems too closely to the war years and to Frénaud's imprisonment, though it must be noted that Aragon also said, in that same early introduction, that the myth of the "roi mage" was also a metaphor for the life of the poet, perhaps for all of life.

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8 Jean Lescure, "André Frénaud ou La poésie à hauteur d'homme," Poésie 45, No. 22 (janvier 1945), pp. 60, 63.


10 Hackett, "Theme of the Quest," p. 120.

Frenaud claims that he did not harbor particularly anti-German feelings when he wrote the poems which reflect his war-time experiences. And indeed the poem "Noël 39" describes both Germans and Frenchmen as cold, numb and miserable — "ton coeur mêlé au mien, ennemi, rôde, Nos pieds enfîlés....Nos mémoires, gourdes..." — and includes the "enemy" in its final plea.

Pitié pour nous et pour tous ceux qui passent ici et là et de l'autre côté.
Noël des hommes, ô frère, pitié pour tous, qui attendons l'aurore. (pp. 89-90)

The German poet Paul Pörtner, in his postface to the German translation of a selection of Frenaud's poems points out that while Frenaud took part in the Resistance alongside Eluard he stood for reconciliation rather than for hatred.

Frenaud did not write rallying cries like Aragon's "Marche Française" calling for French skies free from German planes, or Eluard's famous "Liberté" with its

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14 Louis Aragon, La Diane française (Paris: Seghers, 1946), pp. 77-79.
hypnotic repetition of "J'écris ton nom."\textsuperscript{15} His poems are much less topical than Eluard's plea for the French girls whose heads were shaved for taking German lovers, or his lament for the executed Gabriel Péri.\textsuperscript{16}

Elsa Triolet found "inévitable" the association of the "Poèmes de guerre" (now "Gare de l'Est," pp. 83-97) with Apollinaire but did not explain.\textsuperscript{17} It is true that this group of poems was originally preceded by an epigram which ran:

\begin{center}
Canonier comme Apollinaire [sic]
moi aussi une étoile au front
les yeux de la Mort dans les miens
A la nôtre et Adieu la Guerre...\textsuperscript{18}
\end{center}

Léon Gabriel Gros detected Apollinaire's influence in the lyrical aspects of the poems which describe the early days of the war, the departure from Diemeringen and the prisoner's dream of escape. He cites the following lines from "Le Beau voyage."


\textsuperscript{17} Elsa Triolet, "André Frénaud, roi mage," \textit{Confluences}, No. 28 (1944), p. 61.

A Hambourg, j'ai vendu pour rien ma cargaison
et dans la foule je danse pour les amis jusqu'à
l'aurore. (p. 103)¹⁹

The poet himself admits irritation with what he calls
"le côté apollinarien" of certain of his poems, while
feeling that taken together with his later work they
have their place.²⁰

Frénaud may occasionally wax lyrical while evoking
a potentially grim situation, such as the departure
for the front -- "Tonneaux débondés, vin coule et les
argent, et la fille./ Il faut rire, et il n'est pas
demain/... On va partir, on part...." (p. 91) -- but
he never finds the war itself beautiful as does
Apollinaire in "Merveille de guerre."

Que c'est beau ces fusées qui illuminent la nuit
Elles montent sur leur propre cime et se penchent
pour regarder²¹

One cannot imagine him exclaiming with the poet of the
First World War, "Ah Dieu! que la guerre est jolie/
Avec ses chants ses longs loisirs."²²

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²⁰ Frénaud, Inhabileté, p. 19. Hereafter referred to
in the text as Inhabileté.

²¹ Guillaume Apollinaire, Calligrammes (Paris:
Gallimard, 1966); p. 137.

²² Apollinaire, p. 117.
Frénaud once explained to Gros that when one evening in the prison camp the moon suddenly reminded him of the myth of the "rois mages" he realized that the old story focused ideas and preoccupations he considered of primary importance.²³ Reading the two famous poems today it is difficult to find more than a faint echo of the experience that gave them birth. Frénaud follows the rough outline of the old story: three kings, guided by a star, set out in search of a promised child. There is mention of prisoners, death, and the uncertainty of the goal of a journey involving physical wear and tear more reminiscent of hard labor than of a kingly caravan.

Nos paumes qui ont brisé les tempêtes de sable
sont trouées par le charonçon, et j'ai peur de la nuit.
(p. 129)

But the poems are clearly about a spiritual search rather than a physical imprisonment.

There is considerable continuity of theme and even of vocabulary between the poems in the first section of Les Rois mages, written before the war began, and those written during it. Months before hostilities broke out, in a setting strangely resembling Brandenbourg, in snow and among pines buffed by the wind, the poet complains,

²³ Gros, p. 232. See also Inhabilité pp. 147-148.
La prison était si compacte,
où je marchais en descendant
toujours, si vite et si lent. (p. 17)

The world around him becomes the theatre of his distress. Hope flees into the marshes and in the surrounding countryside there is no promise of freedom (p. 22). The night seems indifferent to his plight and even the "grand ciel de lumière," the day, is like himself, a prisoner (p. 19).

The poet longs to escape to a place of refuge, to an as yet unrealized serenity (p. 23), the "azur" to which only the transports of love have so far promised access (p. 22). He imagines it as a "sourire de la plénitude" far away in a "pays plus clair" (p. 26).

But his hope of attaining such a goal is no more than a "Delieux mensonge" (p. 56). Should his desire carry him away in spirit from an existence that he considers a prison, it cannot keep him long from the crass realities which soon entrap him again.

Filet de mes songes, oiseau qui me tiens
captif et m'emportes au-delà,
pourquoi me ramener à ce jour acariâtre? (p. 53)

There are specific physical limits imposed by prison camps. One may not leave, one is separated from all one loves. There are other limits imposed by life on the mind
which dreams. Before he knew the confinement of Brandenburg, the poet cried out in frustration against spiritual bonds: "je les hais,/ ces limites des joies et du malheur" (p. 56).

War was still in the future when Frénaud began using military terms to describe various aspects of that "vie dure" (p. 62) which he finds so restrictive. The end of another year is "la fin du combat" (p. 26). Rotten fruit explodes "comme des grenades, celles de la guerre" (p. 30). In a particularly black moment the spiritual warrior sees before him a "charnier des Innocents" while off into the night glides a galley, that special sort of prison that will come to mind again as he monotonously shovels sand with his work companions, "Comme un rameur sur les galères du roi" (p. 110). When all seems lost he declares that the "dernière escorte a fui" (p. 72).

Laboring for the Margrave of Brandenbourg, Frénaud experienced physical and political exile from his homeland. But already much earlier he had felt himself spiritually "séparé" from his companions although to all appearances he was a most convivial person (p. 32).

In a poem entitled "Fraternité" he concludes that in this life it is not possible for all mankind to be united in the way he would wish.
Pitié pour vous et pour moi
puisqu'il n'est pas permis, frères,
d'être un seul être fraternel,
avant le sein froid de la nuit. (p. 33)

Cities, for all their crowds, are lonely places, as desolate as prisons; "La solitude garde la ville avec son fusil" (p. 62). This life with its separations is really a form of exile. "Cette vie d'ici n'est pas la nôtre" (p. 37).

The poetry of Les Rois mages tells much more than the tale of a prisoner of war in Germany. It takes up the old theme of the eternal exile, the stranger,\(^\text{24}\) while evoking an atmosphere of enclosure beautifully described by Georges Borgeaud. "Quand on est à l'intérieur d'elle, ...on s'y sent un peu comme dans une ville assiégée où le sommeil est menacé sans répit. Par elle, il n'y a point de repos et quand le poète rêve, c'est avec les yeux ouverts et une attention toujours aux aguets, obligant son lecteur à participer avec lui à une espèce de combat, lui bouchant les issues, lui interdisant l'évasion, le contraignant à prendre conscience de son destin, mais d'une manière fraternelle et en sa compagnie."\(^\text{25}\)

\(^\text{24}\) Christian Audejean, "Il n'y a pas de paradis," Esprit, 5 (mai 1961), 861.

\(^\text{25}\) Borgeaud, p. 37.
If, of all the poètes prisonniers, Frénaud is the one who has most successfully withstood the test of time, it is without doubt because the very real exile of his war-time captivity provided images and "objective correlatives" for a spiritual alienation long and deeply felt. As the German poet Paul Pörtner suggests, André Frénaud discovered under the surface of destructive and destroyed Germany his metaphysical home.

Discussing a much later poem, "Etape dans la clairière" (1966), Jacques Chessex explains how the image of war functions in Frénaud's poetry. "La guerre est l'image de la vie cruelle, de ses travaux, de ses peines, de l'incroyable somme d'efforts et de douleurs que coûte l'existence quotidienne. L'image qui se dessine dans le poème est celle de l'homme en marche qui avance difficilement, attentif au moindre signe hostile, guerrier qui veut vaincre et qui veut sauver sa peau."  


27 See Raillard, p. 20.

28 Pörtner, p. 104.

Frénaud's attitude toward life had been established before the conflict. After his return to France he continued to write poetry which entertained his previous concerns, a poetry enriched by his wartime travails.

The following chapter considers how Frénaud, the disillusioned "roi mage," expresses like the existentialists the misery of man, the dispossessed king, but also the greatness of his revolt and his hopeless combat.  

CHAPTER 2
The Philosopher

The French poet is first of all a thinker.¹ This is true of André Frénaud whom Georges Limbour characterizes as a "penseur-poète."² This "poète-philosophe" judges and weighs the hopes and aspirations of human existence.³ He expresses in an existentialist way the misery of man.⁴ He is the poet who came closest to expressing the philosophy of the post war era, from Jean-Paul Sartre to Albert Camus.⁵ He shared his friend Camus' conception of the absurd as seen in L'Étranger.⁶

³ Brett, p. 178.
⁴ Peperstraete, p. 469.
⁵ Rousselot, Dictionnaire, p. 34.

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Only rarely does his conception of the absurdity of the human condition borrow images directly from the horrors of the war, as it does in "La Noce Noire."  

Et de longs canons s'avancent, gavés comme des boas, les peuples convoyés par le silence du grand prêtre, les tombereaux conduisant les filles nues au charnier, toutes nourritures de bourreau.  

(Sainte Face, p. 57)  

This long poem is a later (1944-1945), darker version of the "roi mage" poems of 1941. It presents a world gone awry.

Longeant les silos rongés de rats et d'orge,  
coloriant les villes de leurs guenilles,  
on-ils dépassé les maisons mal jointoyées.  

(Sainte Face, p. 56)  

The numerous wanderers, "les appelés" (p. 55) find only

7 See Frénaud's "Note à propos de la construction d'un livre de poèmes," La Sainte Face, p. 257.

8 La Sainte Face (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 57. Henceforth references to the primary works will be included in parentheses in the text. The following abbreviations will be used:

Etape (L'Etape dans la clairière, 1966)  
Paradis (Il n'y a pas de paradis, 1967)  
Sainte Face (La Sainte Face, 1968)  
Toujours (Depuis Toujours Déjà, 1970)  
Sorcière (La sorcière de Rome, 1973)  
Rois mages (Les Rois mages, 1977)  
Inhabileté (Notre inhabileté fatale, 1979)  

When page numbers only are given, they refer to the work just cited.
grubs between their teeth and in their houses, and a world of hate separates them from each other: "le mur mitoyen de la haine entre toi et l'autre" (p. 57). In a desolation of rotting grain, rags and tumble-down houses, food is always just out of reach, foundry smoke suffocates them and there is a bad odour everywhere. Their uncertainty leads them to wonder if they have mistaken the date, if the festival wasn't yesterday. They ask where the road goes. They can't tell if the voice they hear is that of the deadly undertow of the sea or the sounds of a reassuring fair.

In "Poèmes de dessous le plancher" (Sainte Face, pp. 7-52) the very black vision is made up of images already forming within the poet and brought to the surface by the violence of the war experience. In the countryside pockets of suspicious persons lurk, protective lines are down, all is uncertainty, and there are thousands of strangled children in the deserted houses of the suburbs (Des bandes dans le pays," p. 37). Some people have gathered in a strange hotel. Although the servants clean assiduously, the clients are harassed by rats and bedbugs. When the lights go out, which they do frequently because of inexplicable short circuits, grubs appear under the sleeper's tongue and cannot be removed. Sometimes blood

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9 "Note," Sainte Face, p. 257.
flows in the pipes and children disappear, but no one talks about it, or the possible connection between the two, anymore than people discuss the various vermin that keep them awake and pacing the halls at night ("Hôtel à plein sang," pp. 31-34).

A small store adds to the gloomy picture.

Le vin n'est pas frais ici, la vie n'est pas chaude. Les viandes ont coulé sans laisser de mousse. La fille, elle est morte et sa chevelure servit un temps d'épouvantail, les fourbis [sic] l'ont emporté. La maîtresse, je ne sais. Les nouveaux patrons, pas annoncés.

Alors peut-être on nous attend. ("Enseigne," p. 36)

It is cold, the wine has turned sour and the meat gone bad. A girl, perhaps the one who served customers, is dead. Her hair became an object of horror, could have been used as a scarecrow, until some nameless things (fourbis) carried her body away. The mistress of the store is missing, probably dead too. The narrator does not know. If there are new proprietors, they have not been announced.

A peddler sounds a pessimistic note. After a litany of nine lines, beginning with "pas de" and including
everything from shoe laces to news of the children, he concludes: "Le monde est vide, il n'y a rien à vendre" ("Air du colporteur," p. 35).

The world is rotting, empty and disturbing. "Il y a des vers sous la chemise de la mariée. Il y a des bêtes dans le lit de la morte. Il y a une taie sur l'oeil de la beauté" ("Tout m'inquiète," p. 42). If there are forces that control it they are malevolent. One of the distichs of "Mère marâtre" (p. 43) announces that "Il y a du sable dans le baume/ dont je flatte le supplicié," while the "Rêverie de Dieu ou les mauvais dons" (p. 47) concludes cynically: "Je t'ai donné l'espoir/ pour vous mieux tromper." An absurd world indeed. "Il se trouve que nous sommes à l'âge de la désintégration" wrote one critic shortly after the war10 and another added, "Nous marchons en somnambules sur les toits d'une maison en flammes."11

Jean-Paul Sartre published Qu'est-ce que la littérature in 1948.12 In this enquiry into why and for whom the writer writes, he declared that the writer


12 Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
should be committed (p. 44), and that he should write in such a manner as to permit no one to remain innocent about the state of the world (p. 31). He made clear, however, that this requirement was made of the prose writer and not of the poet. Prose is utilitarian by definition, he wrote, and the prose writer uses words as tools (p. 26). In poetry, however, although emotions, passion and even anger, social indignation and political hatred be at the root of the poem, they are not expressed as they would be in a pamphlet (p. 25).

However, Louis Aragon's Le Crève-coeur, a collection of poems written between 1939 and 1941 and among the first inspired by the Second World War and the Résistance, temporarily launched a vogue of "committed poetry."13

André Frénaud, who published in the very committed series Poésie 42 etc., and other clandestine literary magazines, was assimilated by many into the category of committed poet. Vladimir Brett praised the critical stance of his poetry toward the social and political developments of his time and the witness he bore to it.14 He suggested that his poems were above all a cry of

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14 Brett, p. 178.
indignation and sorrow at the injustice of history.\textsuperscript{15}

It is true that André Frénaud participated in the Resistance in the literary milieux.\textsuperscript{16} Later he signed the "Manifeste des 121"\textsuperscript{17} which in 1960 declared "the legitimacy for French citizens of armed resistance to French policy" in North Africa.\textsuperscript{18} He contributed along with other men of letters to the struggle for the deliverance of his literary colleagues in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{19}

Most of his "committed" poems can be found in the group "Civiques" (Sainte Face, pp. 137-156). He expresses his sympathy with the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War in "Espagne" (p. 141), castigating the turncoats and the priests who supported Franco and evoking the dreadful mute grief of Spanish motherhood.

Pour toujours accroché aux blasons replâtrés,
aux robes des prêtres-traîtres,
aux grands arbres, aux moissons, au plein sommeil,
a l'herbe
au long sifflement innocent de la faux,
le silence du hurlement terrible des mères d'Espagne.

(p. 141)

\textsuperscript{15} Brett, p. 176.

\textsuperscript{16} Brett, p. 174.

\textsuperscript{17} Wiedmer, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{18} Germaine Brée, Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment (New York: Dell, 1972), p. 82.

\textsuperscript{19} Wiedmer, p. 7.
In a bitter poem which starts by calling Christmas the night of the liar, and rejects the Christmas story in favor of the miseries of ordinary men, "de fraternité et de sang, guerre ou amour" he turns to the chilled children of Barcelona sleeping in the subways, under the thunder of bombs, and wishes for them the traditional serenity of the animals of the crèche. Then, in a final burst of anger, he calls for the death of Franco in the bullring in Madrid.

Un jour, aux arènes de Madrid, jour de justice, le grand taureau qui est avec nous dans ces cornes emportera la tripe de Franco. Que le sang de ce chien nourrisse le sable!

(pp. 142-143)

However André Frénaud is not a facile supporter of armed struggle. The title "Chant Patriotique" (pp. 147-148) of another poem is ironic. War is not a grand affair. Frénaud describes it as an ugly sea swell, regular as menstruation, a solemn matter of dead flesh. But in the call to war, he complains, people forget all the atrocities. The poem ends with a bitter repetition of the old call to arms: "A la guerre. A la guerre" (p.148).

Turning to the disastrous events in Eastern Europe during the late thirties, Frénaud expresses shame for the abandonment of Prague by France after the Munich agreement,
and exposes his countrymen's cowardice ("Prague," pp. 137-140).

Contre ton injustice soudain découverte,
nous avons pris le masque de la raison
parce que nous avions peur,
mais c'était l'injustice que nous t'avions permise.
(p. 138)

The victory of such reason over a promise is a treason
which touches all the French people. Can this be the poet's own country? Is this the path of honor (p. 138)?
In disgust he describes the sweaty odor of the bourgeois
who followed Neville Chamberlain and Daladier to the Place de l'Etoile and then took up a collection to buy each of the "sauveurs de la paix" (note, p. 140) a house in the country. He compares them to those misguided patriots who killed the messenger from the Thermopyles in the struggle of the Spartans against Persia.

His lament for Poland is equally bitter: He pictures the unhappy country as an exiled sister of the wandering Jew; As he did for Prague, he recalls the beauty of a land he knew personally, a land that he says France always abandoned and then welcomed when it was dead ("Lamentation de la Pologne," pp. 149-150).

Frénaud protests the forced exile of so many European Jews. In 1939 a ship with more than a thousand Jews
deported from Germany was refused permission to dock anywhere. It therefore tried, unsuccessfully, to land its passengers secretly in the Caribbean (note, p. 146). Here again the poet uses the image of the wandering Jew, in combination with that of the promised land of Canaan. In Germany, the complacent praise the combination of uniforms and authority and are moved by the greatness of the fatherland. They believe in the justice of their country and drink to the "radiant future." Meanwhile soldiers on guard along the flowering coasts of the Caribbean turn back the refugees. There is no place for them to go. "Les algues du fond, douces pour le juif errant" ("Sur la Mer des Caraïbes," pp. 144-145). The poem is dedicated to one of those who died at Mauthausen.

André Frénaud, like so many of his generation, held great hopes for the heritage of Marx and Hegel. But in the long "Agonie du Général Krivitski" (pp. 107-128) he expresses his disillusionment through the personage of Krivitski, a powerful Soviet counterspy who defected during the purges of 1938 and later was assassinated in New York. In the seven page explanation which follows the poem Frénaud describes his friendship with Krivitski in Paris. He deplores the unjustifiable, monstrous excesses

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20 "Note," Sainte Face, p. 257.
of Stalin and the resultant subversion of the Revolution. While divorcing himself from the nihilism he attributes to Krivitski at the end of his life, in the poem his own voice can still be heard through that of the Bolshevik. Krivitski regrets not having died in the International Brigade in Madrid when he still had hope. He would have preferred not to know of Stalin's betrayal of the Revolution. The honor of the Revolution died with Léon Davidovitch Trotsky (p. 118). The Communist Party has become a barbarous, traitorous tyrant. His hopes fade as Boukharine confesses to trumped up charges in Loubianka prison (p. 120) and rigged trials are staged in Moscow. With the last admissions of the old hero of the Revolution die Krivitski's own hopes. He feels a new kinship with Dostoyevsky's leering demons. Addressing his "Compagnons de route sous l'étoile de la Révolution," Krivitski declares them all vanquished, lost in the windings of the road, henceforth without a guiding light (p. 125).

In another long poem, "Enorme figure de la déesse raison," Frénaud turns to the revolution that gave birth to the French Republic. The "déesse Raison" of the title is the "verbe de la révolution" (Paradis, pp. 39-46). As such she has mixed qualities. She may proclaim the right of man to be a god (p. 41), she may take the people in her arms, but she is also "un faux arc-en-ciel" (p. 42),
which in Frénaldien symbolism means that she is an empty hope or ideal. She is a "vivandière de rêves mauvais" (p. 45) who rules insurrection through "géométries passionnées de sang" (p. 41).

The entire poem is an indictment of reason as it has been admired and misused since the eighteenth century. Reason has been called to the support of many bloody causes and has led to many disasters. It promises clarity and freedom, but often delivers the opposite. "Qu'on égorge les vaincus... O mes enfants, je vous suis une mère trompeuse" (p. 44).

To Frénaud's bitter disillusionment with "hegello­marxisme" was added the discovery of the concentration camps, which "dépassaient tout de même les possibilités prévisibles de l'histoire dans le pire."21 Thereafter there is little mention of specific political circumstances in his poetry. But if he does not advocate a permanent vocation for participation in the transformation of society through political action, allowing nevertheless that there are circumstances in which one must do just that, he claims for the poet the possibility of transforming the despair of being into a livable form of non-hope, if not into hope itself. It is everyone's

21 "Note," Sainte Face, p. 257.
obligation to help in his own domain. And so he explains his protest against Stalinism.22

Frénaud's commitment operates in a wider human context than political activism. Raymond Jean noted that this political consciousness was added to an anguished quest for being, an anxious questioning of the why and the wherefore of the real.23 Frénaud is not a political poet. He rejects commitment to doctrinaire and ideological groups.24 At the time, lyricism, born of a purely personal anguish, coincided with the aspirations of the era.25 The image of the "engagé" poet was somewhat misleading.26 The commitment was poetic rather than political.

Frénaud is one of the few modern poets "haunted" by the ontological questions which are the new form religion has taken in our day.27

22 Note on "Agonie du Général Krivitski," Sainte Face, pp. 131, 134.


24 Pörtner, p. 104-105.


His ideas correspond most closely to those of Heidegger although the orientation of his work had been established before he read the German philosopher. Heidegger became more and more interested in the notion of the poet as the "shepherd of Being" after he published the first of several essays on Hölderlin in 1937. He later published interpretations of Rilke, Gottfried Benn, Georg Trakle and Stefan George.

Man's severance from Being is Heidegger's central theme. The essence of Being, the essence of man, and his belonging to Being "remain ever yet and ever more overwhelmingly what befits thought." Since he does not have an answer to the question of what Being really is, he reexamines the problem. He does however remove it from the realm of Christian theology. Being is neither God, nor a first cause, nor the totality of that which exists. So it is with "the recognition that God is dead and that man has no standpoint outside the totality of

30 From Sein und Zeit, 1927, p. 459, cited in Edwards, Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the article on Heidegger.
things that man must approach again in this age the problem of Being."32

Now one"may expect any analysis of Being to vary with the general framework of concepts within which it is considered,"33 and Frénaud is writing poetry rather than philosophy. However, a concern with Being is at the center of much of his work. Frénaud senses that man, with his individual consciousness, has become alienated from what is universal in nature,34 the cosmic principle,35 "la vie profonde du cosmos."36 Frénaud wishes to return to the universal "one" behind the multiplicity of modern existence, to renew Being, to "change life."37

The "one" is not the Christian God. Addressing his conventional Catholic father Frénaud specifies that it is not his father's God, but another, unknown, god that interests him (Paradis, p. 197).


33 Edwards, Encyclopedia, the article on Being, p. 276.


36 Expression of Frénaud, cited in Clancier, Frénaud, p. 81.

This unknown One he "pursues" (Paradis, p. 183) has revealed itself to him in a "grand balbutiement où se débattait/ tout l'ancien malheur aboli sous les regards neufs" (Paradis, p. 182). All became harmony. Now he listens for an echo of this "unique harmonie" (Paradis, p. 150), so that he may "aller si loin que je sois accordé à tout" (Paradis, p. 110).

As Rimbaud wanted to find "la vraie vie," so Frenaud wants to attain "la vie véritable" (Paradis, p. 119) which coincides with "la réalité véritable" (Rois mages, p. 40) or more importantly, "la Réalité" (Paradis, p. 234). Being is imagined as a place. It is variously "la vraie contrée (Paradis, p. 146), "la vraie patrie" (Sainte Face, p. 26), and "le vrai monde" (Paradis, p. 91), "mon pays" (Paradis, p. 137) and "la dernière île du bonheur" (Paradis, p. 185).

Early poems locate "la vraie contrée outside of this life in a "refuge au-dessus de la vie" or see it as a "belle demeure en dehors de la vue (Rois mages, p. 23). Then again it is conceived to be the treasured object of a long search: a pearl (Rois mages, p. 14), a grail and a golden fleece" (Rois mages, pp. 138, 134).

As the terms multiply the difficulties of describing Being become more and more apparent. Progressive approximations do not come any closer to a final definition.
A cause for celebration—"les noces de l'homme avec lui-même" (Rois mages, p. 134)—Being is associated with light and clarity, "les mains blanches de la lumière" (Paradis, p. 113), "le vrai jour" (Etape, p. 22), and with the "azur" dear to Mallarmé and Baudelaire. It is at the same time "l'infini" (Paradis, p. 14) and "le profond secret" (Rois mages, p. 40), having the expansion of the universe and the compactness of a deep secret. The poet turns to it as to a "promesse ancienne" (Paradis, p. 96) which reveals itself to man in the form of "un bonheur arc-en-ciel" (Paradis, p. 118).

But rainbows fade and promises are not always kept. "L'accord" (Paradis, p. 118) glimpsed in "la face bleue de l'ange" (Paradis, p. 91) is momentary. The poet "saisira pour un instant l'Unité du tout" (Paradis, p. 234), but only for an instant. Being is mercurial, ambiguous. Although its "appel est vrai" (Paradis, p. 111), it seems less and less attainable. It is the promise of "l'unité future" (Rois mages, p. 139) rather than here and now. Its call becomes an "incertain murmure" or a "Petite musique fuyante" (Rois mages, p. 140). The ancient promise permits only "aperçus incertains" of a "plénitude peut-être" (Paradis, p. 97).

The success of the experience is more and more modified by negative qualities which bring out its indefiniteness, its refusal of definition or of substance.
Gradually those "certains moments privilégiés" which the poet knew to be a "faveur inouïe" (Paradis, p. 123) attributable to "la grâce" (Paradis, p. 122) lose their brilliance and become "certains éclats furtifs" (Paradis, p. 139). The contradictions implicit in the "Resplendissement de la plénitude jusqu'au lointain" (Paradis, p. 132) become obvious. If it sometimes seems that the "Bonheur acquis d'emblée (Paradis, p. 132) is his and will be "la noce perpétuelle" (Paradis, p. 133), in fact it is "Promise, mais différée la noce" (Paradis, p. 121), and the poet finds himself empty handed before "un mystère non avenu" (Rois mages, p. 140).

The clear face of the angel is really "un visage illisible" (Etape, p. 13), "le visage non formulé" (Paradis, p. 64). In despair the poet concludes that "tout est secret vide" (Etape, p. 20). And yet it is undeniable that he has experienced, if only fleetingly, the grace and plenitude of Being.

Mais certains jours tout est facile.
Le monde ouvert, profitons-en pour prendre la peine d'être heureux.

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L'écho d'en bas n'a plus de souffle.
Des lumières ont bougé dans les branches.
Un bonheur arc-en-ciel s'élève
si les coeurs savent se contenter.

(Paradis, p. 118)

One part of the difficulty lies in the fact that
Being is less a place or a thing than an energy which
erupts, surges, and passes. One does not possess being,
one only feels its devouring violence.39 So it is an
error to make a thing out of it, to think of it as a
substance when it is in fact a force, a form of energy.40
And indeed Frénaud realizes this. Describing a previous
experience of it, he talks of "la foudre qui m'anéantit
dans l'unité" (Paradis, p. 139) and in another poem he
associates energy and the absolute: "j'ai voulu
enfreindre les limites, retrouver/ l'afflux de l'énergie
sans voix, le chant absolu" (Toujours, p. 87).

But here again there are troubling negative aspects.
Being, "énergie lointaine,/ je ne sais pour qui,/ je
ne sais pas où (Paradis, p. 121), is still not readily
accessible. By its nature as energy its exact location

39 Bernard Pingaud, in the preface to, Paradis, p. 7.

is impossible to pinpoint. In a small Paris street with the striking name of Passage de la Visitation, it manifests itself in a characteristic silence. "Passage de la visitation, si l'être y passe/ quelquefois c'est sans bruit" (Paradis, p. 97).

And yet, although he does not know where it is, he knows that it is still everywhere, but hidden. It comes to him in brief manifestations which he cannot control or predict. Being, like grace, manifests itself when it is least expected, when the seeker's guard is down.

L'être impatiemment se meut à travers tout. Il éveille, il s'ignore, il est caché. De l'une à l'autre forme il ne passe pas, hors quand se défont assez toutes mes prises pour que remonte et sourde soudain au travers du silence un éclat.

(Paradis, p. 111)

The explosion of energy recedes, the seeker notes with regret its short duration and its renewed inaccessibility: "La faveur n'était pas durable,/ Le passage s'est obstrué" (Paradis, p. 11). Time and time again the same brief, frustrating experience occurs: "le bonheur se tient sous la menace/ la beauté n'est pas durable" (Paradis, p. 150).
Now according to Hegel, one of Frénaud's favorite philosophers, the immediate, indeterminate notion of Being is nothing.\textsuperscript{41} Heidegger, for his part, contends that "Mortals are touched by presence, the ancient name of Being. But because presence conceals itself at the same time, it is itself already absence."\textsuperscript{42} Sartre's thinking invites the question, "Is being an irresolvable duality, a plenitude on the one hand and a barren negation on the other, l'être et le néant?"\textsuperscript{43} Frénaud, in "Il n'y a pas de Paradis" (Paradis, p. 83), answers yes.

Addressing Dylan Thomas, who had expressed the wish to make heard the music of Paradise, he declares that he himself cannot hear the music of Being, and when he meets it face to face it burns him to ashes, as in the old tales where the gods destroy those who dare come face to face with them.

\begin{quote}
Je ne peux entendre la musique de l'être.
Je n'ai reçu le pouvoir de l'imaginer.
Mon amour s'alimente à un non-amour.
Je n'avance qu'attisé par son refus.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{43} Blackham, p. 111.
Il m'emporte dans ses grands bras de rien.
Son silence me sépare de ma vie.

Être sereinement brûlant que j'assiège.
Quand enfin je vais l'atteindre dans les yeux,
sa flamme a déjà creusé les miens, m'a fait cendres.
Qu'importe après, le murmure misérable du poème.
C'est néant cela, non le paradis (Paradis, p. 83).

The negations at the heart of Being are multiple:
the music of being is a silence which separates the listener from his own life. His love feeds on a non-love,
his desire to persist is fanned by Being's refusal, and when finally he is gathered up into Being he finds himself in arms of nothing. The full sense of the expression "la foudre qui m'anéantit dans l'unité" (Paradis, p. 139) is now clear. Total reconciliation with Being brings total annihilation of one's individual self. The blue of infinity is at the same time "l'azur noir" (Paradis, p. 150). On the other hand, as a seed's death brings forth new life, so the "néant" can be "notre père fruitier" and "la fécondante déperdition" (Sainte Face, p. 14). Loss of one's separate identity is not only a step on the way toward the clear light of Being, it is the only way to it. "Il fait clair dans la vie où tout est consumé (Paradis, p. 24).

The experience of Being then is inextricably linked with death and nothingness. It is nonetheless a triumph
to have been touched by the "Être où s'évanouira l'homme triomphal" (Paradis, p. 150). Being is still desirable despite its inevitable accompaniment: "en vain nous touchons à la plus pure lumière/----La mort permute aussi/ avec la vie et tout est bien" (Paradis, p. 150). So the seeker must accept the duality of Being. There is no avoiding its provenance or its ephemerality. It will always be "Beauté de l'instant issue des éléments contraires,/ l'éternité saisie sous le nuage menaçant" (Paradis, p. 135). Eternity, by definition, is not available to the human being trapped in time. His sense of it will always be overshadowed by his own particularity. In existentialist terms man assumes a situation that he cannot change, for as Hegel observed, "the life of the mind is not one that shuns death and keeps clear of destruction; it endures death and in death maintains its being."44

For a time this attitude seems successful. There are periods of difficulty and of failure but joy always returns. It is sufficient to keep trying. Everything can lead to Being. Frénaud proclaims with confidence:

Je poursuis, je fais confiance, je vois clair
Je connais mes blessures et j'attends d'autres peines.

J'attends d'autres joies et je salue la vie.
Tout est ma patrie, que je saurai porter.

(Paradis, pp. 139-140)

Even if victory is never quite within reach it doesn't matter. One can live with that as long as even an echo of Being reaches us. As Frénaud says,

Seule victoire, oscillant toujours hors de nos prises peut-être. Il n'importe!
Le temps qui tellement a mordu et mord, j'y peux vivre,
si nous parvient dans l'odeur de fumée, dans l'oreille éblouie par la cloche ancienne, aujourd'hui, un écho de l'unique harmonie.

(Paradis, p. 150)

But the challenge is enormous. Being is given so intermittently that discouragement is inevitable. As evidence of the impossibility of sustaining the harmony becomes overwhelming, the radical separation of man from Being is felt more and more acutely. The tenuousness of Being contrasts with the solidity of man's existence, which becomes more and more obviously that which keeps him anchored to this life, the obstacle which stands between him and the other, the true life.

Since Plato, what we call reality has been regarded as a degradation of the ideal. Frénaud calls it an

"incarnation insuffisante" and describes it as a fall from "Une lumière, acropole au sommet de mes songes" into "l'épaisseur si lente" (Paradis, p. 18). His very existence as a man is an obstacle to Being. Everything about him, his eyes, his mind, seems to prevent its reception. His desire is not strong enough to capture it, his efforts to constitute the "One" are all useless,

Je suis: je forme une ombre à la lumière.
Mes ouvertures, mes prises, mes yeux, l'esprit sont mes entraves,
l'obstacle à son entrée fraternelle.
Le rêve ne sait pas rêver assez profond,
Le désir n'est pas mu par un coeur assez fort.
Les dépouilles d'éclats où je me divertis de ne vouloir accepter mon être opaque
ne me reconstituent pas à l'Unité.

(Paradis, p. 112)

Another paradox of Being presents itself. It is in the obstacle that man must continue the search. Not only is Being inextricably linked to nothingness, it is also, in consequence of this very fact, to be found in the world, not out in some starry elsewhere. Rather than wish for transcendence out of the body and over the rainbow—and the rainbow is a leitmotif in Frenaud's poetry, representing Being -- the poet must turn his eyes downward and look

46 Raymond Jean, "Entretien," p. IV.
for "une ascension parmi la terre" (Paradis, p. 113). He must turn away from the illusion of an escape to "somewhere out of the world" and search around him here below in the world of men. "Il ne viendra de renfort que d'entre nous/ Il n'y aura pas d'ascension" (Paradis, p. 197) to some other place.

Rather than turn away from the obstacle of human existence he must turn to it and work the familiar territory he had disdained for what lies beneath it. In an analogy with the humble peasant he admits:

Il me faut travailler mes terres meubles jusqu'à laisser passer le flot profond pour lui devenir delta conquérant.

(Paradis, p. 110)

And so again at times Being seems almost within reach. But, as before, a persistent search does not result in a definitive success, only a temporary hope, a passing glimpse: "Ce n'est pas ailleurs, ce doit être ici./ Je cherche et je trouve presque, et je perds (Paradis, p. 137). The search for Being within the world leads to a contact with the world's more unpleasant aspects. The poet is nearly suffocated within his own existence. "Je poursuis éclatant parmi mes vomissures" (Paradis, p. 198).

Once more he senses ultimate failure. As the solidity of his own existence once seemed to prevent Being's
entering him from the outside, now it prevents his
descent into himself. The "profond secret" is unreach­able and he is powerless before "Notre vie, infranchis­sable, recluse" (Paradis, p. 18). But his resolve is
such that he attacks again with greater force, only to
find that such violence destroys the very thing he is
looking for. He explains:

J'ai vrillé dans le vif,
tout dépassé ou déprécié
à la recherche d'une perle.

(Rois mages, p. 14)

Instead of the pearl of Being he has burst through to
Nothingness:

Plus rein qu'un trou
que j'ai formé, que je suis
d'avoir trop appuyé.

(Rois mages, p. 15)

The experience seems to have reached a final
conclusion. From a starting point from which he looked
for Being outside and beyond the familiar and the known
the seacher has traced the way in and through life itself.
Far from escaping the Nothingness of death to which our
human lives condemn us, he has come face to face with it
and has realized that where Being is, there also is
Nothingness to be found. But if Being is only given to us
as Nothingness as Frénaud says, then Nothingness is Being and the quest has come full circle back to that from which it fled and which now appears to be the source of the "secret." If the wished for plenitude is "le rien de l'être (Etape, p. 23) and "une vacance du néant dans l'être" (Sainte Face, p. 183), if plenitude gives birth to non-being -- "Sortis de lui, le non-lui... dans le déboulé de nos lois et de nos dieux/ qui se déchirent, nous déchirés, désireux en marche" (Etape, p. 24) -- then man may look to the Néant for his strength:

S'il passe par moi l'irrecevable,  
je m'élève en sa force  
comme l'aigle dans la foudre,  
dans le Rien confondu,  
en feu.  

(Etape, p. 24)

Nothingness is more accessible than Being. It is virtually unavoidable. Rather than chase illusions, one may as well look to Nothingness since it reigns over all. In it look for shelter and nourishment. The intimations of Being, "Ce sont des fables, des échappées vaines!

Rien ne manque à la profondeur du Profond  
Le Rien s'élève, le fauteur

47 Clancier, Frénaud, p. 53.
Il regorge en masse, il s'entrouve.
Il est l'abris violent et le gouffre
la nourricière noire
O négateur, il règne.

(Etape, p. 23)

Two possibilities now seem to present themselves --
total embrace of Nothingness or total inactivity. A
choice made for the Nothingness of death can indirectly
bring life. Is not the death of life the death of death
also? A purely negative procedure can bring about the
desired loss into Being since "La mort de la vie c'est la
mort de la mort/ Dernier passage et rien enfin"
(Paradis, p. 203). But this choice is a trap. Just as
the actual experience of Being brought extinction to the
existing seeker, so will the actual experience of the
Néant bring extinction. At every turn the answer is the
same. There is no absolute attainable in this life. If
the desire for it becomes too strong, the poet risks the
temptation of nihilism, the love of destruction for its
own sake.

This taste for self destruction has a long history
in the human race: "L'Etre c'est la mort,/ c'est un
vieux désir" (Toujours, p. 56). The loss of his idealist
hopes led to General Krivitski's despair and, in
Frénaud's reconstruction of his end, to his welcoming of
death. The poet puts us on guard against the dangers
inherent in the notion that it is "ma vie, la mort/
qui est l'ouverture de l'être total/ ou du néant" (Sainte Face, p. 127). In the explanation which follows
the poem he points out that physical death must not be
confused with losing oneself into Being (Sainte Face,
p. 132). Unlike Krivitski, Frénaud will persist in a
struggle which will always result in a return to con­
sciousness after the brief oblivion of the sense of
union, he will reach for the light even though "demain
précipitera de nouveau l'opacité/ cruelle du jour"
(Paradis, p. 106).

Between the exaltation of the encounter with Being
and the anguish of the return to "l'opacité cruelle du
jour" Frénaud identifies a third state which is mildly
happy and neither exalted nor anguished. He wonders why
he cannot find permanent satisfaction in this tranquil
sort of happiness. Addressing the domesticated order
of the cultivated countryside he asks why he cannot be
satisfied with the lesser contentment it offers:

O coteaux modérés
pourquoi ne portez-vous pour moi
vos honnêtes sortilèges?

(Rois mages, p. 15)

He finds the endless search for Being exhausting and would
like to rest from the struggle. "Ah! sortir du voyage!"
(Etape, p. 29), he exclaims at one of those times when
the peace and the order of a moderate compromise tempt him; "C'est ici où je voudrais m'évanouir/ à l'instant où le monde est bon" (Etape, p. 29).

But it is not to be. "Les répits ne durent pas" (Paradis, p. 199). As Being eludes his grasp so does ordinary happiness. Something drives him on toward that which he knows is unattainable and inexplicable. In frustration he cries: "je ne puis guérir d'un appel insensé (Rois mages, p. 130). Exhausted he admits that every stop is followed by a new departure, that no experience of Being really ends his search:

L'événement ne prévaudra pas sur le parcours.
Je le savais dès l'origine.

(Paradis, p. 183)

Since before Socrates Being has been conceived as one, unchanging, and eternal and certain religious modes of thought have accustomed us to the notion of a realm free from change and decay.48 Being has thus become erroneously associated with a sort of reassuring fixity or stoppage which escapes from the changes effected by life and by time.

Frénaud sometimes longs for just such a state. He would like to be a statue. (Paradis, p. 115) He wishes

48 Edward, Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the article on Being, p. 276.
he were made out of dead wood, or stone, because stone does not dream (Rois mages, p. 36). In the following poem he expresses the desire to remain fixed to one spot like a tree until he reaches a state of stupefaction. He envies the monotonous life of a fireplace which always looks at and through the same window, to presumably the same unchanging vista.

Je veux rester fixé sur cette place,
imaginer comme un arbre jusqu'a l'hébétude.

....

ou que je sois la cheminée qui regarde sa fenêtre.
Je veux quitter le temps qui ne m’a jamais aimé.

(Paradis, p. 53)

In effect time has always reclaimed him from those moments of grace touched by the sense of the oneness of all things which is Being. It has always snatched him away from the momentary sense of plenitude, from the brief sense that all was in order once and for all. But although the poet will often wish for the apparent immovability of the tree or the statue he knows that in this changeable and changing life lies his only possibility of experiencing Being, however briefly, and in the finality of death alone is found permanent order: "Lorsque je serai mort....Tout sera en ordre, ni plus ni moins" (Paradis, p. 141).
So in fact there is no real choice. Frénaud has been called a tragic poet, and a Sisyphus of man's misery. His poetry is tragic in that despite elements of hope, it is largely the expression of calamity and suffering. He is a Sisyphus of man's misery in that he faces an unending task which is arduous and painful and offers no enduring rewards. His rare accounts of reaching the high point of Being are followed inevitably by the descent into the unhappiness of existence and the ever repeated project of again reaching the heights. Like Camus' Sisyphus, his long struggle is rewarded, however briefly, by moments of pure happiness. And because of those moments Frénaud will continue. His poetry is full of obstinate affirmations: "je maintiendrai" (Etape, p. 25), "je poursuivrai" (Rois mages, p. 55).

On certain days the enterprise will seem more derisory than on others. He will lose hope: "Je n'espère pas, je m'efforce" (Etape, p. 17), "je me débats...je n'en peux plus" (Paradis, p. 11). For a moment he will regret he was ever born. "Ah! pourquoi nos parents n'ont pas su...noyer nos promesses" (Sainte Face, p. 65). But he will remember that it takes patience to


become a man, that the real magic is "art douloureux" (Rois mages, p. 108). Like the existentialists he senses that existence precedes essence and he proclaims: "J'avanceraï douloureux dans l'homme que je deviens" (Rois mages, p. 70). He sees himself as the "Architecte incertain de ma forme changeante" (Paradis, p. 140). He does not look to a transcendent God because, he says, "mon sauveur c'est moi" (Etape, p. 17).

Frénaud aspires to Being. He knows that it is obtainable only briefly, by a process which he calls grace, and which he finds completely mysterious. But he also knows that he must always be ready for it, that it is given to those who seek it. So he becomes a "laboureur au labour de soi dans la nuit" (Rois mages, p. 69) and in this perpetual self-preparation he takes on all the negative aspects of a quest demanding much work and much patience. It is for this reason that he chooses as an epigraph to one of his poems the well known expression of Hegel, "La patience, la douleur, le labeur du négatif" (Sainte Face, p. 215).51

Heidegger describes our era as follows: "It is the time of the gods that have fled and of the god that is coming. It is the time of need, because it lies under

51 Hegel, p. 81.
a double lack and a double not: the No-more of the
Gods that have fled and the Not-yet of the God that is
coming. It is this "destitute time" that Frénaud
describes and that is discussed at the beginning of this
chapter. Its physical aspect is that of Europe at the
end of World War II. That catastrophe made real to the
general population what Yeats called "the dark of the
moon" and T. S. Eliot made famous as the "wasteland."

In this twentieth century when the "gods have fled"
and traditional forms of religion seem to offer so little
to men seeking a revelation, Frénaud, like Heidegger's
poet "gives a voice to Being." He more than others "is
exposed to the divine lightenings."

The problem is that "holy names are lacking" and
the "holy" words of the poet are not "names" that really
name. The poet can do no more than bring to men "the
trace of the fugitive gods, the track into the world's

52 Martin Heidegger, Existence and Being (Chicago:
53 William Barrett, What is existentialism? (New York:
54 Barrett, p. 135.
55 Heidegger, Existence, p. 308.
57 Heidegger, Existence, p. 284.
night." Frénaud expressed it this way:

Halant toutes mes morts vers un mystère non avenu, 'passeur de l'être inaccessible, une lyre pâle à mon front tâtonnant, je poursuis.

(Rois mages, p. 140)

Frénaud offers no final answers and espouses no systematic philosophy. His poetry is a witness to modern man's search for an absolute, and his realization that the old assurances cannot be brought back to life. But it is also one man's promise to continue what often seems to be a meaningless quest, and a testimony to the occasional victory along the way.

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58 Heidegger, Poetry, p. 141.
Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung have demonstrated the importance of mythic forms in man's expression of his spiritual adventure. Such mythic forms constitute one of the most striking aspects of Frénaud's poetry. His sense of exile, alienation and imprisonment, his search for spiritual coherence in a world both chaotic and absurd, express themselves metaphorically in the story of the hero who sets out on a pilgrimage involving, as in so many of the old tales, separation, struggle, death and exaltation.

Frénaud does not of course recount the stages of the life of the hero in a chronological, narrative fashion. Repeated readings of his work do however reveal his story, sometimes in small fragments, sometimes in passages of near epic proportions.

The first phases of the hero's life in Frye's system are his birth and innocent youth.¹ In Frénaud's work we discover a "triumphal child" progressing across a field as

¹ Frye, Anatomy, pp. 198-199.
wide as the sky toward a benevolent, smiling king. The surrounding country offers no obstacle to his progress. The high winds have calmed down, and the very plants are kindly disposed toward him (Toujours, p. 67). It is a "monde premier" where man's labor and his handiwork have been in harmony with nature from the beginning and beauty and usefulness are part of the normal order of things. The world is a gift to the child for his own personal use, its borders expanding their bright welcome everywhere.

An invitation to adventure beyond and far away, the mountain near his home promises only fulfilled expectations. He is secure in the knowledge that the horizon has no limit, and confident that the future is as bright as the present. Time stands still. He never hears the clock sound the hour.

L'accord donné dans les réserves intraitables de l'enfance. L'horloge innocente dorée, qui ne sonne jamais quand on est tout petit parce que le longe bat le pouls de l'avenir et défait le temps.
Les reserres tâtonnantes de la nostalgie sont-elles préalables à la tendresse qui se retrouve et s'accomplit quand la montagne auprès de la maison comblait l'attente, comme une chose toujours au-delà, soudain captée. (Paradis, p. 62)

But the hour does sound and the child encounters disillusionment.

He had mocked the little girls who were afraid of the water, but he too became affected by the warnings of their mothers (Paradis, p. 99). Then came the devastating discovery that "dans les trous qui nous regardent sur le visage des dahlias, quand je les pénétrais avec des mains impatientes, il n'y avait rien" -- a warning that what we think we see is not always ours to have and to hold. The child's perception of nothingness at the heart of the lushness of nature spread to the desired "pays de l'autre côté" when one day, on a ride through the countryside, he realized that the other side of the mountain was just like this side (Paradis, p. 100). The château he had seen from afar disappeared at his approach (Rois mages, pp. 47, 48). When he refused to accept this terrible disappointment, the intensity of his desire destroyed the beloved images he had nurtured and left him with only a haunting "appel d'un rien, d'un vide bleu" (Paradis, p. 100). The clouds, the trees, the fields still offered him their charm, but from time to time, suddenly, something
snapped in the child, and he gave way to tantrums of frustration: "Mais à la fin on perd le fil...Alors j'arrachais quelques graminées, je rentrais dans la maison en hurlant, je grimaçais en passant près du cheval" (Paradis, p. 101). The danger of the water, the emptiness of the flowers, the disappearance of the promised country as he approached it, were premonitions of his own fragile mortality. The beginning of life is also the beginning of death, and the inevitable "mort avec la vie" (Toujours, p. 58) begins in the "vert paradis" of childhood.

But the child never really gave up the idea that somewhere something marvelous awaited him, evasive, but not altogether out of reach. "Et toujours me revenait le sentiment d'avoir laissé échapper l'indispensable qui était pourtant à portée" (Paradis, p. 101). As a man the hero returns to the countryside of his early years, still in search of the "indispensable" which has become closely associated with childhood itself. He meets with failure. As he wanders over the gravel roads, searching the hedges and sniffing the country air, he realizes that childhood is irretrievable. "J'ai laissé mon enfance dans les sentiers....J'ai perdu mon enfance par les sentiers de ce pays ancien" (Paradis, p. 102). Before the slag heaps and black mud of the mining village of his boyhood, before the ruined landscape which had been also an integral
part of that idyllic time he tried to recall, the hero is forced to concede that indeed "il n'y a plus d'autrefois" (Rois mages, p. 49) and there is no going back.

He nevertheless becomes a spiritual prisoner of the "pays d'enfance" (Rois mages, p. 48). Despite the evidence that "la vie n'a pas main chaude" and metaphysical speculation is misleading, that time is the enemy and love is venal, despite the fact that around him everything has taken on "un air cendreux" redolent of death, he cannot loosen childhood's stranglehold upon him. Surprised that "le vieux coeur tire encore" after so many disappointments, he observes to himself: "Toujours la corde fiévreuse de l'enfance autour de ce coeur qui gonfle.... Toujours la corde fiévreuse de l'enfance te tient en laisse" (Sainte Face, pp. 99-103).

This fascination with childhood has a sinister side which contrasts starkly with the wistful memories of country lanes and gardens. When it reveals its "vrai visage" it is as "la pesante encolure" (Toujours, p. 64) of his own death. The dahlias had warned him. At the heart of nature there is a nothingness which frustrates all attempts to appropriate it. Part of the order of nature, life is marked for death from the outset. In invisible ways the child is already beginning to die. All that he accomplishes, all that he reaches for will
eventually escape him again. The child has the temporary joy of looking forward to what is to come, without realizing how quickly it will all pass away from him.

To the hero, children and childhood become the symbols of hope itself. Aware that his own childhood is beyond recall, he nevertheless pictures the possibilities of the future in terms of children and childhood. Whereas once he looked back and inward to the child he once was himself, now he looks forward and outward to a promise of new life beyond himself: "Mémoire d'une enfance toujours au-delà./ Métamorphoses, ô métaphore de mon futur!" (Rois mages, p. 140).

When he is lost in the difficulties of life he will see before him "le sourire de l'enfant" as the Magi saw before them the star of the Christ Child. But the Child who brought the promise of eternal life does not speak so clearly to modern man. The hero is drawn on by a more uncertain, often painful "fuyante naissance/ du futur qui nous guide comme un toucheur de bœufs" (Rois mages, p. 130).

Now aspirations, like small children, can be very fragile and the world often treats them badly. During his long search the hero encounters much wanton destruction of the possibilities of the "fuyante naissance" by careless men who do not or cannot respect it. Sometimes they are
unsure whether to embrace it or damage it: "Un enfant pour l'adorer ou pour lui faire mal" (Etape, p. 9). At other times they surround it menacingly and wound it for their sport: "L'enfant dans les halliers, les hommes l'entourent./ Pour bien rire. Pour faire saigner" (Etape, p. 11). Their hatred, like Herod's of old, sometimes knows no bounds and in order to prevent any fulfillment of the promise held out by the child resorts to a general "massacre des innocents" (Sainte Face, p. 40).

Children themselves can be cruel. The child that has come to symbolize the hero's hopes and dreams is also the source of savage torments. Like a little girl who flirtatiously gains the confidence of a rather silly old man, "l'enfance sans pitié" (Toujours, p. 37) leads him on until he believes himself loved, then withdraws its favor.

The longing for the unattainable becomes unbearable in the face of bitter disappointment and drives the hero to turn in angry desperation against that which promised so much. He feels it would be better if hope died, if there were no dreams to disturb his peace of mind, and demands an end to it all. "Brûlez. Brûlez l'enfance./ Ô qu'il n'en reste rien s'il faut demeurer là./ Ô qu'on la fasse taire. Qu'elle soit morte" (Toujours, p. 71). But the relationship is inextricable. The hero is always drawn back again to the "bonheur trop précoce," still
there smiling at him "d'entre les buis/ des bouffées
d'un enfant qui fut là" (Toujours, p. 63). Among his
"printemps défaits" all his "éclats d'enfant" (Toujours,
p. 60) call to him from the rainbow, God's ancient sign
of promise to man that there would be no more destruct-
tion like the deluge. The hero must treat with respect,
even kindness, the very thing that is his nemesis. He
must submit to that which is uncertain and tortuous in its
revelation, because from that same loss comes fruitfulness.
There is no life without death, and from death comes new
life. The hero is fated to pursue "l'enfant qui pleure
que je dois consoler,/ mon bourreau que je dois obéir,/ soumis aux lents détours de sa naissance douloureuse,/ la fécondante déperdition" (Rois mages, p. 141).

In an early poem Frénaud reflects upon the numerous
memories that crowd in on him at certain times and wonders
what provokes the resurgence of this "plein filet de
souvenirs." He does not recognize himself in the child he
sees in them. Some details stand out: the eye of his dog,
a song, a funny saying. Others have been inexplicably
forgotten. He rather wishes that the wind would carry
away this "bouffée doucereuse" of the past. On the other
hand he would like to recapture it in its entirety and
paint the complete portrait of a man of his own age and
time: "pourtant je voudrais l'êtreindre quand je le fuis,/
recomposer l'homme entier jusqu'à mon âge" (Rois mages, p. 33).

He does in fact paint just such a portrait throughout his work, presenting not just a man in the sense of a particular individual, but rather the multifaceted hero of Campbell and Frye. After giving a partial picture of the hero's childhood, Frénaud turns to the hero as a mature man. One of his most striking avatars is the aging Roi Mage of the two early poems, "Les Rois mages," and "Plainte du roi mage" (Rois mages, pp. 128-141).

The Wise Men are such an integral part of the Western Christian heritage that children grow up hearing every Christmas how they set out in search of the Christ Child, the King, the light of the world and how, led by a star, they found him.

Frénaud's Rois Mages too set out, guided by a star, in search of a child. But the Roi Mage who speaks in these poems tells a more complicated story than the one of the Biblical tradition. He had started out with great expectations: "ô campagnes premières, quel délice de l'attente/ lorsque, avec deux autres rêveurs, par la même étoile détournés/ de leurs terrasses, de la douceur immobile de leur ombre,/ nous passions sur les déserts par notre fièvre reverdis" (Rois mages, p. 133).

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He had left the luxurious life of a rich landowner because beyond the palm trees a star had beckoned him toward another ideal. He had taken with him gold and myrrhe. For a time all had gone well. The journey had been joyful: a sense of anticipation was in the air and even the animals and the forests confirmed the confidence of the travelers. "Alors nous avons cru" (Rois mages, p. 133)!

Carpenters, shepherds, the poor, all shared the mood of expectation. And they found the child, with his mother, as in the old tale. The Roi Mage greeted him with respect and hope: "Je te salue, petite créature, mon roi nouveau-né" (Rois mages, p. 135).

But it was the age of "Hérode le cruel." Scarcely had the Roi Mage had time to address the child whom he had come so far to find when pandemonium broke out. Angry men drew their swords to kill the child.

Now the Roi Mage is no longer sure he saw the child. Indeed he declares that he has arrived too late after all, that "le massacre est commencé,/ les innocents sont couchés dans l'herbe" (Rois mages, p. 129). His long journey appears in an entirely different light. The incense has gone bad in the ivory caskets. The travelers have been misinformed. They are lost as they always have been. There is no right way, there is no light. There never has been. The Roi Mage, wearied by the long journey and discouraged by the ugly turn it has taken, longs for
his former life of order, comfort, and certainty, for the complacency he enjoyed before the vision disturbed his spiritual tranquillity.

je maudis l'aventure, je voudrais retourner vers la maison et le platane pour boire l'eau de mon puits que ne trouble pas la lune, et m'accomplir sur mes terrasses toujours égales, dans la fraîcheur immobile de mon ombre. Mais je ne puis guérir d'un appel insensé.

(Rois mages, p. 130)

Rather than a straightforward story of a promise glimpsed and realized, the Roi Mage of Fréaud's poems records one of doubt, aimless wandering, and only dubious success. It is unclear whether he saw the child or not. He was both present at his advent and too late for it. He both believed and did not believe in its occurrence. Once the spiritual journey had been undertaken beyond the certainties of his own culture and his own past, there was no possibility of turning back the clock. He was condemned to wander forever "dans la durée toujours recommençante" (Rois mages, p. 138), drawn on by a star, tantalized by the glimmer of "le sourire de l'Enfant" (Rois mages, p. 130), while sensing himself to be a child too, "un éternel enfant des aventures de la terre" (Rois mages, p. 139).
This Roi Mage is a very different one from that of Christian tradition. Gone is the assurance of an eternal hope, and in its place remains a painful, incurable longing for a transcendence which is sensed, glimpsed, grasped at, but never definitely attained. For Frénaud's Roi Mage there is no successful quest, no happy homecoming, but only an unending, often tortuous journey. He has discovered that there are no final answers. Sartre would say that "the modern hero must be 'Man' who has intellectually and politically tasted of the fruit of confusion and failure." The eschatological view of Christianity has given way to the cyclical view of the religion of Dionysus.

At various places the Roi Mage refers to himself as a child, an old man and a prisoner (Rois mages, pp. 131-132). He is young in his hope, old in his despair, and a prisoner of the "appel insensé" he cannot help heeding. He refers to himself also as a "chevalier" and as an "aventurier" (Rois mages, pp. 130, 132).

"L'Etape dans la clairière (Etape, pp. 9-29) is a long narrative poem, similar in many ways to the Roi Mage poems, whose main character is a knight errant superficially reminiscent of the "chevalier" of medieval

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4 See Jung, Man, p. 144.
literature but tinged with the negative aspects of the "aventurier", a word which originally meant a mercenary, a soldier, or even a pirate.

The first lines of "L'Etape dans la clairière" introduce a group of horsemen—"cavaliers," not "chevaliers"—whose identity is unclear and from whom emanates a vague air of menace. "Un parti de cavaliers dans la clairière./ Entre les arbres est-ce un château qu'ils entrevoient?/ A quoi bon interroger les bûcherons./ Plutôt brûler pour avoir place où recouvrer l'ancien royaume" (p. 9). From the use of the third person plural pronoun "ils" it would seem that the observer is not one of the mysterious horsemen. They are undecided about what to do next. They see a castle through the trees but do not bother to make peaceful inquiries about it. They prefer to recover some unidentified ancient kingdom, which may be connected with the castle, by destructive means. They mention a child, but are again undecided, whether they will adore him or harm him when they find him. In any case they admit they wouldn't know how to recognize him. Indeed they are not sure if their orders are to accomplish some mission, or to die.

The clearing in which they have stopped is not reassuring. It offers possibilities as a stronghold. On the other hand it may only be sufficient for a temporary halt, or worse, it could become a trap. Frightening
sounds in the surrounding forest create a sense of insecurity. Nature seems to mock them. "L'oiseau cruel a ri dans les fourrés (p. 9). The horses are nervous and make muttering-like noises. The sun's light is intermittent. Unquiet eyes of unseen monsters "grésillent" from all around, even from the stones (p. 10).

A change from the third to the first person plural pronoun gives notice that the observer is after all himself one of the horsemen. He admits serious doubts about the feasibility of their project. It has been so long, so confusing, so monotonous in the similarity of its various stages, that in his fever the whole adventure seems like a dream. However he pulls himself together and in proper military terms makes plans to set up camp, light a fire and organize guard duty. Carried along by his own confident words—"Il fait clair. Je vois clair ....Je marche. Je n'oublie rien. Je suis sous les armes" (p. 11)—he initiates an attack. His adversaries are harmless animals. After massacring some sheep his men find a child in the bushes, and laughing, play with the idea of injuring him. There is no suggestion that this might be the child they were seeking, or that such a possibility would make any difference. They come upon an old woman, and a little blind girl. Their fate is not disclosed. The context of the poem promises them an ugly end.
These thoroughly frightening characters finish their evening by sacking a small town and setting fire to the surrounding orchards. After the violence, the narrator of this troubling tale, who is most certainly a participant in the destruction, expresses a profound weariness, "Dormir, oh! dormir au plus profond!" (p.12), while recognizing that he must continue to keep up military discipline. Little by little his musings begin to sound like those of the Roi Mage. He talks of gifts of gold and myrrhe. He once sought a child, but failed to find him. He looks back wistfully to a happier past. But if his disillusionment is as profound as that of the Roi Mage, his revolt in the face of frustration is much more vehemence. He declares himself willing to destroy, to be cruel, if that is the only way to redeem himself, however tentative that salvation may be.

This "cavalier" is not a fairy tale "chevalier" of unassailable virtue, or even of reasonable honor. He carries within him the questing nature of the Rois Mages and the destructiveness of Herod's killers. He has come to terms with these opposing sides of his nature, and makes no apology for his violent urges, for they permit a certain personal growth,"...je nais à nouveau dans l'exultation et la rage" (p. 16). At times he breaks through, in a frenzy of blood and fury, to a delirious success. "Rien de moins que tout j'ètreignis" (p. 16). Like the
Roi Mage he must eventually admit failure. But unlike the Roi Mage he feels no sense of brotherhood for his companions. He refers to himself and the group in collective terms: they are an elite, lords of a sort, who forge on ahead of the common herd: they have traveled together from time immemorial. Yet the difficulty of the quest has isolated them not only from ordinary men, but from each other as well. The "héros en marche/ par les contrées mortelles" (p. 28) is alone, "séparé" (p. 17). Between him and the other wanderers of his kind there is "Nul échange de signes./ Nul accès nos pareils" (p. 28).

Most of Frénaud's heroes are loners, and alone. The "voyageur" of the poem of that title may socialize with the men with whom he works, talk to their families, or discuss his trade with the old men. But "il menait un autre apprentissage/ que charpentier, augustin ou maçon, à travers soi vers quel songe?" (Rois mages, pp. 123-127). Always, Frénaud's hero is a man apart, obsessed by a quest he can ill define. The "voyageur" of the poem left his home in Norway and traveled all over "le vieil Empire" (p. 124) in search of an image glimpsed in the cold starlight one night in childhood. He was young then, pale, gentle, taciturn and brave. In the course of his travels he met a girl in Bergen, lived near the wool market in Lübeck, worked in the shipyards of Bremen, killed a sailor there, and fled. (Frénaud's heroes are all
tainted.) He became acquainted with Germans, Slavs, and Jews. He took lessons from learned men. He came to love France and Italy. But in the end, old and embittered, he returns home to his cold nordic homeland, "comme du vieux bois mort" (p. 126). There he takes up his life as he had left it long before. He dies at last "et il n'a pas trouvé non plus sur l'autre rive/ ce qu'il cherchait, qui ne se tient ici" (p. 127).

Always the story follows the same pattern. A man sets out in search of the reality behind a vision he has had: Initially all goes well and the journey promises success. But gradually it becomes clear that he is really making no progress toward his ideal, and finally he admits the impossibility of the quest.

But despite the similarity of their adventures, the protagonists of the stories differ in various ways. The Roi Mage is a personage of vague historical authenticity but central to Western Christian mythology. The "cavalier" is a nightmarish version of the "chevalier" of medieval literature, who is also central to our Western mythology. The "voyageur" may have been entirely invented, but he is reminiscent of the many unhappy wanderers from the Wanderer of Anglo Saxon poetry to the Wandering Jew. In some details of his travels--stays in Germany, Italy, and Eastern Europe--he seems to have been modeled on Frénau himself.
A fourth avatar, General Krivitski, was however an historical person, a deputy head of Soviet counter espionage in Europe before Frénaud met him in Paris in 1937 (Sainte Face, p. 129), while he was in hiding after his defection to the West. But although the story is based on undisputed facts and Krivitski's actions are much more political, and historically verifiable, than those of some of his other heroes, the form of the tale is the same.

As a young man Krivitski had seen a worker beaten to the ground by an overseer's whip in the snows of the Ukraine (Sainte Face, pp. 107-128). He had had a vision that day, in which the proletariat, among whom he counted himself, would be freed from the tyranny of their tormentors, "C'est vous, c'est moi que je délivrerai, frères" (p. 108). He became a faithful follower of Lenin during the period of death and destruction that accompanied the progress of Soviet communism, sure that he would thereby find the means to free his brothers. "Chaque chose en son temps: tuer et faire naître,/ profaner, délivrer" (p. 109). Like other Frénaud heroes he found good to be inextricably linked to evil. As the first person account continues the confident tone gives way to one of misgiving. His actions take on a murkier, less noble aspect. He compares himself, the counter-spy to a "lampe de cambrioleur dans une boutique à l'aube." He begins to have doubts about his mission to save his fellow man by
undermining "la douceur perfide" (p. 114) of Europe.

One day he finds that his dream has soured: "Et déjà mon rêve avait tourné et je le voyais/ monter derrière moi comme un soleil noir" (p. 115). Lenin is dead, Trotsky in exile, and Boukharine has confessed to trumped up charges in Loubianka prison. The ideals of the October Revolution, of the International Brigade (in Madrid) have been betrayed by Stalin, "le Parti était devenu un tyran barbare,/ le tyran trahissait" (p. 119).

In despair Krivitski voices a lament in which are to be heard echoes of the "plainte du roi mage:"

Compagnons de route sous l'étoile de la Révolution,
dangereux pèlerins d'un fameux voyage,
Vainqueurs vaincus par les lourdes itinéraires
et par nos coups -- qui ont brisé, à force,
ceux qui frappaient--
ous nous sommes effondrés dans les tournants
et désormais il n'y aura plus de lumière.

(p. 125)

Like all of Frenaud's heroes he fails. When the "cavalier" realized the futility of further effort, he asked only to be allowed to remain where he was, in the clearing which seemed, in retrospect, idyllic compared to the hardships of his campaigns (Etape, p. 29). The Roi Mage longed for "un retour dans l'autrefois" (Rois mages, p. 131) of the calm and ordered home life of a great estate where he had been lord and master. The "voyageur"
actually did return home, to Norway. Krivitski goes one step further. He longs for death.

Although he no longer believes in the Revolution, the appetites that fed Krivitski's passion for it are as strong as ever. When he can no longer fight for the Revolution, these appetites consume him and threaten to destroy him.

He immigrates to the United States but finds that he cannot start life over again in "cette grande Amérique,/ aux larges avenues de possibilités d'infinie capture" (p. 126). He no longer believes in the ideals that have determined a large part of his life, but he is incapable of being satisfied with a more ordinary existence. His "orgueil répugne à ce qui n'est pas/ cime au-delà de son pouvoir" (p. 126). He expresses contempt for small pleasures and refuses "d'être rien de plus que celui qui accepte de n'être pas au-delà" (p. 126).

The idealist in Krivitski cannot give up. He begins to see Revolution in another light. It is not simply a matter of freeing the proletariat by a series of political actions. Revolution is a metaphysical concept above and beyond Lenin, Stalin, and Russian communism. Revolution becomes a cosmic mother, but at the same time a "sage négatrice" (p. 127). She offers both life and death simultaneously. The force of Krivitski's revolutionary passion is such that when it no longer finds objects in
the real world upon which to expend itself, its violence turns inward and threatens to destroy him.

Krivitski's experience is the opposite of the experience of the mystic, who seeks to lose himself in an outside force, or of the committed revolutionary who gives his life to a cause. Krivitski no longer believes in that outside force or cause, "je ne crois plus en notre entreprise" (p. 124), he maintains. But he cannot break the habits or forget the expectations of a lifetime. Once he was ready to die for the Russian revolution, and now that he no longer believes in it, death itself has become the object of his desire. Idealism has turned into the "soleil noir" of nihilism. Krivitski embraces this new "promesse d'une victoire" (p. 127) with feverish enthusiasm. Death now seems to offer the hope of a new life beyond, and should it lead only to nothing, it is still the only means of satisfying the urges that have driven him thus far. "Et il ne reste plus que l'appétit toujours vorace/ que la douce va combler, ô ma vie, la mort/ qui est l'ouverture de l'être total/ ou du néant" (p. 127).

With the Revolution restored to him in the guise of Death, Krivitski sees anew, in all its force, the vision of the fallen worker in the bloodstained snow of Nicolaiev. He believes that his hope will now be realized. His spirit soars like a "cheval volant," above
cities and rivers which are "évanouies" (p. 128). As the gunmen of Stalin enter the apartment in which he is living in New York he sees them only as the much desired "sourire de la liberté." He addresses his certain death as "ma seule lumière!" and smiles even as he backs away from the men who have been sent to kill him (p. 107). At the last he believes himself united once more with his comrades. But in the strange inversion of logic that leads men to declare themselves guilty, as Boukharine had done, in order to preserve the meaning of their own deaths, he calls their fire upon himself: "Sur moi, camarades...En joue! Feu!" (p. 128).

In Frénaud's retelling of the Acteon story ("La Mort d'Actéon," Toujours, pp. 47-52) the main narrative line of Ovid's tale of the huntsman is the same. Acteon comes upon Diana bathing. The goddess, angry at the intrusion, turns him into a stag. The terrified youth is set upon and killed by his own dogs.5

But Frénaud's Acteon is a more complex character than Ovid's young hunter of animals. In a solitary quest he has persistently hunted the goddess over a vast and perilous terrain whose characteristics recall the infinite as much as the earthly. "J'ai traversé les marais, les

nuages pour l'atteindre,/ et les deux bords du gouffre" (p. 48). He has dreams of arousing the desire of the goddess, of her wanting to be taken by force; He has hunted with such ardor that his companions have mocked him (p. 48). Discovering her finally one day when he is lost, his final approach is confident and stealthy. "J'approche lentement...J'ai bravé les défenses./ Je coule mes yeux fauves/ par le bruissement des feuilles et je l'ai vue, géante chasseresse" (p. 48). Diana turns to see, not Ovid's astonished, unthinking youth, but a mature man whose eyes declare a violent and long held desire. Her momentary hesitation before this spectacle Acteon interprets as weakness and advances, thinking himself "vainqueur de la déesse" (p. 49). But the character of Frénaud's Diana is also much more developed than Ovid's. She has a lance in her hand, but rejects such a simple end for the brazen intruder. "Elle, n'en veut rien perdre et tenant son plaisir,/ pour le prendre au meilleur ralentit le supplice" (p. 49). Ovid's Diana did not see the results of her anger. Frénaud's Diana watches with satisfaction as her enemy pays the price of his presumption.

Slowly Acteon becomes a stag. His bones, his skin change form; the blood runs warmer in the metamorphosing tissue. But his mind remains unchanged. In one flesh two beings coexist, the man and the animal, the hunter and
the hunted, "Voisins, en attendant,/ sous la même peau:
la frontière/ qui à chaque battement il sent franchir" (p. 49). Like Krivitski, but for different reasons, Acteon anticipates and even takes a strange passionate pleasure in his own death. When his dogs approach, the hunter in him answers to the fury of the dogs. Yet he pities the stag he is becoming as one pities a prey one has hunted so long it has become almost an intimate. This time the intimacy is complete, and he is now himself that animal.

Acteon's death allows him time to reflect. He realizes with horror that like the watching Diana, who languidly points him out to her nymphs from the other side of the river, he too is fascinated by the spectacle of his own destruction—"il jouit" (p. 50).

When the final struggle begins Acteon questions whether after all it is not a woman with whom he wrestles, the "Grande Mère à profusion" (p. 51). He had desired Diana and now he realizes that "Désirer, c'est se perdre en l'azur étranger." There is no solution to the quest he had set himself unless it be death itself.

He understands at last that "L'autre, c'est la mort." But even as he dies, quiescent now in the terrible rending by the teeth of the dogs which had been his childhood friends, his dream and his desire remain. He cannot understand why the goddess took offense. What did he see
that he should not have seen? "La loi, toujours est-elle infranchissable/ si la vie c'est la quête et c'est tâche de prendre" (p. 48). But why?

Frénaud's heroes know that the quest is lost before it is begun, that the otherness they seek is ultimately death. Nevertheless they persevere. Not in naiveté and ignorance, but fully aware that at the end of a road full of failure, destruction, and only momentary glimpses of success, they will meet only with ultimate failure.

C. A. Hackett suggests that in Frénaud's work his presence as a visionary and as the representative and symbol of all men is felt in every poem. This presence is distributed among many personae, the more visionary of which are the Roi Mage, General Krivitski, the "cavalier," the "voyageur," and Acteon. The majority of these personae however, are more limited in both their worldly and their visionary attributes. One of them is quite simply Frénaud himself. In "Autoportrait" (Sainte Face, p. 51) he describes a rather awkward, heavy man, "Triste et gras, l'œil gonflé par une perle opaque, le verbe alourdi par les venaisons," who still rolls his r's as in the mining area of Burgundy where Frénaud grew up. This provincial's hostile gait betrays his awareness of the unenviable position he occupies in a

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6 Hackett, "Theme of the Quest," p. 130.
world from which he expects no great happiness. But despite his resemblance to many men of middle age, overfed, overweight, and less successful than they had hoped to be, the last line of the poem makes clear his kinship with the visionaries when it declares him "un homme porte lumière."

Other poems present various aspects of a more ordinary "man in the street" who might seem a most unlikely subject for a poetic work so preoccupied with the transcendent. This Everyman manifests himself as an "épicier," for instance, in the old Parisian market area of les Halles. He has spent countless springtimes behind the cash register of his small store. His vacations have been in his imagination, to a countryside green with trees he has seen only in the illustrations on the boxes of camembert he sells, trees he counts compulsively as he thinks bitterly about all those springtimes his stifling little job has "hidden" from him. But true to the spirit of the small merchant willing to work long hours to survive, he has no great dreams or does not speak of them, but affirms his determination to hold on to the hard-earned money he knows others envy him (Paradis, p. 31).

His children are destined to rise no higher in the world than he himself, and indeed are less in control of their own lives than he. His son drinks white wine, and by implication, does not work very hard or have any
particular goal in life. His daughter has the unrewarding and dead-end job of making trousers in a factory. His wife is already dead, "fine fleur de cimetière" and is offered no other commentary or tribute (Sainte Face, p. 64).

Very little seems to touch this tough little man who fears neither "dieu ni peuple," and who makes no fine distinctions between the two. He does however wax eloquent about his Sunday evening game of "boules" with his cronies, where he feels at one with an oddly marvelous world, "une belle soupe/ aux cent mille yeux de paon" (Sainte Face, p. 64). Once a year he becomes patriotic, on July 14, the national holiday of the Republic. In the "ivresse de fraternité des hommes dans les rues," (Paradis, p. 32) he exchanges his usual truculence for an uncharacteristic gaiety. "Le monde est en liesse, buvons et croyons!/ Je bois à la joie du peuple, au droit de l'homme/ de croire à la joie au moins une fois l'an" (Paradis, p. 33). He is a man who likes places where other people have lived and left their mark. "J'aime la crasse de l'âme des autres," he exclaims while exploring a house that is for sale. He is so taken with the signs he finds there of previous occupancies that in a burst of enthusiasm he announces to the caretaker that he will buy "la baraque" despite the fact that it is in such poor condition that he thinks
it might well burn down over his head (Rois mages, p. 54).

But as with all of Frénaud's characters, the tough exterior is really a facade. A false note begins to make itself heard through the heartiness, and the pugnacious voice falters. As an habitué of drinking places he has always enjoyed sitting at tavern tables because their atmosphere of conviviality is associated in his mind with the festivities which precede a journey (Paradis, p. 104). This Everyman has always wanted to be just one of the guys, and "Homme autour du zinc," one of those complacent little men who are content with their simple lot in life. But he admits to being "mal à l'aise" and it becomes apparent that he is not after all one of those little men himself. Sometimes he thinks he is, but too often he is forced to recognize that he is an "imposteur" (Paradis, p. 52). For all his talk of fraternity and conviviality he is really an outsider, although those who sit with him may not be aware of it (Rois mages, p. 32). But if he is not one of them, who is he? "Qui suis-je?" (Paradis, p. 112), he wonders, and still addressing himself, "Tu vas, mais où vas-tu?" (Toujours, p. 12). He does not know. His questions betray the insecurity behind the brave front: "Où me perdre? où me prendre?" (Toujours, p. 64), "Où m'atteindre, qui ne sais où je suis?" (Rois mages, p. 28). His tentative answer is pessimistic. "Je suis le même encore. Je me retrouve/
seul, ennemi de moi, étranger" (Paradis, p. 119).

Like Acteon and Krivitski the Everyman of Frénaud's poems is his own enemy. He has a kind of double personality which presents a much greater problem than any exterior obstacles. This "ennemi de soi" is so much a part of him that he seems to eat with the same teeth and speak with the same voice. This "other" tortures him until he feels as if he is "simmering" in a nightmare of suffocation, fire and blisters. His eyes hurt terribly, as if he had drunk too much (Sainte Face, p. 44). Like Acteon and Krivitski again, he becomes the witness of his own destruction, he becomes a paradox, a contradiction, a brotherless brother, a loveless love, "Frère sans un frère ami;/ sans m'aimer moi-même/ amour sans personne" (Paradis, p. 209). Finally in an upsurge of self-pity he admits, "J'ai pitié de moi" (Toujours, p. 66). Within the simple minded, ordinary little man of the street hides the metaphysically tortured wanderer who appeared in the visionary poems. Like the "voyageur" this Everyman is also a "Passager incertain/ qui se tend et s'affole/ en indistincte étrave" (Sainte Face, p. 219). No matter how organized his life may seem to be, no matter how secure his position in the world, he is in fact adrift, aimless, directionless, going nowhere. Security is an illusion, as is the quest for personal identity. All progress is impossible. Far from being a man with an
accomplished goal, he is "un enfant tragique" (Paradis, p. 22) who has not progressed beyond the first steps of spiritual development, and can only look forward to a disastrous future. This "orphelin parmi les autres dans la foule déserte" (Toujours, p. 88) has no spiritual home and feels alone in a crowd, even among those who accept him. He wanders toward his approaching death "le coeur sans amour" and if he smiles it is only "Le sourire éclatant du désespoir" (Rois mages, p. 76).

From the midst of his despair this Everyman sees other men as brothers in misfortune. A "compagnon de l'espérance crevée," he is one of many, all in the same lost and hopeless condition. Like the "cavalier" and Krivitski, these men are at the same time visionaries and bandits. These negative qualities are very necessary. Only the boldest come near to reaching the object of the quest. Each wanders "sans lieu ni rivage" and each, like the "cavalier," is "solitaire" even among companions. These "hommes de la nuit" (Rois mages, p. 65) are "délaisés" (Toujours, p. 86) and "damnés" (Sainte Face, p. 59).

Despite the gravity of their plight, and the despair it involves, these "délaisés" still have a dream. Like the Roi Mage these desperate men are also "appelés" and "voyeurs" (Sainte Face, pp. 55, 57). In the final analysis all Frénaud's heroes, great or small, tell the
same story. All the different personae are facets of the same hero who will continue to dream in spite of everything (Rois mages, p. 121.

Sometimes the hero derides himself and his quest, especially when it takes him back to the past. At those times he asks himself why he goes back over old paths, what he can expect to find there (Toujours, p. 120). At other times he reproaches himself for his own impatience and even his own cowardice. He realizes that he is often dazzled by so many possibilities that he follows none of them through effectively, and indeed his own enthusiasm is often a stumbling block, "Trop captivé par tous les yeux pour m'éclairer./ Rêveur trop hardi pour bien jouir" (Paradis, p. 115). One day he wonders if he is capable of perceiving the dream at all, so well hidden it seems to be as he wanders across some great city in search of it. "Sauras-tu pressentir encore le rêve inscrit/ ressassé dans ces pierres? (Sainte Face, p. 187). Another day all goes well and even if he is traveling over rocks and sand, "Tout est bien, le héros sourit" (Rois mages, p. 122). On such a day he can indulge in his old dream of attainment, he can let go, basking in the prospect of winning once and for all. "Il veut mourir d'aise/ sur les bras du vent" (Rois mages, p. 50).
But such periods of optimism are rare and the quest is more often a story of failure. "Car nul ne règne. Pas de joie, / Ni l'innocence, ni le plaisir, ni la vertu, / Sous un autre visage le héro recommence, / naïf, ses hauts faits. Il tombe" (Sorcière, p. 31).

It is at such times that the truculent spirit of the "petit vieux" (Poèmes du petit vieux, "Excrétions, misères et facéties: carnet d'un petit vieux," Sainte Face, pp. 61-79 and 81-96) serves him in good stead. The same spirit that led that side of him to fear neither God nor man proclaims him, in the face of disappointment, "récidiviste, mal accusé, invincible, voyeur de l'absolu, dépité du peu" (Sainte Face, p. 63).

As in the case of the "cavalier" the contradiction between the dream and the brutality of the means used to obtain it is only apparent. For it is only the strongest and toughest who have any chance of succeeding and the hero declares himself with those who accompany him "rebelles en marche" (Paradis, p. 17). They have need of that violent side, so frightening in the case of the "cavalier" and his companions and the soldiers who destroy the village. The hero must come to terms with both the transcendent and the destructive if he is to succeed.

The quest is not an affair for gentle old kings from the East, or for awestruck youths. It is an affair for those who have faced all the ugly realities of politics
and war.

That stubborn, somewhat vulgar spirit of the "petit 'vieux" and of the "épicier" in the Halles is what will fit the hero for the task. In many poems this spirit shows through. The hero is a "provocateur" (Rois mages, p. 69) who like the "cavalier" will fight back, will dirty his hands, will step over the line of socially acceptable behavior in order to pursue what he must have. All Frénaud's heroes need that fractious spirit of the "petit vieux" who shakes his fist at God and shouts, no! Vowing not to be had, he points out about himself and his ilk that they are made of a "matériaux réfractaire" (Sainte Face, p. 94). It is this spirit which allows him, despite defeat after defeat, to resolve to go on. It pervades all the poetry and is a characteristic of all the personae, humble or exalted. It allows the hero to persist when he admittedly doesn't even know what it is he seeks. "Je me soulèverai à l'extrême d'un désir/ dont j'ignore l'effigie" (Sorcière, p. 25). It sparks the violence that pushes him to go beyond the bounds of reason in his quest. "Mais toujours à merci/ du désir qui m'entraîne/ à chercher sous l'écaill/ ce qu'il faut pour nourrir/ à l'étal de ma vie/ cette angoisse" (Rois mages, p. 25).

The tough side of the hero has little patience with that part of him which looks backward toward a happier
past: "rêveur chétif, avec ta nostalgie" (Toujours, p. 120). The nostalgia is not entirely misplaced, however. One character does not participate in the persona of the hero and yet is himself a hero in his own way among Frénaud's other heroes. A throwback to a time and place when men were in harmony with nature, the peasant laboring patiently from dawn to dusk is "l'homme de l'ancien pacte" (Toujours, p. 82). He is in accord with his world, a "monde premier" where the old alliance between man and nature is not yet broken. But Frénaud's hero contemplates the peasant's willingness to respect the old, traditional, difficult, uninspiring way of life and finds him too submissive, a "Serviteur trop docile, sous les gestes de la soumission." He himself cannot possibly follow his example although he admires him and expresses respect for the "satisfaction du devoir accompli" which is the peasant's reward. The hero can drink a toast to these men of the land with their simple life and simple pleasures but he admits that their home is for him a "contree où je n'ai plus ma place" ("Les Paysans," Paradis, pp. 78-83).

But despite his criticism the hero would very much like to have the satisfaction with his lot he senses in the peasant. He cries out and asks why he too cannot be happy with such simple pleasures. He returns to the theme of his affinity for café and inn tables and those
who frequent them, his respect for those who work hard and
who seem so limited in their horizons. But he is not one
of them and never will be. As much as he would like to be
happy with a simpler life, he is still one who hears "les
tambours/ voilés qui battent" and must answer their call,
"entrainé par la voix" (Sorcière, p. 41) which drives
him away into the desert places of despair and questioning
which also, paradoxically, holds out visions of infinity
and plenitude. When he is particularly discouraged he
considers resignation: "Ne cherche plus, oublie qui rêve
(Rois mages, p. 22). But he soon becomes his own stubborn
self again and although he finds much that is wrong with
his existence he vows to stick with it even though his
motivations are somewhat suspect -- "Je dénonce ma vie
et j'y reste/ par désarroi ou par malice, par vaillance
et par sot plaisir" (Paradis, p. 113). He realizes that
he is not making any visible progress, that he rarely
catches even a glimpse of what he is looking for, that he
is really "poursuivant sans avancer" (Paradis, p. 113),
but nevertheless he will go on, he will persist, no matter
how unpleasant the road may be. He cannot be satisfied
with the limits of a peaceful, small life. He is fated
to follow a difficult road fraught with danger and
trouble. "Je maintiendrai le cri. J'en porterai le
poids./ Exposé au tourment, inutile, agité,/ je garde
contenance,/ hostile, consciencieux" (Paradis, p. 113).
A dark optimism pervades this poetry. Despite endless setbacks, its hero will not give up. And even if he should not attain his goal, he feels deep down that somehow, some of those who follow him will. He salutes these "frères de l'avenir" with the promise that although they are without god or family they will nevertheless succeed where he has failed. He wishes him well, one of these future heroes, and exhorts him in friendly terms: "respendis, mon camarade" (Sainte Face, p. 77). Incurable, he cannot give up even if the victory will clearly never be for himself.

According to Northrop Frye, the hero in the quest stories is usually rewarded a bride, who is also usually an ambiguous figure.\(^7\) In Frénaud's poetry there is a wide range of female figures who run the gamut from the innocent child to the witch. Some of these are involved with the hero in relationships which may loosely be categorized as those of the fiancée, the lover, and the mother.

The fiancée, who is not yet a bride, appears on rare occasions as an ideal companion who is not described in any detail. The Roi Mage, stopped to rest in a pleasant domain provided with a warm house, a good cellar and every comfort, escorts a "longue fille sarrasine" who

is at the same time a "suzeraine" of some sort (Paradis, pp. 68-69). A more contemporary wanderer through the streets of Genoa is also accompanied by "une longue fille" who leans on his arm in the modern fashion (Sainte Face, p. 188).

But as Jacques Réda justly remarks, the fiancée can take on the terrifying aspect of death the only "noce" of which man can be completely sure. And indeed, the virginal creature longed for by the "appelés" of "La Noce noire" (Sainte Face, pp. 55-59) appears at last battered and bruised, the common possession of all the "damnés" who seek her, resplendently malignant like a poisonous mushroom (p. 59).

And then again she sometimes presents the strange innocence of "La Petite fille" (Sainte Face, pp. 25-26) who, faceless, and more a daughter than a lover, nonetheless brings a brief "plénitude...que ne ternissait nulle angoisse," (p. 25) a joy which, unlike the terror of death, is the realization of "la vraie patrie, celle que l'on n'atteint jamais" (p. 26).

More central to Frénaud's work is the woman as lover and loved one. It is in the poems addressed thus to woman that Frénaud seems, to C. A. Hackett, to come closest to finding the meaning of the quest. He seems

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9 Hackett, "Theme of the Quest," p. 130.
to subscribe to the platonic dream of reunion of the separated in the one through the act of love.\textsuperscript{10} Love "qui éclaire momentanément le monde" is the poet's best guide and is unforgettable because it has been "l'approche la plus grande d'un être à un autre."\textsuperscript{11} But if the experience of love, like poetic experience, is a "passage de la visitation" which restitutes "l'unité en mouvement de l'être"\textsuperscript{12} it reveals nonetheless the paradox of the human condition.\textsuperscript{13} "La possession charnelle est vouée à l'inanité au même titre que n'importe quelle tentative de communication avec le Tout."\textsuperscript{14} As Frénaud himself says about his poems on love, "C'est une poésie de la possible joie et de l'échec métaphysique de l'amour" (\textit{Inhabileté}, p. 79).

Love brings man closer to the experience of being than does anything else, while at the same time, because of its inability to do so completely, it renders the failure all the more poignant.

\begin{thebibliography}{14}
\bibitem{10} Lesure, "Frénaud," p. 72.
\bibitem{13} Pingaud, "Conquête," p. 1378.
\end{thebibliography}
Because the woman loved may be a "source totale," as in the poem of that title (Paradis, p. 65), or an "arc-en-ciel" (Paradis, pp. 65, 181), because in her beats "le coeur de l'être" (Paradis, p. 185), the act of love promises knowledge of "le profond secret...la réalité véritable"(Rois mages, p. 40) so long sought for. The lover and the loved one, united, can form a "seule présence réelle" (Paradis, p. 59) in which "le monde s'est réuni" (Paradis, p. 57). Their love is strong enough to repair the "fêlures" (Paradis, p. 58) which abound in this imperfect existence.

Ainsi le temps s'est desserré.
L'amour invente le bonheur.
De nous deux, il n'en reste plus.
Ainsi la vie s'est consolée.

(Paradis, p. 57)

Or so it seems. Until, inevitably, "se défait l'impatiente aurore" (Toujours, p. 17) and the lovers become two hostile bodies once again (Paradis, p. 24). The "splendeur impossible" (Sainte Face, p. 13) is of short duration. "L'amour n'est pas une place sûre,/ très tôt on s'en fait renvoyer" (Sainte Face, p. 69).

The lover doubts the reality of his own experience. "N'ai-je pas imaginé une vacance dans l'opaque?" he asks the loved one (Paradis, p. 174). He comes to the conclusion that he has deceived himself, that "Chacun
s'aime soi-même et se porte dans l'autre/ afin de s'y reconnaître en pays étranger" (Paradis, p. 183).

Disillusioned, he concludes that love, "c'est un leurre" (Paradis, p. 183) and he is no further advanced than he ever was in his quest.

Alone again, "dans son désert" (Paradis, p. 182) of separation he reacts violently against the impossibility of prolonging the union. He declares his hatred of the lover from whom he expected the impossible and in whom he could not lose himself forever (Sainte Face, p. 15). Love and death become associated in his mind (Toujours, p. 29), and yet, although love cannot provide all the answers, he cannot reject it altogether. "Si c'est un rêve qu'éternel amour,/ qu'importe j'y tiens (Paradis, p. 175). The loved one has, after all, brought him close to Paradise.

In Frénaud's quest of the hero there is no leave-taking from the mother as such. But there are various mother figures who are both attractive and repulsive, and often barely distinguishable from the figure of the woman desired.

Jung claims that the separation of the son from the mother signifies leavetaking from animal consciousness.15

But he notes that this separation is difficult for the son and that "whoever sunders himself from the mother longs to get back to the mother. This longing can easily turn into a consuming passion which threatens all that has been won. The mother then appears on the one hand as the supreme goal, and on the other as the most frightful danger--the "Terrible Mother."16

The purest evocation of "la figure maternelle" who plays a "subterranean" role all through Frénaud's work17 is the mother and child found and subsequently lost by the Rois Mages (Rois mages, p. 135). Virgin mother of a newborn babe representing the hope of mankind, she signifies harmony and reconciliation. The role is usually more ambiguous.

The hypnotically powerful "Mère" of "Le Navire négrier" (Sainte Face, pp. 23-24) is regarded by the sailors whom she holds in thrall as "la noble épouse" (p. 23). She provides a "plénitude étrange" which keeps them her willing slaves although they know without saying so that their dependence upon the favors which she distributes to all of them when darkness falls will doom them all to eventual despair.

16 Jung, Transformation, p. 236.
17 See Bernard Pingaud's comments in Inhabileté, p. 14.
Acteon ("La Mort d'Actéon," Toujours, pp. 47-52) at first sees Diana as a body he desires to possess. When it becomes clear that the goddess is not to be so easily vanquished, she appears in her dual role of giver and taker away, "Nourricière de la vie, la terrible et calme/ Mère unique," the "Moïra of the Greeks who holds the fate of all men in her hands (p. 50). Acteon pays the ultimate price for his presumption.

"La Sorcière de Rome" appears in a multiple guise which includes the "protectrice, vierge" (p. 29), the promiscuous spouse, Messalina (p. 31) and "la Mère qui appelle et qui...frappe" (p. 39). The enigma of the multiple identity of the woman both desired and feared appears to have no solution (p. 31).

The woman in Frénaud's work plays another role which establishes her identity apart from her relationship to the various questers who see in her a form of the treasure they seek, or a means of obtaining it. She too is a quester in her own right searching, as they are, for the ineffable and the absolute.

She too is introduced as a child. "Enjouée apparaue au milieu des enfants" (Paradis, p. 180) the "petite chasseresse à l'orée enfantine de [sa] course" (Paradis, p. 178) will make the same discoveries as her male counterparts. She will answer "l'appel de l'illimité," discover a "Terrible joie brûlée and find
herself at the end "Maudite, seule" (Toujours, pp. 18-19). She will make her own way toward the "source incertaine" (Paradis, p. 180) which so eludes the hero.

The long poem "Pour une plus haute flamme par le défi" (Etape, pp. 33-40) recounts a tale similar to those of the Rois Mages and Frénaud's other voyagers except that in this case the protagonists are three young girls, children really, fighting their way through a landscape of modern traffic, inns and woods inhabited by spying salesmen and assorted adversaries. "La terre promise" (p. 34) is their goal, and, like the other questers, they discover that when they think they have reached that dreamt of plenitude where "Tout vibre et se confond" it is already too late for 'Déjà l'Unité se défait" (p. 35). They too wonder if success is possible and show the same determination to keep trying in the face of defeat (p. 38).

The mature woman who speaks for herself in Frénaud's poetry has an overwhelmingly pessimistic story to tell. She does not make love to please her lover, but for herself, in an attempt to shut out the dark (Toujours, p. 39). She hopes to discover the "unique" of which she has been deprived (Toujours, p. 40). Sometimes she seems to succeed. "Je me donne, donc je suis" she proclaims, "Un instant je me rends libre" (Toujours, p. 42). But her victory is not lasting and she is in the end a
"chasseresse toujours vaincue" (Toujours, p. 40). Love is only an "inutile rencontre" and her progress in her quest "une marche sans lumière" (Paradis, p. 190). The act of love becomes an act of revenge, against her family, against the world, against all her disappointments (Toujours, p. 42). Or it becomes a mere distraction (Paradis, p. 191). She regrets that her mother didn't teach her how to make money at it (Rois mages, p. 63). One senses the same angry defiance in the face of frustration in the tough talk of "le petit vieux."

She who had wanted to "rameuter les petites espérances,/ [s] 'en faire un nid qui ne serait pas froid,/ le semblant d'un bien tout comme" (Paradis, p. 189) finds herself confronted with aridity and emptiness (Paradis, pp. 189, 191).
CHAPTER 4
The Poet

André Frénaud's work tells the story of a prisoner, a philosopher, and a mythic hero of many faces. Perhaps more importantly, it gives an account of the birth and development of a modern poet. Much of what is true of the first three -- the prisoner, the philosopher, and the hero -- is also true of the poet. It is interesting to observe, however, the different nuances perceivable in Frénaud's work according to the light in which it is interpreted. The quest, for example, is no longer for a vanquished homeland or a lost metaphysical paradise, but for the integration accomplished through the creation of a work of art.

In this chapter Frénaud's work will be discussed as the quest of the poet, and certain themes which have already been investigated in another context will be re-examined for what they tell us about the poet Frénaud's specific experience of his art.

In his first poem "Epitaphe" (1938) André Frénaud writes that on that day when he hands back to the "néant"
the slate on which are marked the actions of his life the sum total will be zero. "Mes chiffres ne sont pas faux, ils font un zéro pur" (Rois mages, p. 13). The poem is at the same time a farewell and a promise. As an epitaph it is by definition a statement in memory of the dead. On the other hand there is a life still to be lived, as is indicated by the use of several verbs in the future tense: "je remettrai," "il ne me ricanera pas," "Je m'étendrai." But that life will amount to nothing more than "a round o."¹

Frénaud has explained that the "zéro pur" indicates a desire to add nothing to the evil already present in the world.² Disillusionment with idealistic causes which bring misery on men is expressed all through his work. "Agonie du Général Krivitski" (Sainte Face, pp. 107-128) and "Enorme figure de la Déesse Raison" (Paradis, pp. 39-46) come immediately to mind.

He has also insisted, however, on the necessity of living life fully and honestly, "la vie assumée et non pas éludée"³ and rejected the temptation of a certain


² In a personal interview, July 9, 1977. See also Inhabileté, p. 72.

³ Clancier, Frénaud, p. 53.
asceticism to be found in Christianity and Taoism (Inhabileté, p. 143). Frénaud hopes that a life so lived will permit a certain reduction of the self before, and a greater openness to, the experience of being.\(^4\)

Read in the context of the body of work he was yet to write, Frénaud's "zéro" recalls the advice of the ancient Chinese sage Lao Tsu: "Empty yourself of everything."\(^5\) The poet as a "zéro pur" becomes an empty vessel to receive being:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Je me suis défait, inlassable.} \\
\text{Dépouillé j'ai saisi pourquoi} \\
\text{mes zéros, je les ai voulu:} \\
\text{je me prépare.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Paradis, p. 120)

The idea of the poet as a receiver rather than a maker is current in French poetry only since the last century. Alain Bosquet, in a survey of the history of French poetry, notes that after Nerval the poet did not so much make choices as give of himself.\(^6\) Claude Vigée finds modern man in the paradoxical situation of searching for his

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\(^4\) Clancier, Frénaud, p. 53.

\(^5\) Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching, trans; Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Random, 1972), Chapter 16, n, pag.

own birth in his own death, and seeking both with equal fervor. *Epitaph* marks the end of one life and the beginning of another, the life of the poet. "Mourir à soi, revenir un autre, il me semble que c'est, justement, l'expérience même de la poésie" (Inhabitée, p. 125). Frénaud's poetry is an account of that life.

In the long poem "Tombeau de mon père" (Paradis, pp. 195-200) Frénaud explains to his now dead father how and why he became a poet. He feels great respect for this man who has left him "le plus noble regard qu'un homme ait laissé à un autre" (p. 195). He tells him that he has come, with tears in his eyes, to remind him of his efforts to guide his son into a conventional bourgeois way of life: "tu m'avais voulu éclairé selon ta loi" (p. 195). He goes on to say that only now, many years after his father's death, and many years after he has become a poet, does he dare attempt to justify, in a poem, the path his life has taken.

While once he had kept his pent-up anger to himself, the poet now wishes to be reconciled with his father. He explains that his anger is spent and that the time has come for him to speak. His life as a poet has involved refusing "l'ordre" of his father, that respectable order

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7 Vigée, p. 102.
of the middle class which proclaims its own values
"à haute voix mensongère, légiférant/ et qui tient,
éternel encore s'il change" (p. 198). And along with
that way of life he has rejected the faith of his father,
Christianity, with its "dieu étendu,/ cadavre de gloire
au malheur duquel/ il faut compatir pour qu'il nous
console" (p. 196).

It has not been easy for him to begin, but now
"Après tant d'années où je n'ai pas pu/ à cause des
larmes,/ le jour est venu" (p. 196). One of his
difficulties is that he does not feel himself a success
in his father's terms since he does not have an accept­
able profession such as law or medicine. Nor is he a
success in his own terms since he is not sure of the
merits of his poetic oeuvre. He is afraid his father
will see him as respectable society has so often seen
poets: "Un risible, un rêveur échoué, qui ne te l'aura
dit?" (p. 196). Worse, he is unsure of the value of
his own work, "ces paroles qui me sortent, des statues
de vent" (p. 196).

"Epitaph" marks Frénaud's farewell to the life
his father's world held out to him and the beginning of
a new life which in many ways has turned out to be a kind
of dying into life. Worldly possessions are not of
sufficient importance to be mentioned. But on the
spiritual plane his ambivalence about his choice has taken
its toll. "Ma vie toujours menacée/ par la haine de moi
toujours fraîche (p. 199). Again on the spiritual level
he has no easy solution for the problem of God. God may
be dead according to modern philosophy. For the poet the
problem presents itself differently. The poet is in-
volved in the quest for that which is traditionally called
God, and he feels compelled to discover what form it
takes and where. As in "Epitaph" death and birth are
intermingled. "Dieu n'est pas mort, il n'est pas, c'est
moi qui meurs./ Il naît, lui. Il n'en finira jamais
de naître (p. 196). But the word God with a capital
letter is no longer appropriate. Here the poet is using
a term which will be familiar to his father. The god he
seeks is of another order, elusive and faceless, "non pas
votre dieu, mais un autre, inconnu" (p. 197), he tells
him. This unknown god is not the Christian God offering
solace from on high. He is to be found, if he is to be
found, here on earth.

The poet has persisted valiantly, he has been beaten
many times, but he will endure in his quest for the "vraie
vie" (p. 197) to be found in poetry, a life truer than
the one his father envisaged for him. In another poem he
expresses it as "la chance/ de devenir mon verbe"
(Sainte Face, p. 148). This goal he will pursue despite
the constant difficulties involved. At the root of the
poetic vocation begun with "Epitaphe" lies "une expérience
assez singulière" which will influence his entire life and provide the impetus of his poetry. In "Cette nuit-là, à Florence," an unfinished essay, Frénaud recounts a mystical or religious experience which affected him very deeply. As he wanders around the Palazzo Vecchio and the bridge on the Arno late one night a mysterious state of exaltation takes hold of him and builds until the poet becomes "anéanti assez pour ne plus demeurer que comme le support ou l'agent d'un mouvement oscillant d'extrême douleur en joie extrême" (p. 219). What will often be referred to as "l'événement" is here described in greater detail than in any of the poems. One is reminded of the union with God experienced by the great mystics such as St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila. But Frénaud makes the distinction. "Une joie charnelle, volumineuse; c'est pourquoi je ne peux parler de ravissement, ce qui ne va pas sans une dépossession de soi totale, une purification telle que l'on n'existe plus alors dans sa peau d'homme...Mais j'y étais encore un peu!" (p. 219).

This experience, combining sensations of joy, pride, liberation, and domination all at once, builds toward an orgasmic pitch and almost overcomes him before fading away rhythmically, "le mouvement se répétant de plus en plus

8 Contained in Clancier, Frénaud, pp. 217-220.
mal avec un sentiment de nostalgie" (p. 219).

Much could be written about the erotic aspects of this passage. What is of importance for the future poet is the subsequent desire to relive the extraordinary experience, put it into words, or recapture it through the appropriate use of words themselves.

According to Frénaud that night in Florence, in 1934, was the last of several occasions on which he experienced such an occurrence. Shortly after writing his first poem "Epitaphe" in 1938, he protests the French betrayal of Czechoslovakia in the poem "Prague" (Sainte Face, pp. 137-140), which begins "La lumière était trop jaune aux ruelles de Mala Strana./ La rumeur encore aux palais des Capitaines,/ les hauts ombres tout bruisants sous les lanternes,/ et moi qui marche, qui marche" (p. 137). Now the Captains' quarters in the Mala Strana district of Prague was the site where, in 1930, the "singular experience" first came to him. Thus he has a very private reason for feeling so deeply the disastrous consequences of the decision of Chamberlain and Daladier at Munich. But he does not express it directly in "Prague." What he does say is that he had sensed that the joy he felt there that night was "marquée" (p. 139).

9 Clancier, Frénaud, p. 218.
Some lines later, then, he attributes to the city "un sourire" and an "Absurde ardeur de la vie" (p. 138) which he feels sure will survive the disaster.

The événement" of Prague and Florence determines the path of a course defined when Frénaud begins to write poetry, and indirectly provides the motor for all that he writes. Before then, as he hints in "Tombeau de mon père" and admits with considerable humor in his conversations with Bernard Pingaud in Notre Inhabilité Fatale, his life had been basically aimless. Now he can declare, "J'emporte ma naissance et je vais chez les hommes,/ je chante" (Rois mages, p. 38).

The epigraph of Les Rois mages, Frénaud's first published book of poetry, is attributed to Walt Whitman. It reads: "Cher camarade, je confesse t'avoir contraint de me suivre et te contraindre encore, sans rien savoir de notre destinée, si nous serons victorieux ou totalement écrasés et vaincus." At the beginning of his poetic career, then, Frénaud proposes an adventure in which he will be a forceful leader, although he promises no victory. This attitude is consistent with the direction of French poetry in modern times, in which the problem of the artist has become the problem of man and the proper human heroism seems to find itself in the heroism of the
artist. Frénaud's hero-poet promises to save those who follow him from "la molle vie morte d'avance" (Rois mages, p. 41) but warns in a poem where he plays the devil's advocate that the price of following "les songes" or an "amour fou" of that better life is the loss of the reassurance and security of the life of "ordre" of his father (Rois mages, p. 46).

The poet who concludes his own self portrait with the grand image of "un homme porte-lumière" (Sainte Face, p. 51), declares himself also a "voyeur de l'absolu" (Sainte Face, p. 63). Rather than be stymied by the absence or the loss of God, Frénaud pursues what is left to us and in us, that which another poet has called "des fragments de l'ancienne confidence." Frénaud is "attentif d'abord aux venues, aux passages même furtif, de ce qu'on peut nommer la présence." Whether we call it "l'événement," Being, or presence, it is important to note the primacy of this phenomenon in his work, while


remembering that Frénaud is first of all a poet, not a philosopher. His aim is not to construct a system but, as a faithful "shepherd of Being," to bring together the elements of a scattered experience that has become more and more elusive in our day. He does not always present the impressive figure of a leader, a shepherd, a bringer of light and truth. Not every poem will end with the positive affirmation, "Je suis ivre et je chante" (Rois mages, p. 39).

Indeed he goes to some pains to prevent the reader from seeing him only in heroic proportions. His "self-portrait" also points out the rather lumpy and uncomfortable ordinariness that disguises "l'homme porte lumière." Frénaud's poems specifically about poets go to great trouble to show the parallels with very ordinary mortals. The inspired poet who writes "par voeu du souffle de l'Esprit" also drinks his soup like any other man (Sainte Face, p. 50). The care of a pet animal and the fascination with infinity are equally within his domain. "Le poète inspiré/ épile son chien/ ou caresse une étoile, et toujours entre ses doigts/ sa profonde voix chante" (Rois mages, p. 39). For Frénaud such contrasts are one of the unavoidable paradoxes of the poetic vocation. He must face the fact that the "sang d'arc-en-ciel" which allies him with the absolute is also a "sang fauve" which ties him to the earth (Rois mages, p. 39). Frénaud the
poet never forgets that he is also Frénaud the man. His poetry brings the reader back to earth every time it tempts him on high.

Not only is the poet an ordinary man, he is a bit of an imposter. He knows in advance that his quest is doomed to defeat. He frequently reminds us that "il n'y a pas de paradis." In addition, his pose as a leader hides the fact that his quest is essentially personal, and although he may seem to express himself on behalf of others, it is really his own quest which interests him (Inhabileté, p. 113). Frénaud expressed indignation at the betrayal of Prague. But behind that indignation is the sense of a personal affront, the violation of a personal experience. Frénaud has not written about other equally shocking events. Rather his protest is limited to those causes in which he has a personal interest, which in some way are associated in his mind with the experience of being. And so he is a "poète engagé" in a more limited way than his "civic" poems might lead one to suppose.

The first section of Frénaud's first book, Les Rois mages, is entitled "Revenu du désert." Since the poems date from before the war, the desert referred to is not the sandy soil of Brandenburg where Frénaud was a prisoner of war. In the context of his poetry it is more appropriate to think of the desert where Christ spent forty days of spiritual anguish, and to which the
"desert fathers" fled in the early centuries of Christianity to better devote themselves to meditation. The poems of "Revenu du désert" elaborate the whole experience of death and rebirth represented by "Epitaphe." One of the first conditions of this death into life is a sense of alienation.

The poet is first of all alienated from society. He rejected his father's "order" and he thereby rejects the society of many of his fellow men. They do not understand his refusal of their overtures, so he explains:

Regards qui m'accueillez en vain,
je ne suis pas des vôtres, assis à votre table,
partageant le pain et le vin.
Je ne sais plus mentir avec vos mensonges.

Like most heroes, the poet is a loner. He realizes that he will be misunderstood and mocked (Rois mages, p. 32). As a consequence he must live out his self chosen exile rejected and even hated, and because of the difficulty of the course he has chosen he will often wonder if he can go on, "le coeur sans amour...Le sourire éclatant du désespoir/ tiendra-t-il jusqu'à la mort prochaine?" (Rois mages, p. 76).

Not only is Frénaud's poet an exile from society, but as Georges Limbour has pointed out, he is also an
"exilé de l'être."\textsuperscript{14} Sometimes Being seems to be a place from which he has been expelled to wander, fretful and rebellious, with others of his ilk in a desert-like place where there are no trees or breezes to offer even the suggestion of a possibility of returning to what was his "vie que fut/ la jeune lumière" (\textit{Paradis}, p. 17). It seems as though he were outside a tower in which another self, "le prisonnier radieux," remains oblivious to his calls, distracted by "la chambre haute/ la claire fontaine où l'esprit se joue" (\textit{Paradis}, p. 86). In vain he tries to communicate with the prisoner, but eventually he wanders off into the surrounding woods, into what he calls, "les fourrées de ma parole."

Leaving that part of him occupied by the higher things of the spirit he finds that, in the confusion of his words, he unexpectedly has results: "parfois j'ai distingué ma voix" (p. 86), and the thing produced, fragile in contrast to all that surrounds it, is nonetheless beautiful, like "un roseau dans la hêtraie" (p. 87). When he abandons the attempt at reconciliation with that higher aspect of himself it seems his poetic voice unexpectedly comes to him like a "son plus clair" through the "effarouchemenent" (p. 87). But the poet does not know if his two selves have made contact, if the lofty prisoner

\textsuperscript{14} Limbour, "Paradis," p. 107.
of the spirit has heard the words produced in the mundane, disheveled world below of the other self. In the end he must settle for the paradox.

C'est la voix de l'autre, c'est toi.
Sais-tu ce qu'il t'a murmurer?
De lui tu n'auras rien de plus (p. 87).

The poet is not in control of his poems in the manner of the maker of furniture, or as was the writer of poetry in an earlier age when poetry tended to be the expression of an idea which clearly preceded it. The poem comes to him, and not necessarily where he expects it, or in the state of mind in which he expects it. It was not when he tried to reach the "prisonnier radieux" in his own mind that the poetry came, but when his attention drifted off elsewhere. Frénaud has said that the poet himself has nothing to do with the production of the poem, that indeed in his own case, "il était un autre quand il l'a fait" (Sainte Face, p. 261). This does seem to be true of at least his initial inspiration.

Multiple exile then, is the poet's lot: exile from the traditional views of the world, from the common society of other men, and even from himself and his own elusive poetic inspiration. The poet is a man divided between the mortal self which makes him like other men,
and that "autre" which makes him a poet. As Rimbaud declared, "je est un autre."

In a poem where Frénaud seems to be talking about the difficulty of human fraternity, deploring the impossibility of being "un seul être fraternel" one might also read a pleading for sympathy for the poet who himself cannot be a "seul être (Rois mages, p. 33). In the same poem he claims he does not recognize a child which could represent his own childhood or that other offspring, his poetry. A few lines later he wants both to hold the child and to desert him, and finally to recount his story up to the present. The work of the poet is to be fled from, being the exile that it is, but yet pursued for the experience of the plenitude of Being it promises. And in the process of writing, Frénaud does indeed recount the development of a poet of his own age, himself.

Frénaud places himself in the tradition of French poetry which, since Baudelaire, has had metaphysical ambitions (Inhabileté, p. 238). The poet is in quest of Being. He is not a philosopher. So his poems give only his experience of what it is or is not for him, not a logical treatise of what or where it is according to predetermined givens.

Baudelaire and Rimbaud have bequeathed to the poet the traditional voyage off to somewhere else more beautiful
and fulfilling than the world we already know. Frénaud too is tempted to look, as tradition since, Plato has dictated, somewhere else. In one of his first poems he describes himself as new born and returning from the desert—

Revenu du désert,  
me tenant agrippé  
au bord du renouveau (Rois mages, p. 24)

and having the sudden experience of a "repos qui console/à ma joie débordée" (p. 24). All sorts of associations come to his mind: Christmas, hawthorn, lace, his love.

Echoing Rimbaud and Baudelaire, the poet of "Revenu du désert" holds out the invitation:

Venez, nous irons nous marier  
dans un pays plus clair. (p. 24)

He likes the expression sufficiently to repeat it in the next poem. There is indeed a recurrent strain in Frénaud's poetry expressing the desire to run away to a truer life which is not here but somewhere else. Again, echoing Baudelaire (e.g."Les nuages, les merveilleux nuages"), he looks beyond the earth surrounding him to the clouds, those provokers of dreams in all those with the souls of children, as if they could somehow carry him
away. Like a small shepherd boy bound to his mountain flock he dreams of the freedom they promise, "Loin de ses alpages./ Ô l'amour des nues," and imagines himself floating away into the infinite distances, the lowly responsibilities and the human ties of this ordinary life forgotten and far below. "Il veut mourir d'aise/ sur les bras du vent,/ sans rien ni personne" (Rois mages, p. 50). If he floats far enough perhaps he will reach those more perfect fields where he will feel whole, fulfilled, and with a smile of bliss reach infinity.

Atteindrai-je
la prairie des grandes glissées bienheureuses,
la terre de ma cohésion riant à l'infini?
(Rois mages, p. 68)

The whole history of Judeo-Christian civilization has taught us to dream of a paradise where all our troubles will be over, a refuge beyond this life of storm and trouble. Prénaud, dreaming of such a refuge, paints a picture of a paradise reminiscent of both Indian folklore and of certain "primitive" or "naive" paintings. He feels like a bird, a new bird, flitting among the branches of a tree, and the tree in Indian mythology is a sort of ladder to heaven. In the top branches it seems to him that the sun is rising in his heart. The stars have come down in all their glory to
adorn the robins below him and heavenly spheres play in
the garden with the animals. No orthodox Christian
heaven here, but no earthly paradise either. The spell
is broken by a word that, with those of similar adverse
portent, becomes a lietmotif in Frénaud's poetry—
"Pourtant." Something has gone wrong. It is "Trop tard!"
and Frénaud must bid good-bye to what is not a probable,
perhaps not even a "possible arc-en-ciel" (Rois mages,
p. 23).

Although they offer a recurrent image that transforms
itself vitally, there are not many "chansons d'arc-en-
ciel" (Rois mages, p. 75) in Frénaud's work. The poet
rails against the fact that he is always drawn back to
"ce jour acariâtre" (Rois mages, p. 53) where everything
in comparison to his dreams seems dull and dreary. He
has no desire to remain in such a "monde gris." He
protests his right to "bondir en dehors de moi." He
reproaches the "filet" of his thoughts for not allowing
him to stay away, he wishes to be able to lose himself
in them forever. But the "captif" is always brought back
to earth, and his experience of transcendence is only
brief (Rois mages, p. 53). When he tries by his own force
and willpower to recover the gift he had been given so
unexpectedly he is doomed to disappointment. He cannot
transcend this worldly existence by sheer will power alone.
Each time he tries he discovers that he has "tout dépassé
ou déprisé" (Rois mages, p. 14) and is back where he began. Despite the apparent successes embodied in certain poems, they only relate an impossible arrival at an unreachable destination, "un ailleurs/ cependant hors d'accès (Toujours p. 12).

Reluctantly the poet is forced to concede that it is vain to look for being in some form that transcends this worldly existence. The poet whose treatment of the theme of evasion reminded Aragon of Rimbaud rejected first the idea of a transcendent God, and then the hope of a transcendent experience of Being. Claude Vigée, comparing post World War II poets to the prewar poets has noted that whereas the latter took from Rimbaud the expression "La vraie vie est absente" and confidently went in search of it "ailleurs" the former have changed the sense of the search in their adoption of the entirely different "On ne part pas." Frénaud too, unwillingly, turns his eyes earthward and concludes: "Il ne viendra de renfort que d'entre nous;/ Il n'y aura pas d'ascension" (Paradis, p. 197). Alejandro Busuiocbeanu notes that Frénaud's poetry is both Apollonian and Dionysiac.

15 Aragon, "Prisonnier," p. 32.
16 Vigée, p. 115.
Contrasting with the poems yearning for the light are others generating destructive dithyrambic myths and symbols. This dark melancholy of Frénaud's work Pierre Emmanuel reads as a radical criticism of and protest against life as we must live it, \(^{18}\) producing dream-like poems perhaps more truly expressive of his deepest sentiments.\(^{19}\) If in these "corridors de la nuit" that he explores after the disappointment of the "arc-en-ciel" he finds some hope, it is in spite of the fact that such hope is always close to absurdity and always threatened.\(^{20}\) Frénaud notes the impossibility of really dominating that Dionysiac chaos from which poetry rises (Inhabileté, pp. 34-35). But he feels that the poet must come to know his own "abîmes" and use that knowledge to protest against the unsatisfactoriness of our condition. From this "monde souterrain" (Inhabileté, p. 37) the poet draws on a store of sometimes disagreeable images, "des nids de figures" which permit him to express "les vieux malheurs de l'homme" (Sainte Face, p. 257). Although the result may appear to be that "noire mélancolie,"\(^{21}\) Frénaud feels

\(^{18}\) Pierre Emmanuel, "Quatre poètes français et un Italien," La Table Ronde, 30 (juin 1950), 164.


\(^{20}\) Lescure, "Frénaud," p. 63.

\(^{21}\) Emmanuel, p. 164.
such poems, pessimistic though they be, present "une figure assez exaltante" (Sainte Face, p. 258) of man, not delivering him but at least lending him a certain dignity.

The Poet reacts, however, to the frailty and the elusiveness of Apollonian "drapeaux métaphysiques" (Sainte Face, p. 99), so tempting especially to the young, with a bitter disillusionment which leads him to posit the existence of a God who derisively offers him a series of "mauvais dons:" tears, so that he may cry, bread so that he may go hungry, glory so that he may suffer from the lack of it, honor so that he may be wounded by its consequences, and finally, hope, to better betray him (Sainte Face, p. 47).

He lashes out at such unfairness, against those persons and things which, unlike God, are within reach: his mother, his father, the animals and even the earth. "Je les mordrai tous....Je hurlerai comme un chien" (Rois mages, p. 59). He ends a tale of an idyllic stay in a small village where he, like each of his companions n'était sensible qu'au fourmillement d'une plénitude toujours si heureusement éblouie que le dehors et de dedans s'y trouvaient immobilisés ensemble dans une grande solennité soleilleuse, et nous rigolions d'autre chose, en vérité seulement attentifs à cette grâce (Sainte Face, p. 28) with the horrifying account of the total destruction he and his friends wreak on the little village
because it must be a mirage, it is too good to be true. With what sadistic joy they set to "gâter" and "saccager" this little habitat of men which dared to tempt them with what they know now can only be an empty promise of plenitude.

Frenaud the poet does not only seek Being in some platonic realm of purity and ideals, but also in the baser, unavoidable realities of his human existence. Like Baudelaire he does not flinch from seeking flowers in apparent evil. "Coeur charognard/ n'aie pas peur d'être immonde" (Rois mages, p. 57). Dreams of clouds and rainbows, as I have suggested, give way to nightmares. The poet makes his song out of his hallucinatory visions of the horrors lurking underneath the mundane objects and events we call reality. He can no longer see a wedding or a funeral without the ritual beauty which adorns it falling away to reveal an all pervading rottenness at the core. "Il y a des vers sous la chemise de la mariée. Il y a des bêtes dans le lit de la morte" (Sainte Face, p. 42).

This way of seeing produces a number of "poèmes de dessous le plancher" (the name of a group of poems in Sainte Face, pp. 7-53) dominated by disgusting "bêtes de la nuit" which, independent of the poet's will, rise from his psychological and spiritual depths to "boire à la surface" of his consciousness (Rois mages, p. 61).
These nightmare visions produce poems about a ravaged country struggling to survive under war-time or holocaust conditions, sinister hotels where nameless crimes are committed after daylight hours, frightening men who tempt small girls to an unknown fate, empty-handed peddlers and abandoned stores, poems which recall the position of certain existentialist writers that life and the world are absurd.

Frénaud's "bêtes de la nuit" take on an autonomous existence as repellent living creatures. Sometimes they are "des espèces de larves" which get under his tongue at night when the lucidity of daytime existence fades. They cannot be removed, "ces fausses nourritures dans la bouche" and the poet just has to live with them (Sainte Face, p. 32). More often they appear as rats, and they are as unavoidable as they are ubiquitous. "Les rats montent et descendent tout le long de la vie. Ton cœur est l'égout qui les promène" (Sainte Face, p. 101). It seems that everything in his life provokes or breeds them until they have invaded everything he touches. He cannot escape them, so he faces them and tries to obtain from them the nourishment the poet requires. He tells himself they can provide inspiration if he learns to listen to them. "Va donc avec les rats, bonhomme, il te feront fête,/ si ton silence peut les entendre" (Sainte Face, p. 101).
So after a long effort at purification and an avoidance of the repulsive and the filthy, the poet places his fate "Dans les égouts où les hommes trempent leur pain" (Sainte Face, p. 38). It is then that he discovers the paradox that, as his vocation as a poet began with his farewell to a more conventional way of life, so his poetry grows out of what he had at first thought antipathetic to it. When he accepts, indeed, seeks after those dark monsters he had previously fled from, they become tame and friendly, a welcome part of him, and, transformed, they become the "miel qui fut venin" (Rois mages, p. 61).

The difficulties, the disappointments and the horrors that beset the poet appear to him in another light. "La profonde blessure" (Rois mages, p. 34), like some necessary surgery, saves his life as a poet. Little by little negative experiences are absorbed, to reappear in poetic form and so to offer healing to both the poet and the reader. Like some unpleasant but effective medicine, the venin eventually saves him.

Peu à peu les maladies sauvent.  
Poissons de mes eaux profondes,  
qui changez de couleur.  

(Rois mages, p. 17)

The poet now must try to keep his poetic footing on an intuitive ground which demands that he be both active and
Passive in his reception of poetic insights. Sometimes, as the patient who would be saved by the surgeon's knife must allow himself to go under the anesthetic, the poet must allow himself to sink into the often dark and cheerless depths of his own mind. Such submission to the dark forces demands a faith that reason rejects as fatal.

"Les noyés ne savent pas boire l'eau qui les délivrerait" (Sainte Face, p. 15). On the other hand, when his life is so cluttered with everyday concerns that it is like a field of weeds, he must resolutely dig into it as if he were a farmer faced with a field to be plowed. "Il me faut travailler mes terres meubles/ jusqu'à laisser passer le flot profond/ pour lui devenir delta conquérant" (Paradis, p. 111). The "flot profond" appears now as a different sort of paradise. It is toward "la grande eau taciturne" (Sainte Face, p. 18) that lovers drift when they become well and truly one in love, a sea so deep that the poet recognizes it as "la mer du rêve d'avant l'utérus" (Rois mages, p. 58).

Happy dreams and nightmares both arise from the unconscious. Light and dark are both caused by the sun's relationship to the earth. Similarly, the rainbow and "le chant de l'eau profonde" (Rois mages, p. 35) both come from the same source within the poet and sometimes exist only in and through the poem.
Les rêves que je n'ai pas vécus
même en rêve,
ceux qui sont enfouis'au profond
du grand ciel de lumière
qui est prisonnier,
ceux qui empoisonnent
sont ceux-là qui sauvent,
(...)
je ne les connaîtrai peut-être jamais
ceux-là qui affleurent par le seul poème.
(Rois mages, p. 19)

Jacques Maritain makes several points which are particularly relevant to the poetic experience as it is revealed in Frénaud's poetry. He points out that Platonic dialectics succeeded in dividing without being able to unify. The "sin" of Platonism is, in his view, separatism, and a "separatist conception of transcendence." It is this aspect of Western philosophy which leads it to see God, or the poetic muse, as something outside, above and beyond man himself, and leads him to search elsewhere for the absolute, to imagine the experience of being as possible only outside his own body, out of the everyday world. Maritain argues that we have to locate the Platonic muse within the soul of man. He proposes the term "créative intuition" for a faculty which partakes of the intellect and the imagination and gives rise to
what he calls "poetic experience."  

Maritain, like recent psychoanalytical theorists, tries to avoid the trap of the Apollonian/Dionysiac or the intellectual/subconscious dualism, by suggesting that poetic intuition is born in a "spiritual" but non-Freudien unconscious, from which it eventually emerges.  

Without developing here Maritain's notion of the soul, and other metaphysical concepts which have little or no application to Frénaud's work, certain of his ideas may be considered instructive: his emphasis on the location of poetic activity within man's earthly self, his attempt at combining certain intellectual and unconscious functions with that activity, and his effort to find a solution for the dualism caused by the models of Platonic thinking. He might even be talking about Frénaud's "prisonnier radieux" when he claims that "we possess in ourselves the Illuminating Intellect, a spiritual sun ceaselessly radiating, which activates everything in intelligence, and whose light causes all our ideas to arise in us, and whose energy permeates every operation of our mind."  

The outcome of the working of creative intuition, or the poetic experience, of that sun is an "immanent fruition of the absolute," a product which comes

22 Maritain, p. 64.
23 Maritain, p. 67.
24 Maritain, p. 73.
from a radiant source within man and which obviates the need for an experience which takes him outside of himself and this earthly reality. 25

This absolute is an ineffable presence which permeates the world itself, as its "real" reality. Maritain maintains that "the reality with which the poet is confronted is the very object of intelligence, that is the ocean of Being, in its absolute universality." 26 At the root of the creative act, he says, there is "a kind of experience or knowledge without parallel in logical reason, through which Things and the Self are obscurely grasped together. 27

It is important to note that Maritain is positing the existence of a kind of union of Things and the Self, in which a higher form of the intellect plays an important role. He posits the loss of the Self into the sea of Being, yet claims for the Self the ability to remain aware of what is happening. Again, he might be talking about certain aspects of Frénaud's work, in this case his awareness that during the extraordinary experience in Florence his "ravissement" was not total, rather, as he

25 Maritain, p. 173.
26 Maritain, p. 94.
27 Maritain, p. 84.
put it, "j'y étais encore un peu." What Maritain claims for poetic intuition is the possibility of a totally subjective experience of the oneness of things, retaining nonetheless some characteristics of objective experience because of its provenance from an intellectual intuitive source. Thus "subjectivity has become the very vehicle to penetrate into the objective world.

In this way Maritain justifies the subjectivity of modern poetry, by claiming that it is by such subjectivity that the poetry sees things and the world as they really are. The subjective poetic mind is better able to grasp the "inner meaning of Things" than the scientific, logical mind.

After reaching out beyond himself and the world, then reaching down into the depths of his unconscious, Frénaud finds a third ground in the world itself, natural and man-made. The ecstatic tone of the "arc-en-ciel" poems and the nightmarish qualities of the "poèmes de dessous le plancher" give way to a quieter, more even sense of communion with the cosmos. To describe this

28 Clancier, Frénaud, p. 219.
29 Maritain, p. 29.
31 Maritain, p. 25.
type of poetic experience Frénaud borrows an expression used by Yves Bonnefoy about Pierre Jean Jouve. He says that the unity that the poet senses is not found by rational, intellectual processes, but manifests itself when it will as "l'avénement de l'être dans ce qui est" (Inhabileté, p. 93).

The concern of so much of Frénaud's poetry with the daily reality of city and country life leads Claude Vigée to classify him, and poets such as Francis Ponge and René Char, as poets who make "la redécouverte du monde réel." Commenting on this trait, Georges Borgeaud adds that while firmly anchored in the real, Frénaud's poetry transfigures it. Vigée attributes this characteristic to a strain of modern poetry which is sensitive to "la splendeur immanente" apparent to Parmenides and the writer of the Song of Songs, a "sens charnel de la Création" still present in the world of the old testament. Renewing those "rapports vitaux avec le monde" which persisted in the generally hostile and other worldly atmosphere of medieval Christianity, until they were suppressed during the protestant reformation which saw

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32 Vigée, p.113.
33 Borgeaud, p. 38.
34 Vigée, pp. 103, 115.
them as vestiges of a pagan past, this poetry abandons the "Non total" of the neoplatonic, augustinian heritage of the occident and looks for the "présence unique de l'être au sein des choses multiples et mortelles." It comes a little closer to an oriental attitude.

Chinese art, Maritain observes, does not strain toward a transcendental absolute but shows a sacred veneration for Tao, the primal source.

Such modern poetry recaptures the feelings of primitive man, or of the old Ionian philosophers who sensed that "all things are full of gods." Maritain firmly places poetic experience in the realm of the enigmatic and multiple relationships of things with each other in the created world. It is mystical and not poetic experience which is concerned with a supra-mundane unity.

This kind of poetic experience of the real undermines the scientific investigation which our civilization has come to accept as the only model for the search for truth. Jean-Claude Renard declares it subversive.

35 Vigée, pp. 102, 103.
36 Maritain, p. 13.
37 Maritain, p. 9.
38 Maritain, pp. 172-173.
in its ability to "faire voir le monde autrement,"
making us aware of the presence of a primal mystery and
increasing our perceptiveness by helping us see things in
a newer and more creative way than we would directly,
ourselves. It is a manifestation of "un effort désespéré
d'ordre métaphysique, pour connaître la profondeur
de la réalité."39

Renard reminds us that the poet cannot, however,
completely restore the primal contact, that is, recover
the epos of the first epic poets. He can only réport
his own findings, and give an impression of a new con­
nection. His language may be "d'une certaine manière
traversé par l'être" but it enjoys only the trace of
such a passage and not "une présence retenue."40

Frénaud, "passeur de l'être" (Rois mages, p. 140),
sets for himself the task of transmitting to the reader
"un autre rapport avec le monde" (Sainte Face, p. 262):
In his poetry the French countryside and large European
cities have a special capacity for revealing the presence
of being. If it sometimes seems that the earth will be
forever mute and indifferent (Rois mages, p. 22), there
are other times when the still, dreaming countryside is

40 Renard, pp. 50-52.
lit by the faint glimmer of "un paon immense, invisible" which sends out endless gold reflections like the echoes of a barely heard and hidden voice (Paradis, p. 78). At such times the poet senses the tenuous existence of fragments of a "Monde premier" where man and nature lived in a now lost harmony with each other. Every turn in the road promises a "bienveillance" he barely dares hope for (Toujours, p. 81).

Weary from many disappointments, the poet greets the possibility of a "réconciliation" as men greet the rainbow after a disaster. Overwhelmed, he hopes he will be able to take in "le langage de l'autrefois" (Toujours, p. 82). The presence he senses is elusive. He cannot locate it precisely. "Mais là dans la prairie, / de l'autre côté si proche, dans le bosquet de noisetiers. / C'était là... Ou dans cette chambre sombre à cette heure, / sous les solives... L'horloge veille. Elle était dorée... / Et je fus hors du temps" (Toujours, p. 86). It touches him briefly, abolishing all sense of time, difference or distance. But it abandons him again almost immediately, leaving him with only the memory of a restless "énergie sans voix, le chant absolu" which tantalizes him and never fulfills its whole promise (Toujours, p. 86).

Such poems lead Yves Bonnefoy, for whom one role of any form of art is the recovery of a "presence" in
reality, to observe that Frénaud's work suggests "un autre horizon que les métamorphoses encore, et les orages, de notre christianisme tardif: disons quelque Tao de l'universelle campagne." Bonnefoy declares that artists like Van Gogh, Monet, Matisse and Derain choose forms which reach beneath the physical appearance of things to "bear witness" to the power of reality.

Frénaud is subject to the enigmatic "presence" in cities as well as in the countryside. Indeed his initial, and fateful, experiences of the "événement" took place in Prague and Florence. Paris too holds a particular enchantment for him ("Trente ans après, Paris," Toujours, pp. 9-13). As he walks through its streets listening for "le chant total" the façades of buildings, the street signs, the names of stores and businesses, seem to form a "grave texte à déchiffrer" whose meaning he cannot quite grasp (p. 10). As the strange "appel" draws him on, he names the streets he investigates: rue Chanoinesse, rue de la Corderie, rue des Blancs Manteaux, rue du Louvre, rue des Patriarches, rue du Roi-Doré, rue Maître Albert (p. 9). But this time the "ancien langage" remains


impenetrable. The poet is tempted to give up the search for "le secret attendu" (p. 10). He has doubled back on his own tracks, "inapaisable témoin" unwilling to admit defeat (p. 11). This time he is unable to seize "l'Un qui se diffère dans la pénombre" (p. 11). Lao Tsu said that the "Tao alone nourishes and brings everything to fulfillment." He also said that the "Tao is hidden and without name." 43 The poet remembers places such as Rome and Prague where he did indeed find what he is searching for now so unsuccessfully, and contemplates returning to them. "Tu partiras vers d'autres lieux qui t'ont aimé,/ Campo de Fiori, Mala Strana" (p. 13).

Another French city, Lyon, does however accord him the "promesse courante,/ qui émerge entre les murs jaunes que défait la brume" (Paradis, pp. 50-52). There the "appel indifférent" of the facades becomes readable. It is as if, he says, "les rues s'alluminaient à mon regard quand je passais." Confidently he approaches that which is invisible but not quite lost. This time he is certain of success. "Il est à moi puisqu'il m'a appelé et que je sais lire,/ derrière un aveu illusoire, un cri silencieux."

Since the "événement" he pursues is by its nature transitory, he must constantly renew his search for it.

43 Lao Tsu, Chapter 11, n. pag.
Rome in particular (where Campo de Fiori is to be found) is permeated by "le grondement de la voix ancienne" (Sorcière, p. 38). The city is the abode of a female spirit of many faces. "La Sorcière de Rome" of the poem of that title is by turns an old woman, a goddess, the great mother, a sibyl, a vestal virgin, Messalina, and the Virgin Mary. She carries out the promise of fulfillment to the former wanderer of Mala Strana.

The poet feels himself to be one with a mysterious presence. But again the union is brief. "Je renaissais. Suis séparé,...j'essaie d'entendre" (p. 23). Once more the poet is forced to admit the impossibility of capturing permanently the mysterious presence. Rome, like Prague, Paris, or Lyon, may permit "un regard sur le triomphal," she may even offer the experience again and again. But she is not "pénétration de l'abîme et soleil qui monte" (p. 12) and cannot, after all, assure the "avènement promis décisif" (p. 12).
Yves Bonnefoy suggests that all art reveals, through the shape of its perceptions, an agnostic quest for a hidden knowledge and beatitude that seem just out of sight, while yet located in the world of our own experience. Frénaud, who takes for granted the ontological ambitions of poetry (Inhabileté, p. 140), sees a book of poems as an organic entity which permits the exploration of "des géographies secrètes d'un labyrinthe personnel" in which is to be observed "le cheminement d'un être-en-quête" (Sainte Face, p. 256). Christian Audejean compares Frénaud to "un étrange Roi Mage, chargé du don précieux de la parole" who, always attentive to the world around him, ever travels toward his elusive goal.

In his multiple role of Roi Mage, prisoner, philosopher, and hero, the poet gives expression to both the "révolte" and the "louanges" of the title of Claude Vigée's essay on French poetry since World War II. But among the protests and the praises of the embattled quester are passages where he not only describes "le passage de la visitation" (title of a poem, and of the collection in which it is found, Paradis, pp. 81-106) of

44 Lawall, p. 70.
46 See Vigée, pp. 99-129.
Being, but succeeds in reproducing its effect.

Frénaud's whole effort as a poet is directed at producing these "quelques échos de la voix illuminante" (Paradis, p. 234), which are not mere description of a phenomenon, but "ce qui est," rivals of the experience itself, that capture however briefly for the reader "l'Unité du Tout" (p. 234). Such passages Bernard Pingaud sees as transmitters of the "événement" to those not directly touched by it.47 Philippe Jacottet notes that, like the original experience itself, these passages tend to be very brief, a sentence or two, the juxtaposition of several words or expressions.48 They are often inspired by certain "lieux d'approche" Frénaud encountered on his travels. Jacottet chooses one of the poems from several Frénaud has grouped together under just that title, "Lieux d'approche" in Il n'y a pas de paradis. The poet contemplates the lakes of Värmland on the bottom of which, according to Swedish legend, the arms of the soldiers of Charles XII are to be found. Affected by the peace of the pines, the "ciel voilé" and the bronze colored water, he pleads that these weapons of

47 Bernard Pingaud in the preface to Paradis, p. 11.

war be left where they are, because, as he explains in a sentence whose magic power for Jacottet resides in its naïveté, "Je veux cueillir ici la myrtille et l'airelle."^49

It is at such moments, when the poet is not explicitly concerned with Being, that its presence is best transmitted to the reader. As Frénaud encountered "le passage de la visitation" in his travels at home and abroad, so the reader encounters it in poems which extend over the whole range of the poet's experience. In a brief poem about Oxford (Paradis, p. 93), "le gazon blasonnant les pierres" in a quadrangle of one of the old colleges is a "parfait désert sous la parure gothique" whose silence fosters the meditation of those whose brave persistence in the face of trouble has kept England what she is.50

Paris, the poet's home for most of his life, and the subject or the setting of many of his poems, becomes for him an "amande bleue amère" and an "heaume enchanté" (Paradis, pp. 29-31). Deeper than the delight of the tourist before a panorama as pretty as post cards is the sense of a mysterious fertility or an ancient unexplored treasure conveyed by these expressions which the poet makes no attempt to explain, placing them with other enigmatic approximations to the real.

^ 49 Jacottet, p. 480.

50 See Jacottet, p. 480.
When the poet tells us that in the countryside there are moments of eternity "issue des éléments contraires," that "promesses de la félicité" are still momentarily granted (Paradis, pp. 132-135), we believe him not on faith but because elsewhere in the poem certain phrases are the fulfillment of that promise. The words, "le triangle d'un village dans sa fumée," are themselves a "bonheur acquis d'emblée (p. 132). "Sur un champ, une charrette se dresse bleue" is in itself a "noce" (p. 133). "Les longues pièces de terre écrites à la charrue" are, in language, a looked for "contrée...perdue" (p. 134).

After a day in the village of Menerbes (Paradis, pp. 145-152), the poet and his companion, standing hand in hand like passengers on the high, ship-like promontory on which the small community is built, rest confident in the assurance of future "prestiges" of "l'unique harmonie" (pp. 152, 150). The harmony is actually realized for the reader in lines about an ordinary summer field insect. "Des sauterelles m'accompagnent./ Frêle seigneurie, cavalcade pâle parmi l'herbe" (p. 148).

The poet, describing his struggle in terms of a long search hampered by obstacles and digressions, tells us that sometimes "des paroles inconnues me parviennent familières" (Paradis, p. 131). For the reader, familiar words come together in Frénaud's poetry to allow him a new intimacy with that which seemed already known but
now displays unsuspected powers of revelation.

People as well as places participate in the magic that certain words confer. Off the coast of Denmark three-masted ships are visible beyond the birches. In a garden bustling with children reminiscent of the tales of Hans Christian Andersen the poet imagines a fulfilled Hamlet unknown to Shakespeare. "Le prince Hamlet a quitté son château./ Il nage, il rit dans le soleil du Sund" (Rois mages, p. 79). A small girl, showing as yet no sign of the heartbreaker she will grow up to be, captivates with an innocent perfection that recalls the impossible transcendence so longed for. As she disappears from view the poet wishes her well. "O sois heureuse, petite chasseresse à l'orée enfantine de ta course" (Paradis, p. 178). Or in Rome, where the poor live among the ruins and the garbage of a once glorious past, the evening light transforms them into enormous shadows like resurrected gods against facades gilded by the setting sun.

...ET LA GRISERIE DORÉE DES LOINTAINES ÉTAILLES, ET LES PAUVRES, CONFINÉS DANS LES PRES MAIGRES APPARurent PAR LA BRUME, ILLUMINES SUR LES FAÇADES LES PLUS HAUTES, À CE DÉFAUT DU JOUR.

(Sorcière, p. 37)

The poet knows that there is no paradise. Bernard Pingaud has rightly emphasized that for the quester
"le terme du chemin, c'est le chemin lui-même (Paradis, p. 6). But along the way there are resting places which in the end, although they offer no promise of a permanent abode, are a great gift in their own right. They are like those inns where travelers stop for protection from the dangerous night, "l'étape et le repos gagné" (Paradis, p. 103). They are sanctuaries, where the weary may enjoy "le délassement enchanté du repas, le réconfort de la veillée avant de repartir" (Paradis, p. 104).

Frénaud imagines the Roi Mage and his entourage, resting awhile from the rigors of the long journey, enjoying the peace of hearth and home that can no longer be theirs permanently after their departure to follow the star.

Dans une halte de roi mage,
...
une maison adossée à la terre,
une maison chaude
qui s'ouvre vers nous en descendant par des terrasses.
(Paradis, p. 68).

Like the horseman of Etape dans la clairière, forever in pursuit of an ever receding castle, wearied by battles and disasters, when he comes upon an unexpected resting place he vainly wishes he could stay.

But for the poet there is only the continuing effort to recapture a fleeting experience he cannot forget, an experience which as a poet, he must attempt to reproduce
in such a way as to give the reader a sense of what it is he seeks. When he does, he provides for himself and for the reader a brief moment of respite, an "halte de roi mage," from the rigors of the quest. But the moment and its successful embodiment in the poem must be seen for the frail and momentary triumph they are, a "répit avant les traversées, la tempête, l'écueil fatal" (Paradis, p. 131).
CHAPTER 5
The Poetry

For the poet the ultimate object of the quest is inevitably the poem itself. Although poetry may ostensibly focus on outward events or spiritual endeavors couched in the form of real or mythical adventures, its only actual reality is on the printed page, or, less frequently in modern times, in the spoken word. We have traced Frénaud's poetry from its apparent inception in real events to its concern with spiritual problems, and the poet's multiple metamorphoses as prisoner of war, philosopher, spiritual quester, and finally poet concerned with the production of the poem. But in fact Frénaud is first and foremost a poet, and his poetry is not the means to an end, but the end itself.

The German poet Paul Pörtner compares André Frénaud to Hegel. Both, he maintains, liberate art from the guardianship of philosophy and religion and assign to it the possibility of an independent experience of the absolute.1 Frénaud says that every poem is a possible

1 Pörtner, p. 102.
setting for that quest for being initiated by Rimbaud.² As "la parole sacrée,"³ poetry reveals the progress of a quester who is the poet himself.⁴

A poet in the tradition of Claudel and Péguy,⁵ like them and in contrast to Frénaud, a believer, Jean-Claude Renard subscribes to a similar view of poetry. To him also it is one of the fundamental expressions of our desire for an absolute. The poem, he says, provides a space in which "les signes du 'sacré'" may make their appearance. But he points out, as Frénaud might, that this appearance is more an impression of the sacred than its actual manifestation. Each poem is only a small part of that "poème global" which attempts to "déchiffrer l'Être."⁶

Others have attributed comparable goals to Frénaud's poetic endeavor. Jean Tardieu, a long-time friend of Frénaud as well as a fellow poet, describes his friend's

² Jean, "Entretien," p. IV.
⁴ Jean, "Entretiens," p. IV.
⁵ See Rousselot, Dictionnaire, pp. 206-207.
⁶ Renard, pp. 131, 125, 50, 66, 72 respectively.
work as a "Quête de l'essentiel, recherche de la signification perdue," whereas Georges Limbour cites the "prodigieux pouvoir de dévoilement" that Frénaud discovers in everyday reality. Frénaud is conscious of his capacity to turn the "inimitié" of a situation which resists him by its very opaqueness (Toujours, p. 11) into a complicity in the effort of "dévoilement."

The function of poetry, writes Frénaud, is to "maintenir une trace d'un passage qui fut" (Paradis, p. 243). Since the experience itself cannot be reproduced as such, and the poet begins the poem after the greatest intensity of the "visitation" has passed, his goal is to "mimer la force évanouissante, à en perpétuer la vibration du discours." To accomplish this, poetry must divert language from its ordinary purpose, which is to communicate something while remaining itself unobtrusive. It must force language, as we have seen Frénaud's poetry do, to preserve within itself "le grondement prestigieux de l'événement." It is in its search for the master word, says Renard, the "mot unique" of Heidegger, that the poem affirms itself, and is its own

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9 Pingaud, in the preface to Paradis, p. 8.
10 Pingaud, in the preface to Paradis, p. 12.
self-critic, even as it evolves. Jacques Réda acknowledges Frénaud's at least partial success in this enterprise when he writes that "on trouverait ici et là les fragments dispersés du texte absolu qui poursuit sans relâche à travers eux son impossible plénitude." Renard emphasizes that poetry is the expression of a spiritual experience and an expression of being combined with one of language. The dilemma it faces is the decision to be silent or not when confronted with the problem Hölderlin encountered, the lack of "sacred names" in an age which neither hears nor listens for them.

The modern poet seems forced, in consequence, to invent his own language. The finished work can be a conundrum for him. Frénaud sometimes welcomes it as such: "Dieu merci, la poésie est énigmatique pour le poète lui-même, ce qui lui permet de découvrir parfois de nouveaux sens et de nouveaux émois" (Inhabileté, p. 131). He is delighted when Bernard Pingaud, who has

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11 Renard, p. 36.


13 Renard, p. 97.

14 Renard, p. 73.
commented on his work since 1964, tells him he has been touched by lines he (Pingaud) really doesn't understand (Inhabitabilité, p. 135). Frénaud admits to a more uncomfortable uncertainty when he approaches the "lointaine figure voilée" which is the motor of his work. He does not know if he is being drawn to a desired plenitude or a deathlike emptiness (Sainte Face, p. 261).

There is a certain contradiction involved in the process whereby the poet arrives at the finished product. Georges Limbour feels that the only valid goal of poetry is to lay siege to being. Renard points out that being penetrates poetic language without letting itself be captured effectively. Audejean touches on a central problem when he observes that the poet must be both the master and the servant of language. He must at the same time dominate its chaos and follow where it leads.

Frénaud gives importance to both effort and inspiration in the formation of the poem. As the horseman of "Etape dans la clairière" proclaims his stubbornness when he declares, "Je ne fléchirai pas. Je m'obstine plus outre" (p. 23), so the poet indicates his persistence: "Je crée mon verbe, je le constitue démenti" (p. 16).


Frénaud honors hard work when he admires the stolid  
patience of the peasants who after sixty years of field  
labor, births, deaths and the constant grind of their way  
of life have only the quiet, but nonetheless sustaining,  
satisfaction of accomplished duty (Paradis, p. 79).  

When, however, he stands back and examines his own  
work, he admits that effort accounts for only part of  
his poetic accomplishment.  

Je m'épie parmi ma conquête.  
Pourquoi je m'y reconnaîtrais?  
C'est moi si peu le responsable.  

(Paradis, p. 119)  

In fact the poem is perhaps more a product of the pres­  
ence which inspired such toil than it is of the activity  
which followed. The poet was moved to such exertion  
because he wanted to be the creator of a "parole trans­  
formée/ par la présence qui s'évanouit,/ un monde  
qui se forme" (Paradis, p. 119).  

Valéry made the now well-known claim that the first  
line of a poem is given to the poet. Frénaud once told  
Raymond Jean that a poem begins with "un movement  
irrésistible du langage."17 Under such circumstances  
he realizes that it is inappropriate to force through  
the poetic process "comme un buffle" (Rois mages, p. 73),  

17 Jean, "Entretien," p. IV.
having learned to his cost that excessive endeavor is
destructive and produces only negative results (Rois mages,
p. 14). It is necessary to husband his efforts carefully,
tailoring them to suit the "surgissement originel"
(Sainte Face, p. 261), unforgettable but also unclear.

Both servant and master of language then, Frénaud
must, he feels, strike a delicate balance between the two
roles which will permit the production of this "objet
étrange qui se constitue comme malgré lui" (Sainte Face,
p. 261), and which seems to have its own rules of becoming,
independent of the poet's own wishes. It is as if it
were "le poème qui actionne l'auteur et l'amène à l'ac-
complir" (Inhabileté, p. 151). Since Frénaud's poetry
is born of a combination of all aspects of his being--
thought, consciousness of thought, illumination and
meditation--the poem is an "objet d'art in a dynamic, vig­
orous way rather than in a static, formal sense.18 Sometimes Frénaud fashions the upsurge of words which come to
him. Sometimes it seems that the words control and
fashion him (Sainte Face, p. 78). At other times they
form themselves into poems seemingly without his assis-
tance, as effortlessly as butterflies appear in a flower
garden: "Petits poèmes qui fleurissez sur mes épaules,"
he addresses them (Rois mages, p. 145).

18 Clancier, Frénaud, p. 23.
The quality of ambivalence Frénaud ascribes to the poem accounts for the diversity of the identities it assumes. Sometimes it resembles a living organism, an "Epanchement charnu" of the poet's thoughts (Rois mages, p. 39), an extension of his own body, so to speak, participating in his own vitality. Or, providing sustenance and maintaining life, "Le Livre est aliment, la Parole est eau vive" (Toujours, p. 107).

Pingaud singles out the archetypal image of the poetic work a "un bloc, château de langage au pont-levis dressé." In Frénaud's work castles are generally unapproachable and reminiscent of medieval fortresses. His weary travelers rarely seem to reach them and often remain uncertain of their existence. Frénaud remembers that in the vocabulary of the mystics the castle is associated with the soul and with the knowledge of being. For him, it also represents the poem "comme finalité rêvée," in other words, the inaccessible (Inhabileté, p. 164). It is as if as poet he builds a tower, he tells us, in a large garden, with "pierres de taille/ azurées de créneaux" (Rois mages, p. 55). When he is most successful he becomes one with his own construction to the point

19 In Clancier, Frénaud, p. 228.
where he is seized for a moment in "l'Unité du Tout" (Paradis, p. 234).

In its role as monument, the poem attempting to keep alive "la mémoire de ce qui fut" stands as a bulwark against the flow of energy which inspires it, preventing what has been from flowing away too quickly into oblivion. The poem becomes a "véritable bloc de parole où vibre encore l'énergie du passage." 

Frénaud's work contains many such "objets abruptement dressés," and they form their own poetic world of "pierres généreuses," although the poet often finds them bitterly disappointing, lacking in substance, permanency, and accessibility. Hoping to form a talisman with words, he feels as if he has produced instead a tomb (Etape, p. 39).

But monuments and tombstones do keep memory alive. The poet has not failed. To the question, "Où est mon pays?" he can still answer, "C'est dans le poème./ Il n'est pas d'autre lieu où je veux reposer."

Inadequate as it may so often be, there is no other place

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21 Pingaud, in the preface to Paradis, p. 11.
22 Pingaud, in the preface to Paradis, p. 13.
23 Lescure, "Frénaud," p. 94.
he would prefer. And after all, if he has built a tomb rather than a castle, it is nonetheless "vivifié par le flux des sèves, [a] vie morte y chante à voix toujours fraîche" (Paradis, p. 139). The poet's voice, enclosed in the objects he creates, may yet mediate for the reader a certain experience of being (Sainte Face, p. 134).

While he continues to regret that

Tous ses blasons et ses parures,
tous les objets bien trop aimés
ne font pas source ni lieu saint

he discovers that sometimes the tomb he despairs of becomes a cradle sheltering new life or a temple safeguarding the sacred (Paradis, p. 232).

Frénaud's optimism is always of short duration. Poems are such awkward things: "petits objets micro-cosmes" which will not hang together, they dislike bearing witness to the adventure they have experienced (Sainte Face, p. 256). For all his effort "ces paroles malcapturées" have netted him only a "conquête dérisoire" (Paradis, p. 51), and while this setback will not stop him from pursuing his poetic vocation, he recognizes that it too is an "entreprise dérisoire" (Rois mages, p. 55).

Much of Frénaud's poetry, then, may be read as the account of a resolute effort to continue raising
"des monuments pour parer le désastre" (Etape, p. 21).
Even if after every success he must watch as "le trésor pourtant s'obscurcit" (Paradis, p. 232), his task is to continue anyway, as if "le mot terminal n'était pas dans la gorge" (Etape, p. 15). Although the castles, monuments and tombs are made of words, the poet will not be reduced to silence because they are not always effective, but will try even harder.

Je parle, je parle pour taire un silence irréfutable.
Je parle pour forcer ce qui demeure clos.

(Etape, p. 21)

Naming failure is in itself a sort of success, a "trophée" which transfigures despair into a victory, however small.25

The struggle with the language of poetry offers the same exaltations and disappointments as the quest for being. While Frénaud may on occasion be moved to praise its beauty, as when he addresses it as "mon beau langage" (Rois mages, p. 39), he is quite aware that it is in many ways only a delightful lie (Rois mages, p. 56), and he reproaches it for its "Mots qui trompent, impliqués dans un ailleurs/ cependant hors d'accès (Toujours, p. 12).

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Poems can be just as misleading as the "faux arc-en-ciel" of revolutionary rhetoric (Paradis, p. 42), for they do not really give us access to a better world. Even when they seem to be a complete success, the poet remains unconvinced of their authenticity. "Poèmes, miroirs infidèles/ d'un mirage peut-être" (Paradis, p. 119), they have disappointed him before and doubtless will again, "témoins douteux à rencherir pour mieux tromper" (Paradis, p. 119).

Frénaud reveals the violence of his very mixed emotions about poetry when he addresses it "Haineusement mon amour" (Sainte Face, p. 11). Poetry is a secret machine, he complains in the poem given that title, full of endless mutually contradictory possibilities. "C'est un piège inspiré....C'est la fabuleuse prairie....Ce n'est qu'un étranglement....C'était une rédemption. Un ensevelissement" (Sainte Face, pp. 203-204). Worse, it is a useless machine. "Une machine à faire du bruit,...machine à capter ce silence...à grands coups d'ailes inutiles" (Paradis, p. 85). At most the poem can hope to transform despair into a "non-espoir" and it is to this possibility that Frénaud commits himself (Sainte Face, p. 134). He recognizes his own "inhabileté fatale" from the outset and uses this phrase from Rimbaud's Illuminations as the title of the book of his interviews with Bernard Pingaud (Notre inhabileté fatale, Gallimard,
1979). It is perhaps because his poems are doomed to provide a permanent testimony to failure that Frénaud "n'aime la voix que fêlée" (Rois mages, p. 28). A too perfect song might delude its hearer into thinking that its message was equally felicitous. It is more appropriate that he be painfully aware of the "murmure miserable du poème" (Paradis, p. 83). The poet's recognition of the inadequacy of his endeavor in no way affects his will to continue.

je m'obstine
à me tendre et je répète
un maigre dit, insatiable.

(Etape, p. 25)

While Frénaud's poetry is always saying the same thing (Paradis, p. 245), the ineffable that he attempts to express has been experienced under very different circumstances, in places widely separated in time and space. The poems reflect these differences. They come in a wide variety of styles and forms, embodying the contradictions the poet has encountered, and expressing the complex reality of his own contradictory nature. In their attempt to capture an ever changing, constantly oscillating reality, they present the reader with a thousand

26 Hackett, "Theme of the Quest," p. 134.
contrasting faces. Poetic language, unlike mathematics, must contend with "dictionnaires imparfaits" which render its task virtually infeasible. Faced with the fact that there is no one way that will succeed, Frénaud operates on the premise that "tous les moyens sont bons" (Paradis, p. 237). Hence the extraordinary diversity within his work, noted by Emilie Noulet: prose poems, alexandrines, refrains, long irregular, unrimed verses, configurations reminiscent of Apollinaire, mythic narratives and so on. Despite the poet's lament that all these attempts produce only a miserable murmur, the reader is confronted too with an undeniable richness of language animated by the dialectic of defeat and hope which underlies it.

Frénaud's prewar poems are all fairly short. Captivity seems to have been the catalyst for the writing of longer poems with mythic and epic overtones ("Le Voyageur," "Les Rois mages"). In subsequent collections, the longer poems set like massive columns among the

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27 Busuiocceanu, p. 27.

28 Renard, p. 45.


shorter ones survey the ground covered thus far.\textsuperscript{31} Frénau'd's last published volume of new poetry, \textit{La Sorcière, de Rome} (Gallimard, 1973), consists of one long poem of thirty-eight pages, and \textit{L'Etape dans la clairière} (Gallimard, 1966) had already contained only two poems of twenty and seven pages respectively.

Some of the short poems are distichs. They may evoke the nostalgia produced by the sight of a ruined mill, landmark of a past age.

\begin{quote}
Moulin sur l'eau, vieux pensionnat pour les blés et les souris.
\textit{("Ancien temps," Paradis, p. 127)}
\end{quote}

Or they may illustrate the poet's bemusement with small creatures and the words they bring to mind.

\begin{quote}
Trotte menue, muette sous l'urinoir, la pauvre petite a souri.
\textit{("Souris de trottoir," Sainte Face, p. 85)}
\end{quote}

Frénau'd's first poem, and a key to all the poetry to follow ("Epitaphe," \textit{Rois mages}, p. 13)\textsuperscript{32} consists of eight spare, irregular unrimed lines of great sobriety,

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{32} Clancier, \textit{Frénau'd}, p. 53.
\end{quote}
uniting abstract concepts (néant, zéro) with physical objects (ardoise, dents). And another early poem has the kind of rhythm Georges Limbour calls "la coulée fluide de la chanson," unusual in Frénaud's work.

Adieu à la ronde,
clairons, compagnons,
le miel et le germe,
doux pain de l'ivraie.
("Il veut mourir d'aise," Rois mages, p. 50).

The majority of the long poems fall into one of several categories. A number of them concern important European cities such as Paris, Rome, Prague and Genoa. Others, like "Vieux Pays" and "Les Paysans" (Toujours, pp. 81-89, Paradis, pp. 73-79), take as their point of departure a rural way of life which is already dying. Still others have political overtones. "L'Enorme figure de la déesse raison" (Paradis, pp. 39-46) exposes the false promises of revolution and "L'Agonie du Général Krivitski" (Sainte Face, pp. 107-134) focuses on the conflict between revolutionary ideology and its cruel practicalities. All of these, like Frénaud's work in general, can be read as part of a great adventure exemplified by one of his first long poems, "Plainte du roi

mage" (Rois mages, pp. 131-141). The characters change from the Greek Acteon ("Mort d'Actéon," Toujours, pp. 47-52) to the ambiguous horseman of "Etape dans la clairière" (Etape, pp. 9-29), but the quest is always the same: the search for and the attempt to express in language, an ineffable absolute.

The dialectic of hope and despair which runs through Frénaud's work finds a structural analogue in the dramatic form much favored by the poet and often made explicit by the use of italics to differentiate the voices. This sometimes indicates the presence of two distinct, even opposed speakers. The poet's admission that he is different, alienated from other men, is followed by the mocking whisper of the crowd, in italics: "Un fou, c'est un fou./ Il n'aime pas être heureux" (Rois mages, p. 32). The narrator's account of the quest of the three young girls, female equivalents of the Rois Mages and the horsemen, is interrupted at points by their cries. "Mon royaume brûle et me détruira," for instance, is set off in italics. While the poet's observation of poor shepherds among the ruined palaces and statues of Rome evokes images of a more splendid past, the distinctive type of the question,"Qui peut promettre ou compromettre ou conjurer?/ Qui jugera?" (Sorcière, p. 47) effects an interruption in the meditative continuity of the poem and is a reminder of the uncertainty of its efficacy.
Sometimes the poet is simply talking to himself. As he wanders around Paris ("Trente ans après, Paris," *Toujours*, pp. 9-13), he questions his own motives and incentives. No italics are necessary. Queries and encouragements alternate: "que cherchais-tu/ entre le jour et la nuit, dans la solitude/ émue par un appel?" is answered by "Va plus loin" (pp. 9-10). After the exhortatory "Allons donc!" he again interrogates himself: "où vas-tu qui t'éloignes et te troubles?" (pp. 10-11). Finding no answer, he comes to the realization that he is giving up. "Tu renonces à la recherche qui t'était promise" (p. 13).

In "Etape dans la clairière" Frénaud uses italics to emphasize the change from a tone of detached observer to one of impassioned participant. As he is explaining the difficulties involved in the adventure, the strength of his emotional commitment breaks through the narration and proclaims "Je désire encore. Je m'enfonce dans l'eau pleine" (p. 18). He ends the outburst with a broken, enigmatic, "La roue. L'hosannah. L'océan," and then, the crisis past, goes on to relate quite calmly how the horsemen go on their separate ways to continue the search (p. 18).

In the same poem italics also underline the alternation of abstract and concrete aspects of the quest. Thus a long passage (pp. 23-26) beginning with a
meditation on the concept of nothingness is in italics, while the return to normal print reveals the horsemen, disillusioned, but ready to go on, deciding upon appropriate companions and the route to take.

On occasion the same device is used to set off a question from its answer. Near the end of the poem someone repeats the enquiry of the Roi Mage (Rois mages, p. 128 and Etape, p. 27).

Avancerons-nous aussi vite que l'étoile? La randonnée n'a-t-elle pas assez duré?

The inevitable reply may come from within, from another horseman, or from the narrator who has witnessed so many unsuccessful quests.

Si l'appel a scintillé jamais, il s'est tu. Dés avant l'origine nous sommes dans la nuit.

The multiple voices of the poetic work reflect the diverse aspects of an artistic effort which is always searching out its path anew, is unwilling to concede defeat when any one way fails and is forced to change its course when it does.

Frénaud's prose poems are another attempt to formulate that which cannot be adequately expressed in poetic language. They are grouped together within two of his major collections (Paradis, pp. 90-91, 95-106 and Sainte
**Sainte Face**, pp. 21-37, 174-184). Some of them are made up of "versets" of only a few lines and present the segmented appearance of the psalms ("Le Chasseur ambigue," "Deux oiseaux fabuleux à Altomiro," "Murmure des assaillants," *Sainte Face*, pp. 174-176). Others contain paragraphs of conventional length and extend for as many as four tightly packed pages ("Hôtel à plein sang," *Sainte Face*, pp. 31-34).

The first group from *Il n'y a pas de paradis* (1948-1956) centers on various "lieux d'approche" or on childhood. Being manifests itself as "la face bleue de l'ange" glimpsed through the branches of the trees at Tholonet-Cézanne (p. 91). Its enigmatic nothingness is revealed to the small boy exploring the flowers and ponds on the family property ("Le Jardin Rajaud," "Saint-Vallerin," pp. 99-101).

There is a nightmarish quality to the series of allegorical tales that make up the second group (*Sainte Face*, pp. 21-34, 1944-1948). Strange men seduce little girls, the crew of a slave ship is in strange bondage to a woman on board, soldiers wantonly destroy a deserted village, and the residents of a sinister hotel kill their children under cover of darkness. Among these testimonies to the dark side of the quest for transcendence appears the luminous vision of "La petite fille" (pp. 25-26), who offers a few brief moments of "plénitude," "félicité,"
and total "réconciliation."

The third group (Sainte Face, pp. 174-184) expands upon the problem of the quest. There are ramparts to be guarded, spies to be watched for, defensive positions to be dug, and assailants to resist. Just when retreat seems in order, daybreak comes and brings annihilation into being like "mille canons tonnant des entrailles du ciel" (p. 183). As often in Frénaud's work, the endeavor ends on a question. "Le malheur fut-il, cette fois-là, définitivement conjuré?" (p. 183).

Chris-France Revol explains Frénaud's occasional choice of the prose poem by his desire to avoid all possibility of the self-delusion fostered by poetic language, demonstrating thereby his determination to besiege, as intensely as possible, the crucial "événement" and remain faithful to the unevenness of reality.\(^4\) Frénaud's inexorable lucidity prevents him from being taken in by the power of words.\(^5\) Committed to using any means available, he turns to the prose poem to express what he says elsewhere in a more elliptical form, assured that while some results will be more successful


\(^5\) Limbour, "Paradis," p. 100.
than others, he has left no poetic path unexplored.

That the prose poems are nonetheless poems becomes clear when one compares them to the discursive passages Frenaud has written about his calling: "Fragments sur la poésie," in Clancier, Frenaud, pp. 224-230, "Note sur l'expérience poétique," Paradis, pp. 237-245, "Note à propos de la construction d'un livre de poèmes," Sainte Face, pp. 255-262, and the answers to Bernard Pingaud's questions which make up Notre inhabilité fatale. The oblique, enigmatically imaged references to what has been experienced but cannot be adequately expressed give way to highly technical and philosophical comments that testify to the thoughtful intelligence and culture he brings to his poetry. Frenaud has been reluctant to commit himself to prose because its use of rational arguments and long modulated sentences tends to dissolve the contradictions it discusses. The prose poems embody the same conflicts exposed in the other poems while relying somewhat less on the meditative space created by white expanses on the page or on special rhythmical effects of varied phrase length, assonance or alliteration.

Comparison of Frenaud's poetry with the thesis, antithesis and synthesis of Hegelian thinking may lead one

36 Pingaud, in Inhabilité, p. 17.
to expect a logical progression in poetic form and technique or a clarity of direction which would in fact be inconsistent with the internal evidence of his work. While there are indeed numerous examples of a movement "procédant par négations et dépassements successifs" reminiscent of the German philosopher,37 this movement might be described more accurately as a series of "crises" which offer little of the reassurance associated with discursive demonstration and approximate more closely the vacillating reality that Frénaud seeks to capture.38

For the modern poet, the "illumination" comes in flashes39 and does not lead to the invention of a continuous creative universe.

A contained, accumulated vehemence makes itself felt in certain poems which seem to be fragments of some uncompleted epic. Their rhythm builds up to an insistent pounding or panting far different from the musicality of song.40 The "déboulé" of words barely stops to catch its breath.41

37 Pingaud, in Paradis, p. 9.
38 Lescure, "Frénaud," p. 87.
40 Noulet, p. 114.
41 Frénaud's expression for the surge of words which produced his first poems, in Inhabileté, p. 119.
Prisonnier impatient du patrimoine de nos désastres, après mes algues lentes et si avides, reprises inexorables qui m'ont fertilisé douloureusement et m'entraînent par les millénaires vers une nudité plus obscure...

(Rois mages, pp. 131-132)

It reproduces the rhythm of the poet's respiration and its precipitation is like that of a man who has just been running.

Je féconderai la source avec le sang morcelé. L'univers s'écoule en ses graines brûlantes, j'y suis. Je m'ouvre dans le flux, je m'exhausse dans le chant. Je délie et je ploie. Au rythme triomphal Je suis libre.

(Etape, p. 16)

Frénaud's readings of his own work reinforce the sense of urgency imparted by such passages.

After each acceleration the pace slows again, sometimes to a Baudelairean weariness.

Les trésors toute la vie transportés depuis l'époque ancienne dans une bourse qu'on ne quitte pas, un caillou, des cheveux tressés, quelques images, un carnet d'ivoire avec des mots pâles,

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42 Bouyer, p. 459.
43 Tardieu, p. 54.
menus, gouffres à la trop vertigineuse remontée
pour être regardés jamais...
Les pauvres avoirs. L'inutile charroi.
(Etape, p. 19)

And sometimes the poem stops entirely, in a moment of repose.

Un parti de pâquerettes dans la clairière.
Un paradis frêle à l'abris des saules.
(Etape, p. 29)

Between the precipitation, disturbed or joyous, of certain passages, and the pause created by others (shifts of pace characteristic of the poetry considered as a whole), one rhythm dominates. It is a determined, fairly regular if somewhat awkward tramp proceeding from affirmation to uncertainty and back to affirmation. 45

Notable already in the Roi Mage poems, this rhythm dominates in his last published works, in most of Depuis toujours déjà (1970) and in all of La sorcière de Rome (1973). Its increasing importance, to the near exclusion of the other extremely varied patterns Frénaud has used, encourages the conjecture that Frénaud has made a choice among "tous les moyens" (Paradis, p. 237). The extremes of exaltation and despair are muted by the

45 Jacottet, p. 479.
increasing similarity of the syntax. Pages of long
"strophes" are no longer separated by poems of startling
diversity. The message, like the form, becomes more
modulated.

--Nous passons dans les rues, nous allons notre vie
dans l'animation des mouvements au soleil.
On est à son affaire, on y croit presque,
certains jours, s'il fait beau.

(Sorcière, p. 34)

But returning to consideration of Frénaud's entire
oeuvre, from his earliest poems, one may contrast his
"volonté d'expansion" with the austerity character­
istic of poets such as René Char or André du Bouchet.46
Frénaud's passion for "le verbe" is sensual. When he
reads, he might be enjoying a good meal or a good wine.47
The pleasure is similarly voluptuous. He has been quite
willing to run the risk of encountering total chaos in
his quest for new poetic enchantments. "Chez Frénaud les
mots sont comme des foules qui défilent ou qui piétinent,
des rassemblements, des émeutes de mots.48

47 Clancier, "Frénaud, poète total," p. 306 and
interviews with Frénaud, July 1977, May and June 1978.
48 Tardieu, p. 61.
the whole range of tones from grandiose to vulgar and considers all words capable of poetic service.

Indeed it is as if words were autonomous beings, responding to his call by crowding around him in exuberant disorder, and falling into various independent configurations for his greater delight.

Je ris aux mots. J'aime quand ça démarre, qu'ils agglutinent et je les déglutis comme cent cris de grenouilles en frai. Ils sautent et s'appellent, s'éparpillent et m'appellent.

("L'Irruption des mots," Sainte Face, p. 78)

At one end of the scale are words which are traditionally poetic, words such as "arc-en-ciel," and "château." At the other are those of a kind that was inadmissible before the modern era. Such words are doubtless what led Eluard to proclaim that in Frénaud "un nouveau naturalisme est né." The lucidity of the poet's vision of the world obliges him to include the trivialities of existence, indeed the vulgarities of existence, alongside its moments of splendor. His

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49 In his preface to Frénaud's Mystères de Paris (Paris: Seuil, 1944). A facsimile of the manuscript of this preface is reproduced in Clancier, Frénaud, facing p. 65.

choice of words is sometimes more surprising than shocking.

La petite eau de bidet, le joli trouble
de l'eau frisée, pelotonnée
de qui cherche, enfant, son premier péché.

(Sainte Face, p. 65)

Or again it may indicate sarcastic derision and a desire
to drive home the inacceptability of the human condition,
shot through as it is with misery and hate.

Toujours à masturber vos plaies.
Taisez-vous plus fort, imbécile.

("Exhortation aux pauvres," Sainte Face, p. 76)

Pretty words mask the gravity of their subject.
Frénaud turns the tables. In a reversal of expectations
he writes a pastoral about a little shepherdess who turns
out to be rather unnerving and quite insane.

La bergère en délire
a charmé le vieux pâtre.
Et sa peau crevassée.
Et son vagin fangeux.

("Maléfice," Paradis, p. 27)

The harsh realities of life close to the land are perhaps
better served by words considered unspeakable than by
those cultivated in drawing rooms. Those same drawing
rooms can draw their curtains to shut out reminders of
the rottenness of city life hidden away from the grand houses and the public buildings. Frénaud, although he pays eloquent tribute to the city, does not mince his words about its failings.

La ville est comme ça, la vie aussi,
putain perforée aux deux bouts.
("Gare du Nord," **Rois mages**, p. 78)

Love and sex are not treated in the abstract either. Frénaud is not afraid of their realities, nor of the unusual erotic associations they create in his mind.

Ton sexe, arbrisseau irrité,
séchera si ma joie ne l'irrigue.
("Invitation galante," **Paradis**, p. 27)

Paris, his "amande bleue," is inhabited by people of all ages and walks of life, including numerous secretaries.

Colibris frelatés, les dactylographes.
Le rouge à lèvres et leurs règles qui les ont tachées.
Sous le coton, capitonné, le vagin coule.
("Les Mystères de Paris," **Paradis**, p. 35)

Such treatment might lead one to suppose disgust. But sympathy, compassion and affection for his fellow creatures are evident throughout Frénaud's work.
He can be accused of contempt only in as far as he includes himself as deserving of it also. "Si j'ai dénigré l'homme c'est pour lui faire honte, je n'ai plus pitié de moi," he writes in the epigraph of the "Poèmes de dessous le plancher" (Sainte Face, p. 7). Rather than interpret a certain rawness of vocabulary as bad taste, one can perceive in such examples the effort to understand and express existence in its totality, and that means accepting the unpoetic and the disagreeable along with the rest. 51

Bringing everything down to human terms has inevitably mixed results. Frénaud's poems dealing directly with the Christian faith have not been considered entirely successful. 52 A deliberate trivialization of the subject matter is sometimes difficult to appreciate. When Frénaud finishes a whimsical plea to Jesus with the assurance that "moi je suis des tiens sous mes airs fanfarons" ("Le bon apôtre," Paradis, p. 165) the tone of his confession fails to convey conviction. Mary and Joseph in an overcrowded train without seat reservations, met on the platform at their destination by the legendary donkey and ox ("Noël au chemin de fer," Paradis, pp. 156-157) have been so assimilated to the banalities of modern

51 Chaulot, p. 139.
52 Cayley, p. 39.
French vacation travel that they seem to lose any special significance their unusual welcome might imply. Christ playing dead for three days and bored stiff with the game ("Samedi Saint," *Sainte Face*, p. 95), or resurrected walking off into the hills in yellow socks ("Pâques," *Sainte Face*, p. 97) lacks the ring of authenticity of Frénaud's other accounts of spiritual endeavor. These poems do, however, jolt the reader familiar with the traditional Christian commonplaces into a reconsideration of their spiritual validity.

A certain common, familiar brusqueness, a tendency to argue, to become indignant, is characteristic of Frénaud himself.53 His poetry, in its constant "remise en question" of itself, tends to liquidate the "vieux stock poétique" and replace it with an aggressive irony so deeply felt that it displays at times a certain "côté putain"54 whose ignoble words proclaim its revolt against the conventions of an ineffective art. Frénaud must be considered a link in "la maigre chaîne des révoltés" who preserve in the face of a too facile eloquence that fundamental duty of poetry to disturb and unsettle.55

53 Tardieu, p. 55.
"Quelqu'un veille sans trêve au sein de l'extase verbale et la dénonce."

It is because poetry is capable of great enchantments that it must remind us of its role of chorus in the tragedy it tells. Frénaud is, as it were, condemned to "faire mal," predestined to be a "récidiviste de la révolte," because of his declared intention to make sure that his "chiffres ne sont pas faux" (Rois mages, p. 13).

It is however going too far to claim, as does Alain Bosquet, that Frénaud does not belong to the category of poets one may classify as "artistes," to say that questions of form do not interest him. His language is modern in its syntax and its non "musicality," which is to say that it incorporates uneven phrases, and elliptical locutions, juxtaposes the grandiose and the trivial, and willingly abandons the even rhythms of the "chanson." As Frénaud himself points out, the result is not meant to

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60 Raillard, p. 21.
be easy and edifying. "Si le propre de la poésie c'est d'exalter de beaux sentiments dans un noble langage, alors le lecteur sera ici mal servi." 61

Frénaud's art voluntarily admits the intractability of its subject and its substance.

Si mince l'anfractuosité d'où sortait la voix, si exténuant l'édifice entrevu.

("Les Paroles du poème," Toujours, p. 125)

The words of the poem attempt to be both accurate and ambiguous, reserved and liberated, indicative of paradise, yet tightly ordered and secret ("Les paroles du poème," Toujours, p. 125).

Frénaud's characteristically ample "strophes" yield, upon inspection, much more discipline and structure than is immediately apparent. The following example may serve as an illustration.

Pour honorer une odeur de fumée soudainement remontée d'entre les pierres, une odeur de sarment venue des cheminées d'une enfance lointaine, loin d'ici, sur ce bateau où j'avance, bâti sur la pierre ferme en pierre ouvragée, île de pierre dans l'azur, qui appareille par le grand vent, immobile,

61 In the foreword to Excrétions, misère et facéties (Rome: Sciascia, 1958), n.p.
pour faire apparaître notre pays d'ici,
notre unique pays au profond de la terre.

("Ménerbes," Paradis, p. 145)

According to how one counts the syllables of each line, that is, more or less strictly according to the traditional rules for classic verse, the lines of the selection are more or less regular in length, yielding eight lines of ten or twelve syllables and one of fourteen, or a slightly more irregular sequence of 10, 12, 12, 9, 13, 13, 12, 10 and 12. Lines three, eight and nine may be read as alexandrines with the cesura after the sixth syllable.

There are two end rhymes, if one is not too strict about spelling and sound being consistent and if one accepts the repetition of a word as a rhyme. Thus "fumée" at the end of the first line rhymes with "cheminées at the end of the third, and "d'ici" at the end of the fourth line is repeated at the end of the eighth. The vocalic assonance of the i's in "immobile" (line seven) with those in the "ici's and of the e's in "pierres," "ferme" and "terre" provide an unobtrusive reinforcement of the effect of the already noted rhymes.

The word "pierre" occurs four times, twice within one line, but always in a slightly different verbal context so that the repetition does not become obtrusive; "les pierres," "pierre ferme," "en pierre ouvragée" and
"ile de pierre."

The "pays" of the poem is predominantly constructed of "pierre," and the accumulation of the latter word three times in two lines leads up to its designation as "notre pays d'ici, notre unique pays," a repetition again relieved from monotony by the variation of the verbal context. A noun and an adjective replace the prepositional construction. The relationship between "pays" and "pierre" is strengthened still further by the alliterative echoing of the p's in "appareille," "apparaître" and "profond."

Internal repetitions, or near repetitions, serve the cohesive purpose of more blatant and too facile rhymes: "loin d'ici" repeats part of "lointaine" and the "bat" of "ce bateau où j'avance" is followed by "bâti sur la pierre ferme." "Appareille" and "apparaître" begin with the same syllables.

We have seen that André Frenaud thinks of himself as constructing "une sorte de machine," borrowing Rimbaud's term, "alchimie du verbe" for the poetic operations he performs. His aim is no less than a resonance "avec la palpitation secrète de l'Être" (Note sur l'expérience poétique," Paradis, pp. 240, 244). But, once again, "tous les moyens sont bons" and Frénaud takes a particular delight in trying out what might be called word games. They are used with various degrees of discretion.
Sometimes they provoke a momentary hesitation on the part of the reader who does not realize immediately what caused the hesitation. They are so flagrant, at other times, as to seem like child's play or linguistic experimentation.

Elsa Triolet was the first to point out this ludic characteristic of Frénaud's poetry, noting in particular how he turns around certain expressions. In most people's minds, for instance, the hunter spies out his prey. Frénaud reverses this order of things when he introduces "Le guetteur épié par les bêtes" (Rois mages, p. 57). In another poem he talks about the "poissons de mes eaux profondes" (Rois mages, p. 17). Our normal set of associations would pair "poissons" rather than "poisons" with "eaux profondes." Then again, in a series of dramatic announcements, he declares "Vous êtes folle à vous délier" (Paradis, p. 26) where the reader expects "folle à lier." The use of one expression which so nearly reproduces another results in a greater complexity of meanings or values. The ideas associated with the hunter tracking an animal are added to those attached to a beast tracking a man. To the unpleasant aspects of the word poison are added the elusive fluidy and mystery of deep water fish. The woman addressed is about to lose

62 Triolet, pp. 60-61.
all self restraint while calling up images of someone so unhinged as to become immobilized, a paradox more unnerving than either alternative. The poet is packing a maximum of possibilities into a minimum of expression.

Certain aspects of grammatical order can provide the motor of an entire poem. Each line of "Le drame éclate" begins with a subject pronoun, starting with "je" and ending with "ils."

Je ne vous aimerai pas--
Tu ne m'en avais jamais rien dit--
... (Paradis, p. 26)

On the same page another "drame" uses the same device, plus all four forms of the definite article.

La glace ne s'est pas ridée--
Les mots n'ont rien su dire--
Le silence n'éclaire pas l'affaire--
L'amour n'est pas plus fort que la mort-- (Paradis, p. 26)

Certain words are placed together because of the similarity of sound and meaning.

n'aie pas peur d'être immonde,
mais de louer tes délices, tes blandices. (Rois mages, p. 57)

63 Noulet, p. 116.
The word "delice" means delight, "blandice," gentle flattery or seduction. Sometimes the similarity of sound seems to be the major reason for the choice of words and the resultant shades of meaning almost an extra bonus.

Oh! les douces clairières,
limon, linon, perles claires...
(Rois mages, p. 59)

Only one letter separates "limon," the sandy soil or loam one might find in a forest clearing, from "linon," a word recalling "toile," and by extension, a spider's web with its early morning pearls of dew ("perles claires") which echoes "clairière."

One word may prompt what amounts to an aside using a similar sounding word. "Temps est venu où les coeurs se rebandent,/ cahin-caha—Caïn je ne le suis—(Rois mages, p. 89). One wonders if the effort at disassociation from Cain the evil doer would have occurred to him without the prompting of the similar sounding expression "cahin-caha."

The use of similar expressions may serve to provide structural coherence, referring back to something already mentioned while avoiding the repetition of the conventional refrain. In "La Sorcière de Rome" the line "Et les motocyclettes et les combines" is echoed twenty lines
The structure of the poem may be built upon a series of semantic oppositions couched in terms which are grammatically similar.

Bon an mal an,
bon gré mal gré,
bon pied bon œil,
toujours pareil,
toujours tout neuf,
c'est toujours vrai,
c'est toujours vain,
ça persévère,
ça s'exaspère,
ça prend son temps,
ça va briller.

(Sainte Face, p. 167)

A partial explanation for such a procedure lies within the poem itself. In attempting to describe the "indescribable" (line 14) it has recourse to an effort at approximation through a series of oppositions, knowing full well however that any such attempt is only a "commencement" (line 19).

At times the poet's "ivresse des mots" (Paradis, p. 243) seems merely playful, a catalogue of words called up by spontaneous association.
L'epi.
Les pis.
Les pistoles.
Les épissures.
Le pipi.

("Les Episodes," Sainte Face, p. 89)

However the subtitle "Epitaphe" (also the title of two other poems: Rois mages, p. 13, and Paradis, p. 142) gives the reader pause. Even in its lighter moments Frénaud's poetry never quite forgets its commitment to a spiritual quest.

André Frénaud has always been careful to disassociate himself from the Surrealists. Some of the surprising juxtapositions he proposes might however suggest a relationship that is in fact only apparent and serves his own very different purposes. Frénaud has never been deluded by the "angélisme vaticinateur" of those who expected more of surrealist poetry than it was capable of giving (Sainte Face, p. 257). When he offers us the horrifying spectacle of what seems to be cannibalism,

La vieille femme va crever sur son sac
et ils la mangeront glacée, pour le Réveillon.

(Rois mages, p. 30)

64 Chaulot, p. 138.
it is his way of underlining his distress at the des- 
peration of the human condition. "Avis aux amis" he warns 
in the last lines.

In another poem he proclaims the uselessness of 
is "grands gestes" poetic or other, all of which 
accomplish nothing, and moreover rebound to do him 
harm. After addressing man as an "enfant tragique/
qui n'en finis pas..." he trails off into a little verse 
which might sound like a lighthearted children's non-
sense rhyme, if it were not affected by the bitterness 
of the preceding reflections and rendered thereby hollow 
and ironic.

Un nénuphar, né sur le sable 
à Chaville-Viroflay. 
Va dans la cour Batave 
chercher du serpolet. 

(Paradis, p. 22)

Frénaud's vision is closer to that of Hieronymous 
Bosch than to that of the surrealists, and indeed he 
dedicates the five pages of "Le Miroir de l'homme par les 
bêtes" to the Flemish painter (Sainte Face, pp. 209-213). 
To the familiar "relais hasardeux" and the elusive 
"royaume" of the Rois Mages and the horsemen he adds 
images clearly suggested by the strange creatures of 
Bosch's paintings.
Les cornemuses, interminablement,
s'avancent sur leurs courtes pattes, les clarinettes
au long bec des anges.

(Sainte Face, p. 210)

Frénaud, "le passionné de coquecigrues" (Rois mages,
p. 33), loves unusual words and can transform the sight
of street peddlers selling their wares into a cross be­
tween a tongue-twister and a fantastic fairy tale in
the manner of Lewis Carroll.

Le camelot bringuebale sa bimbeloterie
de la barrière de Pantin à la Grande-Ourse.

(Paradis, p. 35)

His use of alliteration is widespread. In the above
example it provokes amusement. Sometimes it grows out
of the sort of spontaneous association that has already
been noted. In "il vivait/ ivre d'ivraie" (Rois mages,
p. 122), not only is there a repetition of the [r]'s but
there is a sort of musical progression from the "ivai"
of "vivais" to "ivre" to a combination of the two in
"ivraie." Something similar occurs in the following
verse.

Un certain poids,
les larmes et le givre,
la lave et les lames
et les larves.

(Rois mages, p. 16)
The word "lames" is part of "larmes" while "lave" and "larves" borrow from both "larmes" and "givre," giving a double alliteration, with [l] 's at the beginning of words and [v] 's in the interior. Sometimes only the general sobriety of the context saves the alliteration from becoming excessive, as in the fourth line of the following.

La grande terre dormira toujours.
Les seins laineux des blés,
jamais la liberté n’y tressaille.
Des vaches vêlent, ah! victoire!
Mais non, ce n’est pas déjà l’aube.

(Rois mages, p. 22)

Often it is used in the most traditional of ways, as for example, when repeated [s] 's imitate the sound of the wind,

La neige a sifflé,
les sapis hagards
ont secoué, secoué.

(Rois mages, p. 17)

or whisper for our ears alone a great secret.

Le sourire de la plénitude
secrète comme la colombe,
seules des caresses furtives
avec les mains de la neige.

(Rois mages, p. 26)
Another technique he favors is basing the construction of a poem on the repetition of one element. This style is so reminiscent of Eluard that the dedication to him of "Voici l'homme" which begins

Dans ma fronde pour me lapider,
dans ma glaise qui est froide,
dans ma vie mal habitué.

(Rois mages, p. 149)

and continues in this way for six more lines, seems only natural, even inevitable. Frénaud's numerous "litanies" may run to more than a page and contain as many as sixteen repetitions which determine virtually the entire poem (as in "Litanies adverses," Sainte Face, p. 201), or they may constitute only a few lines of a long poem such as "Etape dans la clairière" (p. 15).

Frénaud's "litanies" are not mechanical or purely singsong in nature and may express a pathetic eloquence, a stubborn and painful conviction, or an incantory protest against existence. The prisoner longing for his homeland, longing to leave with the barges and the wild geese he sees passing, proclaims his pain in the reiteration of the ō of dramatic oratory.

65 Noulet, p. 113.
66 Cayley, p. 38.
Frénaud expresses the bitterness of his disappointment and his protest against the wrongs life does us in eight lines beginning with "comme si."

Comme si la mort savait conclure.
Comme si la vie pouvait gagner.
Comme si la fierté était la réplique.
Comme si l'amour était en renfort.

(Paradis, p. 22)

The confident assertion to his lover—"je t'ai trouvée, j'ai confiance, je te prends"—he qualifies with a list of exceptions to his declaration running to six lines and reinforcing the insistence of the repetition by following each "excepté" with a possessive pronoun.

Excepté ton regard où je hais ma rencontre,
excepté tes mains où mon front est resté.

(Paradis, p. 25)

Alleging that he has "bâti l'idéale maison" but reminding us of the unlikelihood of accomplishing such a project, Frénaud lists fourteen things it does not contain, cramming them two and three to a line.
ni de captifs, ni de maîtres, ni de raisons,
ni de statues, ni de paupières, ni la peur.

(Paradis, p. 88)

While one poem plays on the repetition of a preposition, a pronoun and a verb: "pour y trouver," "pour y passer," "pour y pomper," and so on, another uses "comme" and a third "avec" (Paradis, pp. 85, 21, 20). "Ancienne mémoire" (Paradis, pp. 127-128) prevents the monotony risked by citing twenty-nine remembered things one after the other by taking advantage of the difference of the particle necessitated by the change of gender and number.

je me souviens.

..........................
des premières vendanges et des nouveaux promus,
de la lumière étonnée de la lune pleine,
de l'éclat matinal du manoir et de la métairie.

Another poem distributes the repetitions of "pour" plus an "er" verb among dissimilar lines, rendering the device a little less obvious.

Pour attirer dans mon rire
la françoise et l'herbe douce,
pour effrayer dans mon regard
l'appel inamical des bêtes,
pour flatter la route évasive,
pour frapper la foudre de peur,
j'ai donné mon nom à la vie.

(Paradis, p. 25)
"C'est à valoir" uses "c'est" to introduce whole sections and "parce que" to introduce others (Sainte Face, pp. 73-74). "Cerbère de soi ou Bonheur du petit mort vivant" (Sainte Face, p. 70) combines repetitions of "il," "et" and the reflexive pronoun "se" with word play of the sort already discussed.

Il s'empresse à sa place.
Il s'adresse à sa glace.

Et s'agrippe à sa grappe.
Et se gratte à sa grippe
et se grippe à sa gratte.

Lest it seem that Frénaud be too attached to procedural devices that incur the risk of becoming artificial, it should be pointed out that his most natural language seems to be that of the village, of artisans and peasants, a language both noble and modest at the same time, as basic to life as bread or wine.\(^{67}\) One of the most attractive traits of this "poésie de la totalité humaine"\(^{68}\) is its naming of specific plants and animals. This is especially true in poems which deal with childhood.

Near the "Maison de Sennecey-le-Grand" (Paradis, pp. 98-99) the dried out moat of an old castle harbored

\(^{67}\) Clancier, Frénaud, p. 86.

\(^{68}\) Clancier, "Poète total," p. 309.
lizards and centipedes. In "Le Jardin Rajaud" (Paradis, p. 99) mothers warned their children away from the water where serpents were said to lurk. At "Saint Vallerin" (Paradis, pp. 100-101) there were salamanders. Dahlias grew in the garden, and beyond "la charmille et les laurelles" there were vineyards and elder trees, bindweed (liseron) and scutch-grass (chiendent).

In the poems of Les Rois mages birds often represent the possibility of freedom and hope. The "voyageur" leaving his native Norway in search of a great secret is accompanied by the cries of the wayfaring gulls ("mouettes," p. 123). The prisoner in the German work camp envies the stork on its flight towards his French homeland (p. 101) and when he sees the wild geese too pass overhead he vows to leave with them.

Birds of prey are admired for their power. The sparrow-hawk (épervier) soars high into the summer sky and the falcon promises its master a forceful and successful hunt (Paradis, pp. 20, 134). The peacock is a reminder of paradise (Paradis, p. 78). But Frénaud gives a special place to the humbler birds of field and farm which are just there, respected inhabitants of our ordinary world, such as the wood pigeon (pigeon-ramier, Paradis, p. 77), the dove (Rois mages, p. 116), the goldfinch (chardonneret, Paradis, p. 128), the black crow (Paradis, p. 91), and the noisy rooster (Rois mages, p. 112).
Trees are not simply trees in Frénaud's poetry. Often they are more specifically the poplars so characteristic of French roadsides (Paradis, p. 53), the chestnuts of Île-de-France (Rois mages, p. 103), the olive trees of the south (Paradis, pp. 60, 69), the oak, the elder (sureau), the alburnum (aubier, Paradis, pp. 27-28) and the apple tree (Paradis, p. 135). They are, further afield, the pines of Värmland, Sweden (Paradis, p. 94) the birches of Denmark (Rois mages, p. 79), or the evergreen oaks (yeuses) of Spain (Paradis, p. 94).

Hawthorn is Frénaud's most mentioned flower, and is associated with purity and renewal (Rois mages, pp. 24, 25, 75 and Paradis, p. 54). Dahlias have the dubious distinction of having revealed to the child Frénaud the devastating notion of nothingness (Paradis, p. 100). Poppies, wild roses and cornflowers wave in the field like tricolor flags (Paradis, p. 134). Other flowers are asters (Paradis, p. 99), wallflowers (giroflées, Paradis, p. 134) and the humble pissenlit (Rois mages, p. 95).

The list of both plants and animals is too long to include in its entirety. Certain animals have nevertheless a special importance. The donkey and the ox of the traditional Christmas story (Paradis, p. 157) assure us of the bond between man and animal, and are joined by the calf and the hens as signs of promise and welcome (Paradis, p. 156). Although in a moment of doubt the poet
considers the sow, the cow, the goat, the sheep and the horse part of an "inutile nature" (Paradis, p. 84), his attitude is generally one of affection and respect (the totally negative connotations of the rat were developed in an earlier chapter).

As for insects, Frénaud mentions crickets and cicadas among the sounds of the southern countryside (Paradis, pp. 84, 91, 149). Even these small desizens of man's world are associated with the quest. In a poem more optimistic than those he now writes the poet implies that the love and respect of nature may bring some answers.

Ce n'est pas la cigale qui prononcera le secret dans la douceur de l'air au long des pentes, mais peut-être à force d'écouter au milieu d'eux les âmes devenues sereines, les bâtiments.
(Paradis, p. 84)

And "La sorcière de Rome," somberly evoking old glories among the ruins of the once great city, wonders at the changeless "cri anonyme" of the cricket and is tempted, a moment, to hear in its thin cry an echo of "l'addition ultime, la somme, le sommet gagné décidément, l'insaisissable/ couronne irradiant, l'hymne avec la bénédiction" (p. 10).
CONCLUSION

André Frénaud's first poem was an epitaph, a brief statement worded as if to be inscribed on a monument.

Quand je remettrai mon ardoise au néant
un de ces prochains jours,
il ne me ricanera pas à la gueule.
Mes chiffres ne sont pas faux,
ils font un zéro pur.
Viens mon fils, dira-t-il de ses dents froides,
dans le sein dont tu es digne.
Je m'étendrai dans sa douceur.

mai-septembre 1938
"Epitaphe," Rois Mages, p. 13

It signaled the end of an era, not only for Frénaud, who was setting out on a new life of poetic endeavor, but also for the world of his youth and young manhood. After the holocaust of World War II, the concentration camps, and Hiroshima, French poetry expressed "a chronic, latent fear and anxiety, the sense of the transitoriness not only of each human being as heretofore, but of the human species as such and of our planet itself, and simultaneously, a new, a deep sense of the miraculous mystery, beauty, and
solidarity of all living things."¹

This sensibility is characteristic of Frénaud's work, which has been described by the young English poet Michael Cayley as "a poetry of permanent spiritual crisis."² Frénaud's initial sense of the proximity of the "néant," which he has never lost, found an all too appropriate fund of images in his experiences of war and captivity in Germany only a year or two after he began to write. The shock of lost ideals and the destruction of beloved people and places led him to protest against the absurdity of human existence and the betrayal of man by man in poems that name the people and the events that inspired them.

But always, in counterpoint to the disappointment and the despair, there have been poems evoking those moments when the elusive Being, with which he struggles, touches him gloriously, if briefly, and calls him on from the center of its impenetrable obscurity.

Frénaud's poetic voice finds its most ample expression in poems with mythic overtones in which wanderers like the Roi Mage and the medieval knight blend with the


² Cayley, p. 37.
soldier and the adventurer in a perilous quest which takes them through city and forest, village and countryside, past and present, toward an elusive goal which has both orphic and mystical dimensions, and which finds its most real meaning in the journey itself, which is for Frénaud, the creation of his poems. His unchanging question, "Où est mon pays?" is answered best by his own, not always convinced, reply, "C'est dans le poème.3

The domain of modern poetry is difficult to define. It has no preordained structure. For many poets it consists of a slow discovery, "an adventure forever taken up again, a process of becoming."3

Frénaud has accepted the challenge of marking out for himself a "château," an "île," his own poetic "patrie," at the risk of making serious mistakes and facing failure. But as Marcel Béalu, citing Tagore, has remarked, if one closes the door to all errors, truth remains outside.4

Frénaud established himself early as one of the major French poets of our time and this judgment has never been seriously contested.5 He has given voice to the concerns

3 Brée, "Recent trends," p. 263.


of us all in patterns that, although they may not solve
the paradoxes of modern life, give them recognizable
shape.

In his quest for the "château," the ideal final poem,
Frénaud has explored many pathways. He was first ac­
claimed for the "Rois Mages" poems and their mythic and
epic overtones have never deserted him. He has seemed to
some to be a philosopher, to others a committed political
activist, and to yet others the creator of new myths of
modern man, wandering in a world in ruins. His final
significance is to be found, of course, in the poems
themselves, rather than in what they may seem to be
saying about something else.

Faced with the imperfectibility of the poem,
Frénaud has obstinately tried, nevertheless, "tous les
moyens." His success has not been unqualified. In a
sense no poem is ever entirely satisfactory. But many
of his poems do capture for us, miraculously, "un faible
écho de l'expérience." Frénaud cannot answer our
questions, nor his own. He can, and does, like some
ancient worker in stone, leave monuments along the way for
those who follow in the increasing darkness.

6 Bernard Pingaud, "La Présence et la perte," in André Frénaud (Paris: Centre National d'art et de
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