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ABSTRACT

This study examines technique in the novels of Raymond Queneau. The first section, 'In defence of the novel', seeks to demonstrate Queneau's particular technical awareness. At the same time, it places his work in the context of changing attitudes to fiction in France since the early 1920's and also connects it with international developments in the theory of fiction, with particular reference to those of Joycean origin. The second section, 'The relation of theme to technique', examines significant features of Queneau's fiction as they recur throughout his work and relates these to the theoretical aspects considered in Part One. The concluding section, 'Surface and the underlying truth', relates Queneau's approach to fiction and the themes he discovers to a consideration of the role of the novelist in terms of literature and reality.

The transcript of two interviews with Raymond Queneau are included in an appendix, as is a complete bibliography of Queneau's writing and also of those critical books and articles concerned with his work.

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his prior written consent and information derived
from it should be acknowledged.

CORRIGENDA

- p. 9, l. 7, for romaneque read romanesque
p. 11, l. 2, for prclamation read proclamation
p. 16, l. 25, for mymidonne read myrmidonne
p. 22, l. 25, for attion read attention
p. 30, l. 4, for prfond read profond
p. 38, l. 14, for concered read concerned
p. 44, l. 3, for cirulaire read circulaire
p. 126, l. 25, for Montaignes read Montaigne
p. 148, l. 9, for Transendant read Transcendant
p. 150, l. 26, for Pairs read Paris
p. 150, l. 30, for nouveau read nouvel

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements, -----	page	3
Introduction, -----	page	6
 <u>Part 1: In defence of the novel</u>		
a) The reaction against surrealism, -----	page	4
b) The nature of Queneau's reaction, -----	page	13
c) The principles of Queneau's rhetoric, -----	page	29
d) Poetry and the novel, -----	page	39
 <u>Part 2: The relation of theme to technique</u>		
a) The significance of parody, -----	page	49
b) One paragraph from <u>Loin de Rueil</u> , -----	page	58
c) The theme of language and communication, -----	page	64
d) Patterns of fiction, -----	page	76
 <u>Part 3: Surface and the underlying truth,</u>		
a) The problem discovered: the identification of characters, -----	page	93
b) The problem defined: the motivation of characters, -----	page	103
c) Queneau and Flaubert, -----	page	114
d) Conclusion: the novelist as sceptic, -----	page	120
 <u>Appendix</u>		
a) <u>Interview with Raymond Queneau</u> , -----	page	128
b) One paragraph from <u>Loin de Rueil</u> : breath-units, -----	page	137
c) Graph of breath units, -----	page	140
d) Bibliography, -----	page	141

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Introduction

Raymond Queneau's career as a writer has already spanned five decades, beginning with his participation as a young man in the Surrealist movement. Since that time his various activities have included fiction, poetry, translation, literary criticism, art criticism, linguistics, painting and mathematics. He was made Sécrétaire Général of Gallimard in 1941 and in 1951 was elected to the Académie Goncourt. Appropriately enough, in 1956, he was also appointed General Editor of the Encyclopédie de la Pléiade. In spite of the extraordinary breadth of his activities, he has found time to write some fourteen novels since Le Chiendent was first published in 1933.

Among writers and critics in France, Queneau's work is now met with fairly general approval. At different times, Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, and Maurice Blanchot, among others, have acknowledged Queneau as one of the more important living writers and a considerable influence on the development of French fiction since the War. Nevertheless, his work has rarely received close critical attention. Of the full-length studies which have so far been published, only Claude Simonnet's Queneau déchiffré has given detailed consideration to the formal aspect of Queneau's fiction, and this confines itself to a single novel, Le Chiendent. The books of Andrée Bergens (Raymond Queneau) and Jacques Bens (Raymond Queneau) are notably meagre and, it could be argued, misleading in that they avoid analysis in favour of anthology, selecting the more immediately appreciable comic effects for reclassification under headings such as 'Parody', 'Word Play', and so on. Even in the numerous short articles which have been appearing since the War, critics have shown an apparent reluctance to devote much attention to Queneau's approach

to style and structure. Those who have attempted some analysis of his attitude to language have tended to concentrate on his essays and have assumed, sometimes mistakenly, that his fictional technique more or less echoes the theories he has expounded.

This study is largely concerned to examine Queneau's fiction from a technical point of view. The opening section follows the evolution of his technique as a novelist and examines the principles behind it, giving consideration to the way in which Queneau's work anticipated recent development in French fiction. The second section investigates the relationship between theme and technique and shows, by detailed analysis of a short passage from Loin de Rueil, how in Queneau's case technical considerations can dictate what his novels 'say' to the reader. As a further illustration of this characteristic, two recurrent themes, which are clearly discovered by Queneau's questioning approach to the conventional use of language and structure in fiction, are traced through a number of the novels. The study moves finally to consider the implications of a purely technical approach in terms of the writer's attitude to the fundamental problem of art and reality.

Part 1. In defence of the novel

a) The reaction against Surrealism

Raymond Queneau was twenty one and had just completed a degree in Philosophy at the Sorbonne when he was first introduced to André Breton. He participated in the Surrealist movement from 1924 until 1929¹, during which time he collaborated in several numbers of La Revolution Surréaliste.² Although he was more closely connected with Prévert, Tanguy and Marcel Duhamel in the Groupe de la rue du Chateau than with Breton's Centrale, he sided with Breton in the all-important quarrel over collective action which severely divided the movement, only to quarrel himself with Breton a few months later and join with Ribemont-Dessaignes and Prévert in drafting the violent 'Numéro anti-Breton' of Cadavre in 1930. His first novel, and, indeed, the first work of fiction he undertook as an individual rather than a member of a group, was Le Chiendent, begun not long afterwards and published in 1933.

Although Queneau insists that the dispute with Breton was personal rather than doctrinal³, his choice of the novel for his first really sustained piece of literary creation is significant. Of all conventional literary forms, the one Breton despised the most was the novel, an attitude he made clear in the Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme. In a derisive summary of the principles of the novel, Breton claims the support of

1. Interrupted 1925 to 1927 for military service in North Africa.

2. Cf. M. Nadeau 'Appendices', Histoire du Surréalisme, Paris 1945, pp. 300, 330, 332.

3. R. Queneau, 'Conversation avec G. Ribemont-Dessaignes', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, Paris 1950. New edition, Gallimard 'Idées', 1965, p.37.

Paul Valéry⁴. Certainly Valéry never seems to have objected and the attitudes are fairly consistent with those he expressed himself in a less tendentious manner in 'Hommage à Marcel Proust'⁵. However modern, then, indeed iconoclastic, Queneau's approach to the technical problems facing the novelist, his choice of the novel, coming when it did, must represent a declaration of faith in established forms.

Queneau's break with the Surrealists coincides with his first reading of Joyce's Ulysses. The effect of this was decisive. What impressed Queneau, as Martin Esslin has said, was

the intricate formal pattern of correspondences between the modern novel and its Homeric counterpart. 6

4. A. Breton, 'Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme' (1924), Les Manifestes du Surréalisme, Paris, Le Sagittaire, 1955, p.10

5. P. Valéry, Variété 1, Paris 1924. Oeuvres 1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1957, pp. 769-774.

6. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, (edited by J. Cruikshank) London, 1962, p.81. Martin Esslin also sees Ulysses as an influence on Queneau's attitude to language in literature:

Ulysses helped Queneau to crystallise his thought on a question which had preoccupied him since his student days: the question of the divergence between the written language and that spoken by the people in their daily lives, or rather: the problem of how one could write in a language as it was actually spoken instead of employing an idiom fixed and fossilized by grammarians long since dead and fettered by rules of spelling that made language something seen rather than heard. (*ibid.*, p.80)

In fact, Queneau first read Ulysses in translation. He read the original several years later, and then with the aid of Stuart Gilbert's James Joyce's Ulysses (cf. 'Interview', p.130). It is probable that by then his attitudes on the French language were fairly well formed. He describes in Bâtons, chiffres et lettres how the problem Esslin refers to was first highlighted for him by comics such as L'Epatant, by Monnier's Joseph Prudhomme, by Rictus' Les Soliloques du Pauvre and, above all, by Vendryès Le Langage (Paris, 1920), and how his view was confirmed first during military service and later by a journey made in Greece (Cf. Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, pp.11-17). As Queneau himself readily admits ('Interview', p.130), it is hardly likely that he should have been particularly sensitive at the time to Joyce's linguistic virtuosity.

By way of critics such as Edmund Wilson and Stuart Gilbert⁷, Ulysses turned Queneau's attention to the technical innovations of contemporary fiction in English. It gave him the means to demonstrate his distance from the Surrealists in France by reviving a form they had dismissed as outmoded and pointless:

Il faut ... reconnaître ma dette envers les romanciers anglais et américains qui m'ont appris qu'il existait une technique du roman.⁸

... Je me suis aperçu que j'étais tombé dans le bain romanesque. Alors sous l'influence de Joyce et de Faulkner (qui n'était pas encore traduit), pour d'autres raisons aussi, j'ai donné une forme, un rythme à ce que j'étais en train d'écrire.

The insistence on rigorous application of complex techniques and structures marks a conscious rejection of the doctrine of L'écriture automatique whose principles had been effectively demonstrated by Queneau himself in his own "Textes Surréalistes":¹⁰

Ecrivant Le Chiendent, il s'écarte résolument et systématiquement du laisser-aller, du débraillé de ¹¹l'inspiration pour construire une oeuvre soigneusement agencée.

7. It is interesting to note how heavily even as recent an interpreter of Joyce in France as Michel Butor relies on Stuart Gilbert's book. C.f. "L'Archipel Joyce" Essais sur les Modernes, 'Idées', Paris, 1967, pp.239-282

8. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.28

9. Ibid. p.42 Among other writers, Queneau acknowledges Conrad and Stein.

10. Cf. Part 1, n.2

11. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, Paris 1962, p.24

Queneau has indicated that the project which ended in Le Chiendent was originally to translate into 'modern', that is spoken French, Descartes' Le Discours de la Méthode, Le Discours seeming an appropriate vehicle for such an exercise since it, too, was written in 'modern' French.¹²

It was in reducing to a present-day equivalent what appears to the modern reader as Descartes' grandiloquence that Queneau found himself 'dans le bain romanéque'. The final version of Le Chiendent stands in roughly the same relation to Le Discours as Ulysses does to The Odyssey. The modern novel is a small-scale version of the original work and much of its humour depends on the implicitly incongruous parallel of the petites gens and their classical models. Olivier de Magny sees the reduction of grandiose philosophy as a constant of Queneau's technique of fiction:

Si la plupart des romans de Queneau nous entraînent, au rythme syncopé d'aventures picaresques et saugrenues, à la rencontre de tout un menu peuple de boutiquiers et de bistroquets, de cartomanciennes et brocanteuses, de petits rentiers et petits marlous, et à la découverte d'un univers périphérique de garnis miteux, de terrains de foires, de baraques et d'échoppes, de gargotes, de guingettes de barrières et d'obscurs caboulots, le lecteur perspicace distinguera peu à peu et comme en filigrane de cette triviale bigarrure... le secret, l'opiniâtre épanouissement d'une sorte d'épopée philosophique. Les plus illustres problèmes de la morale et les spéculations les plus majestueuses de la métaphysique dégringolent de leur Olympe platonicien ou cartésien, de leurs cimes hégéliennes ou heideggeriennes pour rouler sur la table d'une noce de banlieue la couche mortuaire d'une laveuse de vaisselle ou sous le crâne d'un concierge. ... Du même coup, ces hautes spéculations et ces problèmes fameux [sont] parodiés et rafraîchis, persiflés et revivifiés, degonflés comme des baudruches et miraculeusement réintégrés dans les quotidiens circuits de l'existence. 13

Queneau's second novel, Gueule de Pierre, uses Freud as a model in the same way as Le Chiendent uses Descartes.¹⁴ For the complexity of such correspondences alone, Queneau's first two novels would be remarkable as

12. R. Queneau, 'Ecrit en 1937' Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.16-17

13. O. de Magny, 'Préface' to R. Queneau, Les Derniers Jours, Lausanne, 1965, p.14

14. Cf. Part 2, Section (a)

technical tours de force. That his reaction against the doctrine of pure inspiration was wholly deliberate is suggested by the fact that his evolution as a novelist reverses the usual pattern which begins with personal (if not directly autobiographical) writing and then progresses towards a preoccupation with technical accomplishment. In his preface to a French edition of Mosquitoes, Queneau describes such a development a propos of William Faulkner.¹⁵ Curiously, three of Queneau's next five novels, Les Derniers Jours¹⁶ (1935), Odile (1937) and Un Rude Hiver (1939), fall into an autobiographical scheme, as if he were releasing something which had hitherto been consciously suppressed. With the exception of Odile, however, even these novels demonstrate Queneau's paramount concern with formal arrangement.¹⁷

While it has its conservative aspect, which appears as a systematic defence of the contrivance of fiction, Queneau's reaction represents in many ways a new approach in France to the problems of the novel. At the same time, it is based on principles for the most part well-established among a certain section of the English and American avant-garde, much of which was centred on Paris. These principles are most clearly expressed in the 'Proclamation' issued by Transition in 1929, an American review published at Shakespeare and Co. to which several ex-surrealist friends of Queneau were contributing¹⁸, a fact upon whose significance Claude

15. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.125

16. According to J. Queval, (Raymond Queneau, Paris 1960, p.203) Queneau asked Gallimard not to reprint Les Derniers Jours, presumably because of its personal content. It has, however, subsequently been published by Les Editions Rencontre, Lausanne.

17. Cf. P. Gayot, Queneau, Paris 1967, p.10-11

18. Among them Prévert and Ribemont-Dessaignes. Cf. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.26

Simonnet has remarked. Simonnet has further shown how closely Queneau followed the proclamation's twelve clauses in Le Chiendent, as if in this first novel he were carefully laying down the principles of the ars poetica he had adopted.¹⁹

One important aspect of this self-consciousness is that it identifies Queneau not only with literature in English but with that tradition which in France links Proust and Gide to the New Novelists of the 1950's and '60's, what Gabriel Josipovici calls 'the unbroken line from Mallarmé to Butor via Proust, Valéry, Blanchot, Queneau and Becket'²⁰. Just as a major theme of Mallarmé's poetry is poetic creation itself, so the novelists take pains to emphasise the artificiality of their fiction by making its own creation their subject:

C'est à dire que le roman sera capable à l'intérieur de lui-même de montrer comment il apparaît, comment il se produit au milieu de la réalité. La poésie romanesque... sera une poésie capable de s'expliquer elle-même, montrer elle-même quelle est sa situation; elle pourra inclure son propre commentaire. 21

Central to Queneau's Les Enfants du Limon is the compilation of the writings of 19th century 'literary madmen', laboriously prepared by Chambernac, the headmaster of a provincial school. He is helped by a 'demon' who becomes involved when he casually wanders into Chambernac's bathroom in an unsuccessful attempt to blackmail him. The novel ends with Chambernac's failure to find a publisher for his manuscript; he is last seen talking to 'un binoclard d'une trentaine d'années' who had met him

19. Cf. ibid., pp.27-29

20. G. Josipovici, 'Structures of Truth', Critical Quarterly, January 1968, p.72

21. M. Butor, 'Le roman et la poésie', Essais sur le roman, Paris, Gallimard (Idées), 1969, p.46

previously 'dans les bureaux de la N.R.F's. Discovering Chambernac's failure with the publishers, the young man begs permission to borrow the manuscript, and then asks,

- Vous auriez une répugnance quelconque à ce que j'attribue votre oeuvre à un personnage d'un roman que je suis en train d'écrire?

Chambernac is delighted with the idea, declines any form of acknowledgement should the novel be published and then, out of simple curiosity, asks,

- Et ce personnage comment est-il?

- C'est la proviseur d'un petit lycée de province. Il est marié, il n'a pas d'enfants. Un jour un démon pénètre dans sa salle de bains.

- Attendez, le mieux ce serait que je vous raconte ma vie. Attendez. Je ne la crois pas extraordinaire mais ça pourrait donner de la réalité à votre bouquin.

-Je ne sais comment vous remercier.

- Mais de rien je vous assure mon cher monsieur, monsieur comment?

- Queneau.

- De rien, mon cher monsieur Queneau. Je vous assure : de rien.²²

Characters are often shown to be aware of their own fictitiousness. In Le Chiendent, after being congratulated for a witticism, Mme Cloche acknowledges her debt to Queneau.

- Ce n'est pas moi qu'ai trouvé ça, dit la reine. C'est dans le livre.

- Quel livre? demandèrent les deux maréchaux errants.

- Eh bien, çui-ci. Çui-ci qu'on est maintenant, qui répète c'qu'on dit à dit à mesure qu'on le dit et qui nous suit et qui nous raconte, un vrai buvard qu'on a collé sur not'vie. 23

In both these instances Queneau clearly has in mind the example of Proust and of Gide's Les Faux Monnayeurs²⁴. What he is doing is to reverse the

22. R. Queneau, Les Enfants du Limon, Paris 1938, p.315. The novel has a post-script: 'Les textes cités par Chambernac dans son Encyclopédie sont naturellement authentiques.' They were in fact collected by Queneau himself from 1930 to 1936, presented in the form of a manuscript to Gallimard and, like Chambernac's, themselves rejected.

23. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, Paris 1933, p.294

24. At the same time the passage from Les Enfants du Limon (n.12) signals that Chambernac has arrived at the same attitude of resigned scepticism which characterises Bouvard and Pécuchet at the end of Flaubert's novel (at least according to Queneau; cf. Bâtons, chiffres et lettres pp.97-124). The effect is consciously achieved. Les Enfants du Limon is filled with allusions to Bouvard et Pécuchet which force the reader into making the comparison.

effects of a device particularly common in the 18th century, the preuve à l'appui²⁵, such as is found in the 'preface by the editor' to Laclos's Les Liaisons Dangereuses. Queneau is in fact still using the device, more clearly in the first example, but using it incongruously. By doing so he undermines the credibility of the characters and their situation. Their essence becomes their fictitiousness. Queneau is plainly intent, as Sturrock says of the 'new novelist',

on showing that he is simply a man equipped with the universal human power of imagination. He does not ask any more that his readers should identify with the creatures of his fancy. 26

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b) The Nature of Queneau's reaction

While this need to disclaim his characters' reality and to expose, albeit ironically, the way their world has been constructed can be traced back to a reaction against the Surrealist dismissal of aesthetic contrivance, another aspect of Queneau's technique can be seen as a deliberate act in defence of the novel. Arguments against a particular art-form tend to reduce that art-form to certain apparently essential features and then to discredit the value of each feature in isolation. In this, the arguments of Valéry and Breton are no exception. Queneau's answer to reductionism of this sort is characterised by his resort to extremes: by demonstrating, within one novel, opposite extremes of fictional technique, he indicates the enormous breadth of the field within which a novelist can work. The device is most easily recognisable

25. Cf. J. Prévost (who discusses Stendhal's use of the device with reference particularly to Chroniques Italiennes in:) La Création chez Stendhal, Paris, Mercure de France, 1951, pp. 322-325.

26. J. Sturrock, The French New Novel, London, 1969, p. 15

in his approach to the language of fiction:

Il ne se doutait pas que chaque fois qu'il passait devant sa boutique, elle le regardait, la commerçante, le soldat Brû. 27

This sentence opens the narrative of Le Dimanche de la vie. The construction is unmistakably popular, although, intrinsically, this does not hold any particular value for Queneau.²⁸ Its effect depends on the reader's surprise, his recognition that, by its very strangeness in a literary context, it qualifies as a rhetorical manner. Although the sentence itself may constitute what Queneau calls 'une photographie de langage populaire', the language of the narrative as a whole is far more complex:

Il ne s'agit pas de sténographier les tournures du parler populaire mais de donner un style au langage parlé. 29

The unrefined tone of the langage parlé forms a large but by no means exclusive part of the raw material for a personal and even highly artificial style. Moreover, while a familiar technique is to express the grandest ideas in the most basic language, at the same time Queneau often reverses the process and describes utterly commonplace human gestures in absurdly literary terms. To underline a particular contrast, he occasionally uses both devices in immediate succession:

Il se prit la tête à deux mains et fit le futile simulacre de se la vouloir arracher. Puis il continua son discours en ces termes:
"Merde de merde, je veux pas dans ma maison d'une petite salope qui dise des cochonnetés comme ça. Je vois ça d'ici, elle va pervertir tout le quartier...- En deux jours elle aura eu le temps de mettre la main dans la braguette de tous les vieux gâteaux qui m'honorent de leur clientèle." 30

27. R. Queneau, Le Dimanche de la Vie, Paris 1951, p.11

28. Cf. Part I, n.54

29. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.78

30. R. Queneau, Zazie dans le métro, Paris, Livre de Poche 1959, p.18

The same novel, Zazie dans le métro, begins with a similar juxtaposition: 'DOUKIPUDONKTAN, se demanda Gabriel excédé.' In the contrast between his aggressive working-class virility and the sort of preciousness we would expect to associate with une danseuse de charme, the first words of the novel establish the essential ambiguity of Gabriel's personality.

Much of Queneau's humorous effect depends on his ability to make sly allusions to past authors and their work in apparently inappropriate circumstances. Gabriel's

Sans ça, qui supporterait, les coups du sort et les humiliations d'une belle carrière, les frauds des épiciers, les tarifs des bouchers, l'eau des laitiers, l'énervement des parents, la fureur des professeurs, les gémissements des adjutants, la turpitude des nantis, les gémissements des anéantis, le silence des espaces infinis... 31

is quite obviously a parody of Hamlet. Le père Taupe's lament in Le Chiendent, 'Ernestine, Ernestine disparu,' is unmistakably a wink in the direction of Proust³², as, on another level, is the confusion between Marcel and Marceline in Zazie dans le métro. This last, arguably the most consciously 'popular' of Queneau's novels, is significantly also the most richly allusive. It contains a parody of existentialist novels in Zazie's quite unemotional account of her father's death³³; one of Samuel Beckett in the dialogue between Pedro Surplus and Gridoux when Pedro suddenly loses his memory³⁴:

- Posez-moi des questions, posez moi des questions, vous allez comprendre.
 - Mais vous y répondez pas aux questions.
 - Quelle injustice! comme si je n'ai pas répondu pour les épinards.
- Gridoux se gratta le crâne.
- Eh bien par exemple...

31. ibid., p.112

32. Cf. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.43.

33. R. Queneau, Zazie dans le métro, pp.47-52

34. ibid., pp.76-78

Mais il ne put continuer, fort embarrassé.

- Dites, insistait le type, mais dites donc.

(silence) Gridoux baisse les yeux.

Le type lui vient en aide.

- Vous voulez savoir mon nom par exemple?

- Oui, dit Gridoux, c'est ça, votre nom.

- Eh bien je ne le sais pas.

Gridoux leva les yeux.

- C'est malin, ça, dit-il.

- Eh non, je ne le sais pas.

- Comment ça?

- Comment ça? Comme ça. Je ne l'ai pas appris par coeur.

(silence)

- Vous vous foutez de moi, dit Gridoux.

- Et pourquoi ça?

- Est-ce qu'on a besoin d'apprendre son nom par coeur?

- Vous, dit le type, vous appelez comment?

- Gridoux, répondit Gridoux sans se méfier.

- Vous voyez bien que vous le savez par coeur votre nom de Gridoux. 35

René Micha sees in 'l'envolée de Gabriel dans les cintres de la Tour Eiffel', 36

un exemple de rhétorique pure, une sorte de prière sur l'Acropole...: ascension du corps, ascension du verbe, Vertige à n'en plus finir. 37

Almost inevitably, there is also a parody of the Homeric style:

erratum - Tel le coléoptère attaqué par une colonne mymidonne, tel le boeuf assailli par un banc hirurdinaire, Gabriel se secouait, s'ébrouait, s'ébattait, projetant dans des directions variées des projectiles humains qui s'en allaient briser des tables et chaises ou rouler entre les pieds des clients. 38

Just as at one extreme the comic effect depends on the contrast between what is usual in literary narrative and the manner Queneau chooses, at the other it depends on the contrast between the banality of the subject matter and the incongruously literary depiction, which in turn suggests an equally incongruous parallel between modern heroes and those of antiquity.

The comedy is not inherent in the situation described. It is discovered

35. ibid., p.77

36. ibid., p.85

37. R. Micha, 'Le cinema de Queneau', L'Arc No.28, Jan 1966, p.68

38. R. Queneau, Zazie dans le métro, p.172

by the language of Queneau's narrative. The approach is altogether suggestive of Ulysses, and in particular of the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode, in which, for example, a sardine-tin is described in fifteenth century English:

And there was a vat of silver that was moved by craft to open in which lay strange fishes withouten heads though misbelieving men nie that this be possible thing without they see it nathless they are so. And these fishes lie in an oily water brought there from Portugal land because of the fatness that therein is like to the juices of the olive press.

As Stuart Gilbert says a propos of Joyce's chapter, the device cannot strictly be called parody:

If the texture of the prose is carefully examined, it will be seen that, though in some passages the style is probably meant to satirize the original (as when an Ars Amatoria is expounded in the manner of Bunyan), the greater part seems to be devoid of satiric intention; that wilful exaggeration of mannerism which points a parody is absent and the effect is rather of pastiche than of travesty.⁴⁰

In Queneau, as in Joyce, the humour rarely depends on exaggeration but on the deliberate incongruity of style and subject matter. As if emphasising the point by contrast, throughout the learned allusions of Zazie dans le métro, we hear the voice of Zazie 'qui parle son propre idiom... le quel agit sur les choses, les appelle, les transforme.⁴¹

While there is, therefore, something undeniably literary even in Queneau's use of spoken French, the humour is also often purely visual. This indicates an important inconsistency between Queneau's theory of oral literature, as presented in the various essays of Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, and his own practice. In 1937, Queneau spoke of a device such

39. J. Joyce, Ulysses, Paris, 1922, London (Penguin), p.384
40. S. Gilbert, James Joyce's Ulysses, London 1930, p.290
41. R. Micha, 'Le cinéma de Queneau', Arts 28, p.68

as 'la rime pour l'oeil' as

la stupéfiante convention qui aboutit..., et ne peut aboutir qu'aux calligrammes et à Un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard. 42

In his 'Conversation avec Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes' (1950), he repeatedly affirms the importance of 'l'aspect oral':

[Il] me paraît essentiel. Je ne conçois pas une poésie faite seulement pour être "vue" écrite, c'est à dire qui soit illisible à haute voix... 43

These remarks would suggest that Queneau sees his own style parlé (when it is used) as an extension of his argument. And yet, the so-called 'phonetic spelling', an important feature of the style parlé, depends on visual appreciation as much as does the rime pour l'oeil:

Il faut noter que la transcription phonétique est une écriture... C'est précisément dans la mesure où elles sont écrites que les tournures verbales acquièrent leur pouvoir comique. A la limite, elles sont comme un graphisme original dont le pouvoir est d'ordre essentiellement visuel. 44

It is self-evident that the more faithful Queneau's version is as a representation of the way people pronounce their language, the more the humour would be lost if it were to be read out loud. It is, in truth, highly questionable whether an accurate form of phonetic spelling is possible in any language. Even within the boundaries of regional variation, pronunciation is by no means uniform, not to mention the other variable : the sensitivity of the listener's ear. This is how Bernard Shaw heard cockney:

42. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.20

43. ibid., p. 39

44. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.82

The Flower Girl : Ow, eez ya-ooa san, is e? Wal, fewd dan
y' dee-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now
bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than
ran awy athaht pyin;. Will ye-oo py me?

'Here', says Shaw,

This desperate attempt to represent the dialect without a
phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside
London. 45

For Shaw, characteristically, it is intelligibility, not accuracy,
which is in question. In spite of his extravagant claims, in spite
of Queneau's, for the potential effectiveness of a flexible phonetic
alphabet, their efforts to establish one underline, if anything,
the contrivance behind all literary representation. Reality, even
the reality of speech, must be abstracted before it can appear
on a page. It is difficult to believe that a writer as self conscious
as Queneau can be unaware of this. Indeed Simonnet sees him giving
a fitting and perhaps wilful reply to Valéry's 'Comment se dissimuler
que tout ceci finit sur le papier'.⁴⁶

It must be said that Queneau's attitudes have changed since
1937. The second remark quoted⁴⁷ is considerably less assertive than the
first: Queneau qualifies it by 'Ce n'est pas une théorie. Ce sont
mes goûts.' His arguments now refer to writing for the 'inner ear'
rather than for recital.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, even in a collection of
poems published during the War, only three years after his first essay

45. G. B. Shaw, Pygmalion, London, Constable 1916, Act 1, Sc. 1, p.203

46. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.58

47. Cf. Part I, n.43

48. Cf. 'Interview', Appendix p.132

he used devices equivalent to the rime pour l'oeil. In 'L'explication de métaphores', verse six almost repeats verse two:

...Mais quelle est, dira-t-on,
la signification de cette métaphore:
"Mince comme un cheveu, ample comme l'aurore"? 49

The difference is that the two adjectives mince and ample are made plural in verse six. Since no liaison is possible, it is a difference which could only be perceived visually. Brée and Guiton make the relevant conclusion:

Queneau's language, both dialogue and narrative, is sometimes a phonetic reproduction of ungrammatical or slangy spoken French; sometimes it rises to the heights of epic poetry; sometimes it lies between the two. But at all times, and whether vulgar or sublime, it follows a fairly unified pattern of rhythmic rhetoric, full of puns, coined words, polysyllables, alliterations and phonetic ornaments. 50

In other words, it clearly demonstrates that the very extremes of language can be brought together to form part of the greater pattern of a fictional contrivance.

Andrée Bergens is, therefore, right to mistrust an over literal application of Queneau's theories to his practice. It is perhaps unreasonable to expect consistency from a man whose career spreads over five decades. This is particularly so of Queneau, for whom consistency appears to imply fanaticism:

Quand j'énonce une assertion, je m'aperçois tout de suite que l'assertion contraire est à peu près aussi intéressante, à un point où cela devient presque superstitieux chez moi. 51

This remark was made at the beginning of Queneau's interviews with Georges Charbonnier. It stands as a prefatory warning to the reader

49. R. Queneau, 'Les Ziaux', Si tu t'imagines, Paris 1968, pp.145-146

50. G. Brée and M. Guiton, The French Novel (An Age or Fiction), New Brunswick 1957, p.170

51. R. Queneau, Entretiens avec G. Charbonnier, Paris 1962, p.12

and its appropriateness is substantiated throughout the text. Andrée Bergens falls into a trap, however, when she suggests that, in his search for comic effect, Queneau works against the possibility of reform in the French language whose very need he argues with such apparent conviction elsewhere. By using a style parlé out of its normal context, she claims, Queneau exposes it to ridicule:

Tantôt il souligne ce que l'application des règles peut produire de ridicule, tantôt il utilise le néo-français dans les domaines les plus sérieux, ceux qui paraissent les moins faites pour une intrusion du langage parlé, non pour créer une nouvelle forme de pensée, comme il paraissait l'espérer, mais simplement pour s'amuser, pour le plaisir de provoquer des effets inattendus.⁵²

This is to misunderstand Queneau's argument. It is not the style parlé which is exposed to ridicule, but the ideas themselves. The assertion of 'Connaissez-vous le Chinook' to which Andrée Bergens refers sceptically,

Le français contemporain ne deviendra une langue véritable et féconde que lorsque les philosophes eux-mêmes l'utiliseront, et naturellement les savants. 53

should be considered together with the conclusion to Queneau's first essay on the subject, 'Ecrit en 1937'; 'Epui sisaferir, tant nye: j'écripa pour anniélé lmond.'

This points to the real fallacy behind Andrée Bergens' objection and incidentally raises a key issue in the understanding of Queneau's fiction. He would certainly not recognise the distinction she makes between 'les domaines les plus sérieux' and 'le ridicule'. His technique is such that it tests the validity of any subject's claim to this kind of dignity while its refinement avoids the repetitiveness of style which can be so irritating in Rictus and even Céline:

52. A. Bergens, Raymond Queneau, Geneva 1963, p.179

53. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.63

Je n'ai d'ailleurs aucun respect, ni considération spéciale pour le populaire, le devenir, la "vie", etc. Mais précisément comme je ne vois rien de réellement sacré dans notre français contemporain, je ne vois non plus aucune raison pour ne pas élever le langage populaire à la dignité de langage écrit. 54

More important still, such apparent lack of discrimination emphasises a theme which stands out in each of Queneau's novels: the extreme gratuitousness of any fictional creation, and, by extension, any human action.

Speaking of the introduction of the 'fous littéraires' and their texts into Les Enfants du Limon, Martin Esslin says:

They represent so many new patterns of the universe in a world that can be made to assume a different guiding principle according to the thinking of each differently orientated, or distorted, brain. Our normal universe is only one possible case in an infinity of others, just as Euclidian geometry only represents one possible case in an infinity of potential systems. 55

Queneau's awareness of the role of pure chance in establishing patterns of behaviour is expressed throughout his novels by the emphasis given to the part played by his own caprice. Le Chiendent begins with such an assertion:

La silhouette d'un homme se profila; simultanément des milliers. Il y en avait bien des milliers.

The question this presentation imposes is 'why should this particular shadow be singled out for attention?' There is no answer. In the first chapter, Queneau presents the reader with a metaphor for the creation of a fictional character which makes ironic reference to Descartes' Cogito. A third party (Pierre le Grand) makes a random decision to observe the activity of a nondescript shadow. The decision coincides with a moment of crisis in the shadow's life: he notices a display in a shop window advertising a waterproof hat. The hat is filled with

54. *ibid.*, p.24 Cf. Part 1, n.28

55. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.88

water and two rubber ducks float in it to demonstrate its impermeability. He has passed the same display every day for the past two years and, on this particular day, notices it for the first time. Cogitat ergo est. His existence having been contrived, he is inflated into his fictional role until, by the end of the chapter, he has acquired a name and even some kind of personality. The process is a gradual one: he is referred to successively as 'l'être de réalité minime,' 'l'être bi-dimensionnelle,' 'Untel,' (a name of sorts; his wife is called Unetelle) and, finally, Etienne Marcel. In the last chapter of the novel, the process is rapidly reversed; it becomes one of sudden deflation as the character's fictional identity is systematically withdrawn. The final two sentences of the novel logically repeat the first two: Etienne Marcel is restored to shadow, the status quo of the beginning returns and the gratuitousness of the whole fictional process is accentuated.

Après avoir rigoureusement monté son jeu de masques l'auteur efface tout, et tout retombe dans l'anonymat sans visage. On pourrait recommencer et recommencer autrement. 56

A brief section of Loin de Rueil shows the hero, Jacques L'Aumône, like Pierre le Grand in Le Chiendent, deciding for no particular reason to observe the behaviour of 'un citoyen absolument quelconque':

Que fait ce type? Rien ne l'indique. Il ne s'arrête devant aucune boutique, il ne se retourne pas sur les femmes, il ne fait pas mine aux chats ni aux chiens ni psst aux taxis, il ne tapote pas les joues des enfants, il n'essaie pas de ne pas marcher sur les interstices du pavage, il ne demande pas son chemin aux flics, il n'entre pas dans les vespasiennes, il ne traverse pas une rue sans avoir regardé à gauche puis à droite, il n'éternue, rote ni ne pète... Il ne jette pas de bouts de papier dans le ruisseau billets d'autobus ou tickets de tramway, il ne boite pas, il n'a pas de tics ni de soubresauts, il est tellement bien comme il faut-être que Jacques se demande comment il pourrait s'y prendre pour atteindre cette perfection, pour s'annuler ainsi... 57

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56. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.59
57. R/ Queneau, Loin de Rueil, Paris 1944, p.61

Once the negatives accumulate to make a positive, 'perfection', the man breaks out, snatches a woman's bag and disappears into the crowd. Jacques never sees him again and nothing comes of the incident. What is heavily implied is that something might have, but, just as Queneau gratuitously decided to create a fictional character from a shadow on the underground wall in Le Chiendent, here, with equal capriciousness, he decides against it. The whole question is that of selection, and it is a recurrent feature of Queneau's novels to have the problem dramatised as part of the narrative, with responsibility laid on a combination of chance and an equally fictitious third person. In Les Enfants du Limon, it is the demonic Purlupan who assumes the role of the third person. Through him Chambernac is introduced into the narrative. Purlupan gets off a train at a provincial station with a pressing problem: who to blackmail?

Purlupan, arrivé inconnu à Mourmèche, inconnu de Mourmèche et ne connaissant pas Mourmèche, n'avait aucune raison de choisir qui-ci plutôt que qui-la. Pourquoi le sous-prefet plutôt que le geôlier, l'huissier plutôt que le notaire, le banquier plutôt que le conservateur de musée de préhistoire; ou encore, l'épicier plutôt que le boucher, le maçon que le garagiste; ou encore pourquoi un rentier; ou encore pourquoi un ébéniste. La question se présentait d'une façon d'autant plus ouverte que c'était son début à lui dans la carrière.

Le soir il erra dans Mourmèche, regardant les fenêtres éclairées, ne sachant se décider pour telle ou telle famille.

... Il finit par découvrir dans cette obscurité provinciale un numéro de bordel. Il comprit alors que le premier homme ayant plus de cinquante ans qu'il verrait sortir, et respectable, serait son homme. Quelques instants après, Chambernac s'en glissait dehors... 58

The manner of Purlupan's entry into Chambernac's bathroom⁵⁹, his deliberate misinterpretation of Chambernac's most simple statements, suggests a parallel in the opening to Kafka's The Trial, with Purlupan

58. R. Queneau, Les Enfants du Limon, p.19

59. Cf. p.11

as Queneau's version of the detectives, working on the assumption that everyone has something to be guilty about which panic will make them reveal. Both novelists are seeking to accentuate the randomness of their characters' selection, Queneau largely for humorous effect, Kafka to create a nightmare. ⁶⁰

Once the characters are selected, the experiences they undergo are also governed by the author's arbitrary will. They are often granted an unconscious, sometimes even a conscious, insight into this. Alfred, the waiter (and chorus) of Les Derniers Jours is given the privilege of knowing the author's design, and so he is surprised by nothing that occurs. His insight is symbolised by his clairvoyance, the author's caprice by the stars Alfred consults. In the epilogue to Pierrot mon ami, even Pierrot, Queneau's least questioning protagonist, thinks back over the events of the novel:

Il voyait bien comment tous les éléments qui les constituaient aurait pu se lier en une aventure qui serait développée sur le plan du mystère pour se résoudre ensuite comme un problème d'algèbre où il y a autant d'équations que d'inconnus, et comment il n'en avait pas été ainsi... et il voyait le roman que cela avait fait... 61

'Pierrot mon ami', says Esslin

is a poem on chance and destiny, on the relationship between what should have happened and what actually does happen. The book thus has two plots - a potential one and an actual one. And the potentialities always fail to come to fruition by a hair's breadth. ⁶²

In Loin de Rueil, the development of the novel's action depends on a series of fantasies which take place in the mind of Jacques l'Aumône. At the same time Jacques has as many fantasies which lead nowhere, and which, initially, the reader confuses with what is actually happening. At any moment these may take over and change the novel's course, or they

60. For Queneau on Kafka, Cf. Part 3, n.62

61. Pierrot mon ami, Paris 1943, Livre de Poche, p.174

62. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.90

may deflate themselves before any action occurs. A typical example shows Jacques on a bus. His imagination imposes the identity of Dominique, the woman he loves, on the conductress. We hear 'Dominique' confess to a fall from grace: 'Jacques l'invite à souper chez Maxim's... Voici pourquoi...', and so the day-dream continues. It is brought to an abrupt close by the voice of the conductress:

- Terminus, monsieur, lui dit-elle.
- Pardon. 63

It is presumably to this kind of interlude which Simonnet refers when he calls Loin de Rueil 'un feu d'artifice de romans possibles à l'intérieur du roman réel'. 64

By revealing not only the processes which have created the actual novel but also those which have been arbitrarily rejected, Queneau emphasises the extent of the novelist's control over the reader's attention:

- ...le long de la rivière il faisait nuit. Il faisait nuit ailleurs également, mais peu importe, sur le bord de la rivière la nuit s'épaississait. 65

While what tends to be underlined by this procedure in the novels is the arbitrary plot and characterisation, selection of manner and point of view is, for Queneau, no less a thing of chance. This is one lesson of Exercices de style. The same banal incident involving two people on a bus is recounted in ninety-nine different ways, ranging from the haikai through various figures of speech and technical devices to longer narratives in French by Englishmen and Italians and in several variations of popular and literary language to the most extreme :

- 63. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.75
- 64. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.60
- 65. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, p.208

Mathématique

Dans un parallélépipède rectangle se déplacent le long d'une ligne intégrale solution de l'équation différentielle du second ordre:

$$y'' + TCRP(x)y' + S = 84$$

deux homoïdes...66

As Martin Esslin says, not all of the exercises are equally successful, 'not all are equally witty'.

But they all illustrate Queneau's basic assumption: the primacy of language and thought over reality. The same incident can appear in ninety-nine different moods and mean ninety-nine different things, in ninety-nine different modes of language. 67

The actual difference may be non-existent, but when it is expressed it is created. Moreover, since the way something is said changes what is said, then the gratuitousness behind the choice of manner must indicate the gratuitousness of all artistic creation.

A further implication of this is that since the perpetual search for comic effect is a permanent feature of Queneau's aesthetic, laughter itself is equally indiscriminating. The reader, of course, does not have to laugh. Whether he does or not is the test to which Queneau submits his subject, and that subject, more often than not, is literature itself. What the reader is forced to question, by Queneau's insistence on the gratuitousness of his activity as a writer, is the consequent value of reading at all. Even a critic as hostile to Queneau as François Mauriac recognises the implication, albeit from a slightly different angle and with evident irritation:

Il faut toujours en venir à la question: "Pourquoi écrivez-vous?"⁶⁸
It is not only the novel which is in question but the whole of literature.

66. R. Queneau, Exercices de style, Paris 1947, p.183

67. M. Esslin, "Raymond Queneau", The Novelist as Philosopher, p.94

68. F. Mauriac, 'Bloc Notes', Le Figaro Littéraire, 1.3.1959. The article refers to Zazie dans le métro: 'Je m'entête à n'y rien voir qu'une histoire idiote.'

The point is made most clearly in Queneau's Cent mille milliards de poèmes : ten sonnets are arranged so that every line of each sonnet can be substituted in corresponding position in any of the other sonnets. The construction is such that no single reader could hope to exhaust a fraction of the possible combinations within a lifetime.

Queneau's reaction to the reductionism of Valéry and Breton is therefore made plain. Where Breton complains of the gratuitous banality of novelists :

Le caractère circonstanciel, inutilement particulier de chacune de leurs notations, me donne à penser qu'ils s'amusent à mes dépens. On ne m'épargne aucune des hésitations du personnage : sera-t-il blond, comment s'appellera-t-il, irons-nous le prendre en été? Autant de questions résolues une fois pour toutes, au petit bonheur; il ne m'est laissé d'autre pouvoir discrétionnaire que de fermer le livre, ce dont je ne me fais pas faute aux environs de la première page. 69

Queneau, far from denying the charge and questioning Breton's findings (as Michel Butor has since done with reference to this specific passage⁷⁰), or seeking to conceal such features in his own work, emphasises his awareness of the part they play. In later editions of the 'Manifesto', rather than quote Dostoievsky, as he does, Breton could have chosen a passage at random from any of Queneau's novels to illustrate the same points; for example :

L'ex-officier, actuellement représentant en vins, déplia son journal avec grand bruit; la petite demoiselle d'en face continua son crochet commencé depuis Pâques. Le vis-à-vis de l'être plat somnolait; mais sa somnolence était agitée; il bavotait et ratappait périodiquement sa salive, exhibant une langue violette qui incitait à penser que son possesseur devait sucer son style ou avoir quelque atroce maladie, le bachibouzouk ou la violetteria par exemple. 71

69. A. Breton, Les Manifestes du Surréalisme, p.10

70. M. Butor, 'Le Roman et la Poésie', Essais sur le roman, Paris 1969 pp.21-28

71. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, p.11

Where Breton claims that such features are almost entirely peculiar to the novel :

..naguère, à propos des romans, Paul Valéry m'assurait qu'en ce qui le concerne, il se refuserait toujours à écrire : La marquise sortit à cinq heures...

...Si le style d'information pure et simple, dont la phrase précitée offre un exemple, a cours presque seul dans les romans, c'est... que l'ambition des auteurs ne va pas très loin. 72

Queneau begins a sonnet, 'Il sortit la marquise à 5 o'clock.' 73 The implication is clear. Where Breton complains of the gratuitousness and banality of the novel ('Je ne fais pas état des moments nuls de ma vie,... de la part de tout homme il peut être indigne de cristalliser ceux qui lui paraissent tels.' 74), Queneau shows that the distinction Breton makes between one form and another is itself arbitrary, the forms he appears to value capable of equal banality, and, moreover, that such banality has its value. The point is further developed by Michel Butor: *What?*

Mais il y a plus sérieux... Il y a plusieurs phrases qui... nous signalent une distinction fondamentale entre deux sortes de moments : les uns intéressants, brillants, qu'il vaut la peine de "cristalliser", les autres "nuls", dont il ne faut pas parler. 75

Queneau's attitude refuses to acknowledge these distinctions, just as it refuses to acknowledge those Andrée Bergens makes between 'les domaines les plus sérieux' and 'le ridicule'.

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c) The principles of Queneau's rhetoric

La recherche de nouvelles formes romanesques dont le pouvoir d'intégration soit plus grand, joue donc un triple rôle par rapport à la conscience que nous avons du réel, de dénonciation, d'exploration et d'adaptation. Le romancier qui se refuse à ce travail, ne bouleversant pas d'habitudes, n'exigeant de son

72. A. Breton, Les Manifestes du Surréalisme, p.10

73. R. Queneau, Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes, Paris 1961

74. ibid., p.11

75. M. Butor, 'Le roman et la poésie', Essais sur le roman, p.28

lecteur aucun effort particulier, ne l'obligeant point à ce retour sur soi-même, à cette mise en question de positions depuis longtemps acquises, a certes, un succès plus facile; *erratum* → mais il se fait le complice de ce profond malaise, de cette nuit dans laquelle nous nous débattons. Il rend plus raide encore les réflexes de la conscience, plus difficile son éveil, il contribue à son étouffement, si bien que, même s'il a des intentions généreuses, son oeuvre en fin de compte est un poison. 76

Butor's declaration of faith could stand as Queneau's reply to Mauriac. }
Those examples of Queneau's humour, which in isolation may appear to achieve their effect at the novel's expense, express, on the contrary, a will to develop the novel. The first step in this process is to challenge those literary preconceptions which, perhaps wrongly, govern our approach. Queneau's linguistic experiments, for example, work in just this direction :

Si le recours, d'ailleurs raisonné, aux vocables et à la morphologie de la langue verte nous fait rire un peu comme une dérision de la littérature, il faut pourtant bien distinguer dans cette dérision même le primesaut d'une restauration de la littérature dans ses pouvoirs les plus vrais et les plus vivants. Notre rire ne doit pas nous cacher ce paradoxe significatif : nous rions parce qu'une oeuvre littéraire choisit son matériau dans la langue que 'tout le monde' parle : or, elle nous désigne dans le travesti d'un verdoyant vocabulaire certaines des conventions avec lesquelles notre idée de la littérature finit peut-être indûment par se confondre. 77

Even where the experiment fails, it has the virtue of having questioned our priorities, and any feature which survives such a challenge is consequently strengthened. That Queneau has chosen to seek these effects within the novel implies his own faith in the form. 78

While the overall implication is therefore one in support of the novel, this support is not without its limits :

76. M. Butor, 'Le roman comme recherche', *ibid.*, p.10

77. O. de Magny. 'Préface' to Les Derniers Jours, p.12-13

78. In his essays, Queneau has been reluctant to theorise about the novel. Such examples of his essays touching on the subject have been confined to comment on particular works, or particular features of his own novels.

Alors que la poésie a été la terre bénie des rhétoriciens et des faiseurs de règles, le roman, depuis qu'il existe, a échappé à toute loi. N'importe qui peut pousser devant lui comme un troupeau d'oies un nombre indéterminé de personnages apparemment réels à travers une lande longue de pages et de chapitres. Le résultat, quel qu'il soit, sera toujours un roman ... Mais pour ma part, je ne saurais m'incliner devant un tel laisser-aller. 80

The key word here is indéterminé. In Queneau's view it stands in negation of the essential power of the novelist, which is to fabricate within a certain framework. It is above all his consciousness of the role of the arbitrary in the writer's processes of selection which demands this framework. There is no moral preconception governing the arrangement of Queneau's fiction. There is, very definitely, a formal one:

Le saboteur sagace des belles lettres cohabite, on le voit, chez Queneau, avec un grand rhétoricien, un partisan passionné de l'oeuvre construite... 81

Since the characters' essence is their fictitiousness, not their credibility, the experiences they undergo, logically enough, are not determined by the author's sense of what is most convincing in terms of real life, but by the novel's structure, which itself is determined solely by the author's view of what is aesthetically pleasing.

In other words, fiction, in Queneau's opinion, is not concerned with the transcription of reality but with the creation of meaningful or beautiful patterns from the meaningless jumble of random happenings that only become real when perceived in an ordered pattern. 82

The design of Gueule de Pierre, for example, follows the pattern of a simple magnetic field, with the structure depending on the lines of force created by the two poles: 'la triplicité des fils (Paul, Pierre et Jean) et la triplicité des règnes.'⁸³ In Les Derniers Jours, the simple numeric pattern based on the square of seven (seven sections of

80. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman'. Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.26

81. O. de Magny, 'Préface' to Les Derniers Jours, p.17

82. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.94

83. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.32

seven chapters each, with each sixth chapter as a pause during which Alfred speaks directly to the reader) is complicated by the superimposition of a further pattern involving principles more commonly associated with music:

J'ai dit plus haut que le nombre des Derniers Jours était 49, bien que, tel qu'il a été publié, il ne comprenne que 38 chapitres. C'est que j'ai enlevé l'échafaudage et syncopé le rythme; certains monologues d'Alfred, supprimés pour la publication, forment des temps zéro; celui de Jules, inattendu, marque une dissonance avant la résolution finale. 84

Within these structures, a character's every move is governed, again, by whether a particular rhetorical device is considered appropriate or not. This is to use technique as a means of discovering rather than containing intellectual and moral truth. The discovery is made through inference. Character and plot cannot be used in imaginative literature without making such implications and they are, arguably, all the more valid in that they impose themselves on the reader's attention instead of being manipulated into evidence. The principle is reiterated by Michel Butor:

...je crois qu'il est bon d'insister sur ce fait que dans la réflexion sur la forme, le romancier trouve un moyen d'attaque privilégié, un moyen de forcer le réel à se relever, de conduire sa propre activité. 85

In a real sense, then, Queneau uses rhetorical devices for their own sake and forces them to declare their own artificiality. The obvious illustration of this approach is in his word-play, which like Joyce's can be considered purely gratuitous: if a word has humorous potential, it is there to be revealed. The joke is both coyly sexual and classically

84. ibid., p.33

85. M. Butor, 'Intervention à Royaumont', Essais sur le roman, p.17

allusive in Journal Intime⁸⁶ when Sally Mara begins her naive investigation into what distinguishes men from women, so that, when she knows the truth, she may be able to 'joindre l'outil à l'agréable'. Occasionally, the original word is qualified or commented upon by the distortions Queneau works upon it, as in the 'phallucinations' Sally experiences, the 'alcoolade' which greets her brother when he is released from prison. 'Inceste pas trop,' the cuckold Paul warns his brother-in-law in Le Dimanche de la Vie; the proviseur of Les Enfants du Limon is referred to as 'le pauvriseur'; the poet, des Cigales, has a room decorated with 'objets aussi faux que loriques', and so on. The joke is made first for its own sake, because it is there to be made, but, by its implications, it must impose a certain nuance on the identity of the characters involved, or even suggest, albeit ironically, a different, more fluid, dimension to their existence.

There are obvious affinities with the word-play in Ulysses:

Joyce pousse ses techniques de contrepoint verbal jusqu'à leurs plus extrêmes conséquences, accumulant à travers les déformations plusieurs significations superposées dans une même phrase, écrivant avec des mots anglais des parodies des textes étrangers, par exemple: "Wallaloo, Wallaloo, mourn is plein", à travers quoi nous entendons immédiatement: "Waterloo, Waterloo, morne plaine" et qui veut dire aussi: "Wallalha, Wallalha, le deuil est complet", et encore: "Wallalha, Wallalha, la lune est pleine!" Le langage se met à vivre d'une vie inquiétante. 87

The correspondences between Joyce's novel and The Odyssey are not only structural: the persistent reference to metempsychosis ('met-him-pike-hoses')

86. This appeared for the first time under the pseudonym of 'Sally Mara, traduit de l'anglais par M. Presle' (1950), as a following to a previous novel, On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes (1947), by the same imaginary pair. The project plainly owes its conception to Boris Vian. Both novels are set in Dublin, and the second, in particular, is a kind of 'homage' to Joyce.

87. M. Butor, 'A une reconnaissance de l'archipel Joyce', Essais sur les modernes, p.265

creates the climate in which a multiplicity of meanings can reasonably direct the flow of the novel at an alternative level to the objective one, and so allows ironic correspondence between the characters, if not spiritually, at least at the level of personality. As often as not, where Joyce uses mysticism as part of the devising, Queneau uses Freud to the same effect. Only rarely, on the other hand, does a pun relate directly to the rest of the novel, like the devinette Mme Cloche proposes in Le Chiendent:

- Eh bien voila. Ferme tes mains, ouvre les douas en même temps q'moua et compte : nain, deuil, toit, carte, sein, scie, sexe, huitre, oeuf et disque. Avec les douas d'pied on peut aller de bronze à vin, mais t'es trop soûl pour ça. 88

Each 'number' recalls a figure or event that has occurred previously in the novel, with disque referring to its cyclic nature and the last sentence reiterating the idea that one could start again, and start differently⁸⁹ (but perhaps, it is suggested, the reader, too, is dizzy after his mind has turned with the circles of the novel's structure). But even this is isolated. More commonly, the word-play alludes to a world outside that of the novel.

Plainly, Queneau's use of pun owes a great deal to the Surrealists, for whom paronomasia bears the same relation to hidden truth as did the acte manqué for Freud, as is shown by the 'Jeux de mots de Robert Desnos plongé dans le sommeil hypnotique':

Rose Sélavy

La soution d'un sage est-elle la pollution d'un page?
Rose Sélavy se demande si la mort des saisons fait tomber un
sort sur les maisons.

Rose Sélavy voudrait bien savoir si l'amour, cette colle à
mouches, rend plus dures les molles couches.

Pourquoi votre incarnat est-il devenu si terne, petite fille, dans
cet internat ou votre oeil se cerna?

Croyez-vous que Rose Sélavy connaisse ces jeux de fous qui
mettent le feu aux joues?

88. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent. p.294

89. Cf. Part 1, n.56

Est-ce que la caresse des putains excuse la paresse des culs teints?
Rose Sélavy propose que la pourriture des passions devienne la
nourriture des nations.

Rose Sélavy n'est pas persuadée que la culture du moi puisse
amener la moiteur du cul.

Devise de Rose Sélavy: Plus que poli pour être honnête.
Plus que poète pour être honni.

Amants tuberculeux, ayez des avantages phtisiques.¶

A tout miché, pesez Ricord.

Plus fait violer que doux sens. 90

In spite of his definite reaction against Surrealism, it is not surprising
to find evidence of Surrealist influence in Queneau's work. This is
often revealed merely in the tone of his narrative, for example, in the
levity of his approach to the macabre:

- Evidemment, évidemment, il y a l'incinération. On évite le
danger des inhumations précipitées.)

- Ça, c'est une sale histoire.

- Voilà une question qui me préoccupe énormément et à laquelle les
pouvoirs publics n'ont jamais apporté une attention suffisante.
Et pourtant c'est un danger réel. Il y aurait un moyen d'écartier
ce danger, ce serait d'installer des sonnettes dans les tombes.

- Ce n'est pas une mauvaise idée. Le macchabé sonnerait et quand
le gardien arriverait, il lui demanderait son café-crème et un
croissant.

- Il n'y a pas de quoi plaisanter, monsieur. 91

or in the succession of deliberately contrasting images which, despite
their denunciation of aesthetic restriction, is the controlling idea
behind much Surrealist writing⁹². There are other examples, in Queneau's
use of dream and fantasy, his clearly phenomenological approach to the
world of objects, and so on⁹³. But Queneau is never wholly serious in
his usage. While he often employs familiar techniques, at the same time
he also mocks those who depend on them and never more obviously than in

90. R. Desnos, Littérature 1.12.1922, collected in M. Nadeau, Histoire
du Surréalisme, p.283

91. R. Queneau, Les Derniers Jours. p;283

92. Queneau's awareness of this is indicated in an essay on Flaubert;
cf. Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.182

93. Cf. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.23

Journal Intime: the heroine systematically lays before the reader her own classically Freudian case-history of adolescent female sexuality. The candour with which she reveals such symptoms as penis-envy, without herself recognising the implications, should put the reader on his guard against Queneau's equivocation.

While in many ways this uncompromisingly rhetorical approach would seem to limit the novelist to a reliance on certain rigid structures, if he is as convinced as Queneau of the gratuitousness of any literary activity, he will feel free to impose his own structures according to the principles of personal formal preference, and this allows scope for self-expression. There must be order, but that order, so long as it is rigorous, can take any form:

...je me suis toujours astreint à suivre certaines règles qui n'avaient d'autres raisons que de satisfaire mon goût pour les chiffres ou des fantaisies strictement personnelles. 94

Queneau found it intolerable, we are told, to leave up to chance the task of deciding the number and arrangement of his chapters :

C'est ainsi que Le Chiendent se compose de 91 (7 x 13) sections, 91 étant la somme des treize premiers nombres et sa "somme" étant 1, c'est donc à la fois le nombre de la mort des êtres et celui de leur retour à l'existence, retour que je ne concevais alors que comme la perpétuité irrésoluble du malheur sans espoir. En ces temps là, je voyais dans 13 un numéro bénéfique parce qu'il niait le bonheur; quant à 7, je le prenais comme image numérique de moi-même, puisque mon nom et mes deux prénoms se composent chacun de sept lettres et que je suis né un 21. 95

Furthermore since his aesthetic allows him to use devices for their own sake, he is free to place his literary virtuosity on display. Queneau is by no means the first novelist to make exhibitionism an essential part of his fiction. The cue, in his case, almost certainly came from Joyce

94. R. Queneau, 'Conversation avec G. Ribemont-Dessaignes', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.42

95. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman', ibid, p.29

and, while Queneau turned to the technical innovations of fiction in English in answer to those critics close to him in 1930, the critics of the English-speaking world were not always ready to approve such displays among their own writers. For many of them the value of the novel in the twentieth century was taken for granted; what they resisted was the new importance given to technique. It is on these grounds that Edmund Wilson criticised Joyce:

Joyce has here half-buried his story under the virtuosity of his technical devices. It is almost as if he had elaborated it so much and worked it over so long that he had forgotten, in the amusement of writing parodies, the drama which he had originally intended to stage; or as if he were trying to divert and overwhelm us by irrelevant entertainments and feats in order that we might not be dissatisfied with the flatness... of Dedalus's final meeting with Bloom. 96

Significantly Edmund Wilson finds compensation for the deliberate lack of drama, the 'flatness' he finds in Ulysses, by a rationalisation which today is very difficult to accept. He assumes that since Odysseus and Telemachus achieved a great deal as a result of their meeting in Ithaca, then Joyce intended us to read the same dramatic significance into the meeting of Stephen and Bloom, in spite of the clear anti-climax of the text⁹⁷. The reader today is forced to recognise that Bloom's call for breakfast in bed, which Wilson interprets as a sign that he will once more become master in his own house, falls deliberately short of the heroics of Odysseus, and, indeed, that this is where the irony is at its most telling. Wilson's is a view which can only be accepted if the reader ignores the humorousness in the analogy Bloom - Odysseus,

96. E. Wilson, Axel's Castle, New York 1931. Fontana paperback, p.174

97. Michel Butor, although he is hardly critical, nevertheless, seeks the same consolation: 'Et pourtant, nous sentons que les événements de cette journée marqueront une trace profonde sur les deux chemins'. ('A une reconnaissance de l'archipel Joyce', Essais sur les modernes, p.257)

Stephen (Joyce) - Telemachus. If account is taken of this humour, it must be seen that the analogy is made for eventual deflation. Nevertheless, nearly thirty years after Wilson's largely appreciative essay on Ulysses, J.I.M. Stewart can make substantially the same complaint:

...[Joyce's disciples] are fond of expounding the successive episodes in terms of an intricate superimposition of framework upon framework: organs, arts, colours, symbols and technics. Read, however, without all this instruction, Ulysses may strike us as a large-scale improvisation, a hand-to-mouth progression from stunt to stunt... to a final effect of agglomeration before which any summing up, any secure arriving at a right aesthetic total, is singularly hard to achieve. 98

Just like Edmund Wilson, Stewart assumes that Joyce should mainly be concerned with 'staging a drama'. What he is calling for is a more simple narrative presentation, and yet, it is because he dismissed such an approach that Joyce has been most influential, particularly in France. In the succession of parodies which make up the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode and which has provoked a large measure of this criticism, Joyce anticipates the New Novelists and challenges the 'notion that there exist absolute forms of representation'⁹⁹. Queneau's Exercices de Style make a challenge along the same lines which is even more direct in that it dispenses with narrative progression altogether.¹⁰⁰

Queneau was not the first to introduce the tactics of Exercices de Style into French literary practice. Their chief virtue in many cases is to startle the reader with the deliberately unfamiliar, for which there are obvious precedents, in particular among the Surrealists. Even before the Surrealists, Marinetti, for example, anticipates Queneau by

98. J.I.M. Stewart, James Joyce, London, British Council and National Book League, 1957, p.30

99. J. Sturrock, The French New Novel, p.4

100. Cf. Part 1, n.66

a number of years in the introduction of mathematical formulations¹⁰¹. However, whereas these earlier examples tend to be isolated in the form of 'textes surréalistes', or at least in short stories, most of the devices Queneau isolates in Exercices de Style have been used several times within his novels. His originality lies in his ability to sustain his virtuosity. Critics have tended to overstate the destructive aspect of Queneau's work, and particularly of Exercices de Style:

On a voulu voir là une tentative de démolition de la littérature, ce n'était pas du tout dans mes intentions... Le résultat c'est peut-être de décaper la littérature de ses rouilles diverses, de ses croûtes. Si j'avais pu contribuer un peu à cela, j'en serais bien fier, surtout si je l'ai fait sans trop ennuyer le lecteur. 102

In exploring the limits of rhetoric, Queneau is attempting to extend the stylistic boundaries of the novel. It appears virtually certain that the Joycean manner, which asserts the continued relevance of the novel precisely by challenging traditional approaches, has created the climate within which Queneau works.

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d) Poetry and the novel

Of these approaches, the most enduring is the notion, implicit in the arguments of both Edmund Wilson and J.I. M. Stewart, that, as distinct from poetry, the novel is the form a writer chooses when he has an idea to communicate and which he sets out to contain within the

101. Cf. F-T. Marinetti, 'Train de soldats malades', "40 Km. à l'heure 45 = pression grandissante sur les viscères qui vont encore à la vitesse de 30 Km. armée des ferments lactiques + armée de levure de bière 900,000 microbes bataille dans un pays secoué par un tremblement de terre..." Indeed Marinetti anticipates Queneau in more ways than this: "Avant la guerre déjà, Marinetti avait réclamé la suppression de la syntaxe et la libération des mots." (M. Raymond, De Baudelaire au Surréalisme, Paris 1940, p.241

102. R. Queneau, 'Conversation avec G. Ribemont-Dessaignes', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.43

structure of his fiction. Paul Valéry's rejection of the novel is based on this assumption:

... un roman peut-être resumé, c'est à dire raconté lui-même; il supporte qu'on en déduise une figure semblable; il contient donc toute une part qui peut, à volonté, devenir implicite. 103

This, of course, makes the critic's task much easier, for he can measure the success of a novel by the quality with which the pre-established idea, that part which can be summed up, is conveyed. It will be remembered that this is precisely the complaint Stewart makes against Ulysses ('any summing up ... is singularly hard to achieve'¹⁰⁴). Not surprisingly, the notion has been disputed. As early as 1929 the Transition proclamation stated as its eleventh principle that the writer - novelist or otherwise - 'expresses, he does not communicate'¹⁰⁵. For some time, the principle has been accepted, virtually unchallenged, as far as poetry is concerned. If a poem communicates anything, it is the poet's sense of aesthetic values. On the other hand, as regards the novel, the point is still under contention.¹⁰⁶ For Queneau, there is no question:

Je n'ai jamais vu de différences essentielles entre le roman, tel que j'ai envie d'en écrire, et la poésie. 107

The whole manner of Queneau's fiction, from his first novel, must be seen in the context of this desire to give his narrative the aspect and the density of poetry:

103. P. Valéry, 'Homage à Marcel Proust', Oeuvres 1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris 1957, p.771

104. Cf. Part 1, n.98

105. Cf. Part 1, n.21

106. Cf. D. Lodge, Language of Fiction, London 1966, part 1, pp.3-98

107. R. Queneau, 'Conversation avec G. Ribemont-Dessaignes', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.43

The rigid inner structure of Le Chiendent...represents Queneau's desire to achieve a poetic novel: numbers, after all, are the basis of poetic structure. 108

More obviously than the novel, poetry aims at the reader's appreciation. There is no attempt to engage his belief¹⁰⁹. The devices a poet uses, rhythm, metre, rhyme, etc., all serve to weal the essential contrivance of the art. In Queneau's novels, corresponding devices are used (and clearly underlined) so that the reader has no choice but to give the novel the same close attention as he would give a poem.

A theme which Queneau shares with Joyce, and which is in turn borrowed from Vico, as Joyce acknowledges in the first sentence of Finnegan's Wake¹¹⁰, is the self-negating circle turned by all human thoughts and actions. The simple device of rhyme allows him to echo this theme in the structure of his novels, or, more properly, the structure allows both the novelist and his reader to discover the full significance of the pattern. So, the first and last two sentences of Le Chiendent are exactly the same; the brother-in-law of Le Dimanche de la Vie is given a different name each time he is mentioned, except for the first and last, which, again, are exactly the same. As Queneau

108. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.82

109. Cf. D.I. Grossvogel, Limits of the Novel, New York 1968, p.1

110. 'Riverun, past Eve and Adam's from swerve of shore to bend of bay brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation, back to Howth Castle and Environs.' It is a sentence which anticipates the progress of the whole novel. Queneau makes his acknowledgement to Vico in the preface to Une Histoire Modèle (Paris 1966), and implicitly throughout each section of the book.

says, 'Le cercle se referme et rejoint exactement son point de départ.'¹¹¹
By his own admission these are rather obvious examples¹¹², but, he
indicates, they do not represent the limits of the device's possibilities:

On peut faire rimer des situations ou des personnages comme on
fait rimer des mots, on peut même se contenter d'allitérations. 113

The main feature of Queneau's 'extension of certain poetic conventions
to the novel form,' say Brée and Guiton, is not,

as with the surrealists, the convention of metaphor, which he uses
sparingly, but that of repetition... A sentence, perhaps a single
word, recurs insistently. Characters alone or in groups of two or
three,...advance and retreat at regular intervals and mirror each
other's words and gestures. 114

Le Dimanche de la Vie begins and ends with a search for Valentin Brû,
in more or less the same circumstances and involving the same characters.
Whatever happens in the novel simply displaces the characters geographically,
and wherever they find themselves brings them back to the start of
something we have seen them begin elsewhere. All activity is reduced
to ritual because the process of writing a novel is itself fundamentally
ritualistic.

The structural rhyming of Les Derniers Jours is altogether more
intricate¹¹⁵: the main feature of the pattern is that it rhymes the
theme of disillusion with the theme of death. The 'last days' of the
title refers to the eventual death of three old men (Brabant, Tolut
and Brenuire père) and to the final disillusionment of the trio of
students (Tuquedenne, Rohel and Brenhuire fils), who depart for military

111. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.28

112. ibid., p.29

113. ibid., p.42

114. G. Brée and M. Guiton, An Age of Fiction (The French Novel), p.170

115. Cf. O. de Magny, 'Préface', Les Derniers Jours, pp.17-19

service at the novel's close. Accordingly, the deflation of Tolut's self-satisfaction occurs just as an obsession with death begins to grow in his mind; his deflation becomes the sudden anguish of the geography teacher who has never left France and who is brought to discover the falseness of his own prestige. He eventually makes one journey to London, but his feelings of alienation only serve to accentuate his anguish, (he goes to London to visit his dying brother). His departure rhymes with the earlier departure of the student Hublin, who disappears to South America to the amazement and admiration of his fellows. But this, too, is a deception; he returns to France and reveals his materialistic motives to his friends.

Hublin le conquistador n'a donc découvert que les pantoufles avunculaires et la somnolente mère patrie du lieu commun. 116

Tolut's realisation that he is an imposter rhymes with the deflation of Hublin's prestige as an adventurer. Moreover, each minor incident which occurs within this pattern echoes a more critical incident in the novel's development. These in turn have their particular significance deflated when they are reported in two or three lines of the newspapers' faits divers, secondary to the heavyweight boxing titles and the execution of famous criminals, which dominate the headlines. Even these, with the defeat of the French champion and the death of Landru, echo the central equation.

The equation itself is by no means original. Queneau is not trying to point a moral but, again, using a commonplace idea as the foundation for his formal devising: all these internal rhymes and echoes are

enclosed 'dans la circularité du regard d'Alfred',

erratum -> pour lequel il n'y a pas d'avenir, puisqu'il déchiffre la gravitation circulaire des planètes qui règle tout. 117

This intricate system of formal dependence has its pattern completed by the enclosing circle. Valéry thought such finality peculiar to poetry:

[le roman] peut être développé intérieurement ou prolongé à l'infini, comme il peut être lu en plusieurs séances... Il n'y a d'autres bornes à sa durée et à sa diversité que celles mêmes des loisirs et forces de son lecteur. 118

What Queneau does is to turn his novel into an object no less immutable than poetry.

In this context, the full significance of Queneau's approach to language in fiction also becomes clear: his ironic style points to the artificiality of his art and therefore objectifies it. The Homeric parodies, the style parlé, the juxtaposition of extremes, are all part of a manner which is above all a poetic manner. Even the 'phonetic' spelling,

bien qu'elle restitue assez exactement la prononciation courante, ne se limite pas à cet humble rôle, mais crée un choc poétique de dépassement. 119

The lines of Queneau's defence of the novel are thus highlighted: the novel must survive if poetry survives. Any critic who undertakes a defence of poetry is implicitly defending the novel at the same time. The critic who attempts to argue the redundancy of the novel because of certain essential features is probably mistaken in judging those features essential. If he is not, he is also arguing the redundancy of poetry

117. ibid., p.16

118. P. Valéry, 'Hommage à Marcel Proust', Oeuvres 1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, p.772

119. J. Bory, 'Poésie et français parlé', Romanic Review 1966, no.57, p.44

without knowing it, since any feature which can be judged to be really essential to the novel must be so basic as to be held in common with poetry. They can be reduced to the simple statement that the writer is using language to create something imaginary within a certain framework.

Much of Queneau's questioning of the novel, therefore, has taken the form of discrediting those features which traditionally have been thought essential. In this he has largely anticipated the iconoclasm of the New Novelists. They have quarreled, above all, with what Sturrock calls

the consolation of a mechanistic sequence of events, with its confident marriage of cause and effect, and of an essentialist psychology which lends spurious coherence to the activity of unknowable other minds. 120

Almost twenty years before the beginnings of the New Novel, Queneau showed his awareness of the 'spuriousness' of such prefabricated coherence, a fact which Alain Robbe-Grillet acknowledges:

Il faut souligner ici l'importance... des romans de Raymond Queneau (Le Chiendent et Loin de Rueil en particulier) dont la trame souvent et toujours de mouvement sont d'une façon rigoureuse ceux de l'imagination. 121

In those early novels Queneau substituted an absurdly arbitrary mathematical progression for the traditional cause and effect sequence. The dénouement of all his novels depends on a series of coincidences generally so numerous and so fantastic as to cancel out the idea of action, as such, altogether.¹²² Queneau's is most definitely not a comedy of

120. J. Sturrock, The French New Novel, p.9

121. A. Robbe-Grillet, 'Du réalisme à la réalité', Pour un nouveau roman, Paris 1963: Gallimard ('Idées'), p.177

122. Queneau is most clearly 'phenomenological' in the manner of the New Novelists in Loin de Rueil. When anything actually happens in the novel, it is unexplained. We are simply presented with the fact of its occurrence, which usually does not depend on anything which has preceded it in the plot.

character; he is particularly careful to make the response itself, rather than the character making it, bear the brunt of ridicule. He shies away from comedy of character partly because, like the New Novelists, he doubts the possibility of giving anyone, real or imaginary, a conclusive psychology. Indeed his latest novel, Le Vol d'Icare, makes fun of the novelist whose practice it is to give his characters a ready-made past and a ready-made psychology on which the future action of the novel will depend. Icarus, the hero of a newly-begun novel (twelve pages old) escapes from between the pages because he objects to what his author has in store for him. He is conceived as a romantic, conventionally poetic and melancholy. Given his freedom, he becomes a remarkably efficient garage mechanic. His escape sets off an epidemic. To the Paris of the late 1890's is added a growing population of fictional characters who discover their 'real selves' and revolt against their pre-ordained psychology¹²³. There is an obvious parallel in the conception of this novel with Flann O'Brien's At-Swim-Two-Birds, not only in the notion of a novelist's characters rebelling against his autocracy, but also in the snowball effect this has among the characters of his fellow-novelists. Although O'Brien's novel was translated into French in 1964,¹²⁴ and Queneau is likely to have read it then because of his position with Gallimard,¹²⁵ if he had not done so already, it is unwise to suggest any borrowing on Queneau's part. Queneau's characters have been aware of their own fictitiousness since his first novel;¹²⁶ it is

123. The Sartrean implications are obviously intentional. The novel ends with a cunning ambiguity: Icarus tries to fly and falls to his death. Either it is an aggressive Sartrean gesture or, exactly the opposite, Icarus is reverting to his name-type.

124. Kermesse Irlandaise, translated by H. Morisset, Paris (Gallimard) 1964

125. Queneau joined Gallimard as lecteur d'anglais in 1938. He has been Secretary General since 1941.

126. Cf. Part 1, n.23

almost logical that they should eventually try to break out.¹²⁷ The parallel is nevertheless interesting in that it represents two very similar advances from what is unmistakably a Joycean approach to fiction.

Here, then, is the key to the ambiguity of Queneau's position in the tradition of the French novel. On the one hand we see a deliberate reaction against Surrealism and against the theories of critics such as Valéry and Breton, on the other an equally deliberate iconoclasm faced with the problems of the novel in France. Martin Esslin sees Queneau as 'an original thinker...of particular importance'

in that his thought represents a point of intersection between French existentialism on the one hand and Anglo-Saxon linguistic philosophy on the other. 128

The two modes of thought would appear utterly unconnected and so, without taking Esslin's assessment too literally, the reader can see in it an indication of the breadth of Queneau's activity. The fact is that Existentialism provides raw material for the exercise of the second 'philosophy' Esslin mentions (just as Freudianism does elsewhere¹²⁹) and that Queneau's irony tends, on the whole, to condemn the methodology of Existentialism.¹³⁰ The problem is further complicated by the fact that Queneau began writing at a time when literary movements were once more transcending national barriers and in the place on which so much of this activity was centred. Thanks to the influence of figures such as Gide, Jean Paulhan and Edmund Wilson, literature in English was having an increasingly decisive effect on the directions the French tradition would take. Queneau was the first French writer to react in

127. It is possible, moreover, that the source of the idea, in both cases, is Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author.

128. M. Esslin, 'R. Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.79

129. Cf. p.36

130. Cf. Part 3, (d)

any comprehensive way to the particular example of Joyce, and it is largely through Queneau that Joyce has been assimilated into the French tradition more fully, probably, than he has either in England or in America. It is not surprising, then, notwithstanding his anticipation of the New Novelists, to find Queneau unwilling to refute the past as Robbe-Grillet has done. His essays, on the contrary, tend to speak out in defence of those novelists whom fashion rejects. Like Joyce, he must recognise just how much his highly allusive approach depends on that 'immensely literate and literary tradition' with which writers are trying to break in both the English and French-speaking worlds.¹³¹

131. Cf. F. Kermodé, 'Is an élite necessary?' The Listener, 29.10.1970

Part 2. The relation of theme to technique

a) The significance of parody

Queneau's Saint Glinglin was published in its final form in 1948. It combines in revised versions two previous novels, Gueule de Pierre (1934) and its sequel Les Temps Mêlés (1941), with a coda, 'Saint Glinglin', added to the final chapter.¹ Gueule de Pierre was Queneau's second published novel. It continues in the consciously fictional vein established by Le Chiendent. Martin Esslin finds in the whole 'trilogy'

an attempt at retelling the myth of the son's killing of the father which Queneau found in Freud's Totem and Taboo.²

This holds true, however, only for Gueule de Pierre (in both versions). Both chapters of this first section concern the expanding consciousness of Pierre, the mayor's eldest son. The first shows Pierre in a foreign capital supposedly learning the language. In fact he spends his whole time in an aquarium contemplating different species of fish. The chapter is written, it would seem, in the form of a pastiche of Pascal contemplating the stars. In the unease which the fish provoke in Pierre's consciousness are the seeds of his revolt against his father's authority. In Freudian terms, the awareness of his father's fallibility is caused by the realisation, at first unwilling, that there are phenomena beyond the father's understanding. The fact that Pierre's mind is at an embryonic stage is suggested by the distortions Queneau works on the word existence: fish have an aiguesistence (which plays on the homonymity of the modern French aigu and the Old French form of agua³), lobster

1. For detailed analysis of the variation between the first and the revised versions (more radical in Les Temps Mêlés than Gueule de Pierre), cf. G. Bataille: 'La méchanceté du langage' Critique, no.31, Dec. 1948

2. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.87

3. which, of course, survives into modern French in several forms: aiguade, aiguail, aigue-morte, etc.

an ogresistence and Pierre an eggzistence.

Against his father's wishes, he returns home for the Fête du Printannier, an annual occasion attracting a long stream of tourists. With the anticipation of the Fête and its climax in the background, Pierre's obsessive unease reaches its own climax when he feels driven to address the people on the subject of marine life. A further Freudian twist, which gives a second meaning to eggzistence, is added when Pierre reaches his conclusion:

Ah bon, il suppose qu'on ne comprend pas. Son petit voyage l'a rendu crâneur. C'est ça: qu'il essplique par des egzamples. Ça ne ferait pas mal après tout, car c'est pas bien clair ce qu'il dit. Koua koua? la Vie Foetus? On ne peut pas s'empêcher de rigoler en entendant ça. Ah bon, s'il vient ici pour raconter des saloperies, on va peut-être s'en payer une tranche. Et il continue. Il continue et il a l'air convaincu de ce qu'il raconte. Il prétend maintenant que la vie c'est bien souvent quaique chose de difficile et de dur et on sait jamais ce qui vous attend. Et qu'on a du souci dans la vie et des embêtements et des ennuis et des maladies et des deuils. En conséquence de quoye il a l'idée comme ça qu'on était plus tranquille quand on était dans le ventre de la mère, bien que ce soye un peu cochon de dire tout haut des choses comme ça. 4

As a result of this address, Pierre is publicly humiliated by his father, who, in so doing, brings about his own assassination. The whole trilogy, however, is also open to religious interpretation, seen by Paul Gayot as the cycle 'du Paradis perdu au Paradis retrouvé'⁵ The mayor is killed and his successor, Pierre, abolishes the institution of the 'chasse-nuages' which ensured unending fine weather. This is succeeded by perpetual rain, and Pierre is deposed. The fine weather is eventually restored by the self-sacrifice of Jean, who has taken over as mayor: by some hideous device which requires a human in the attitude of crucifixion, he replaces the 'chasse-nuages' himself, and the youngest brother, Paul, becomes mayor. The sequence is revolt against the Creator, chaos and,

4. R. Queneau, Saint Glinglin, Paris 1948, p.88b

5. P. Gayot, Queneau, Paris 1967, p.85

redemption. Neither interpretation of the novel (Freudian or religious) excludes the other. It is typical of Queneau that in his construction he should use to the same effect two interpretations of the human condition which, traditionally at least, are mutually exclusive.

The background against which this drama is set itself presents a fairly clear pastiche of the kind of picture given of Spanish custom (bullfights, fiestas, and the endless drinking rituals) typified by Hemingway in The Sun Also Rises⁶ (1927) and Death in the Afternoon (1932). In 1936, between Gueule de Pierre and the appearance of its sequel, Queneau went to Spain with Michel Leiris. They saw a bullfight and we learn from Leiris⁷ that Queneau was rather less than impressed. It would seem that he underwent some kind of reaction when faced with the reality behind Hemingway's self-acclaimed 'honesty and true, not tricked, emotion'⁸. The irony of Les Temps Mêlés, which uses the same background as Gueule de Pierre, is recognisably less gentle: the pastiche has become parody⁹. When Pierre destroys the 'chasse-nuages' and it rains for the first time in La Ville Natale, the 'statue' of his father, 'ce grand cadavre devenu minéral'¹⁰, begins to melt.

Les yeux qui n'avaient jusqu'alors, depuis midi, absorbé que des signes humides se portèrent sur la statue au passage, et l'on commença de faire ah, ah, ah, car la statue fondait.

Dussouchel, également charmé par cette divinité locale, suivait passionnément le procès de dissolution. La couche minérale ne faisait plus armure, elle cessa soudain d'être, et le cadavre s'affala, pourissant soudain avec intensité. 11

6. Perhaps significantly also entitled Fiesta: the 'full' title of Queneau's novel might be La Fête de la Saint Glinglin.

7. M. Leiris, 'Surréalisme', in J. Bens, R. Queneau, Paris, 1962, p.13

8. E. Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, New York 1932. Penguin, London 1966, p.15

9. Cf. 'In defence of the Novel', n.40

10. Pierre's father dies by falling into 'le lac pétrifiant'. His petrified corpse is exhibited as a statue in the city square.

11. R. Queneau, Saint Glinglin, p.191

The deadpan tone and the concentration upon apparently objective description parodies the Hemingway manner, as when he speaks in Death in the Afternoon of the 'visceral accident' of a horse disembowelled in the bullring¹². The suggestion of satire becomes noticeable as soon the reader's attention is focused on the tourists. Three of these correspond in more ways than one to Hemingway's group in The Sun Also Rises: Alice Phaye,¹³ the film star, becomes involved with Paul, Pierre's younger brother (who, admittedly, cuts a considerably less impressive figure than Pedro Romero) and so incurs the jealousy of her two companions, one of whom, like Robert Cohn, spends the whole fiesta in his hotel room recovering from what is presumably too much to drink¹⁴.

The Spaniards Hemingway creates are easily fooled by his swagger:

I went down the street looking for the shop that made leather wine bottles...

'What are you going to do? Sell them in Bayonne?'

'No. Drink out of them.'

He slapped me on the back.

'Good man, Eight pesetas for the two. The lowest price.'

Anticipating a cynical reader, he adds:

The man who was stencilling the new ones and tossing them into a pile stopped.

'It's true,' he said. 'Eight pesetas is cheap.' 15

Queneau's 'Urbinaliens' are more able to see through the foreigners' pose, particularly that of 'toutistes habitués..... aficionados de la Saint Glinglin, férus de printannier et gobeleurs du fifrequet¹⁶':

- Et vous mademoiselle, désirez-vous que rien ne soit changé à l'ordonnance de la Fête?

Se souvenant de son père, il ajouta:

- Car je suis ici le maire.

Alice qui trouvait naturelle cette galanterie, émit les paroles

12. E. Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, pp.9-12

13. Cecile Hays in the first version.

14. Cf. R. Queneau, Saint Glinglin, p.160

15. E. Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises, New York 1927. Complete in The Essential Hemingway, London, Penguin, 1964, p.120

16. R. Queneau, Saint Glinglin, p.160

suivantes:

- Oui, je désire.
- Alors mademoiselle, monsieur, vous assisterez encore cette année à une Saint Glinglin classique... 17

'Classical' is a word which tends to recur in Hemingway. It is essential to his pose of connoisseur:

Finally, when they have learned to appreciate values through experience, what they seek... is always classicism and the purity of execution of all suertes, and, as in the change in taste for wines, they want no sweetening but prefer to see the horse with no protection worn so that all wounds may be seen and death given rather than suffering caused by something designed to allow the horse to suffer while their suffering is spared the spectator. 18

In the chapter entitled 'Les Touristes', the endless obligatory drinking bouts, the reverence for local wines, and so on, rather affectionately depicted in Gueule de Pierre, have their vacuousness clearly emphasised:

- Q Qui vous a dit ça?
- Des gens d'ici que j'ai rencontrés.
- Ou ça?
- Dans une taverne.
- Ca ne m'étonne pas, esplosa Le Busoqueux. Croyez rien de ce qu'on raconte dans ces bas endroits. Mais quelle idée d'aller là? Dussouchel avala cette grossièreté et répondit faiblement:
- On m'avait recommandé le fifrequet de l'année ou Yves-Albert Tromath gagna le Prix Triomphal de Printannier.
- J'en ai bu du meilleur, dit Le Bu.
- Je n'étais pas invité.
- Allons en vider une bouteille.
- Bonne idée, dit Saimpier 19

In imaginative literature any such persistent allusion to existing literature necessarily has the effect of emphasising the formal aspect and therefore shifting the significance of the particular work out of the usual context in which it either reflects life or reflects on it, and into that context where, initially at least, it relates only to literary tradition. Such practice has the preliminary effect of

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- 17. R. Queneau, Saint Glinglin, p.165
 - 18. E. Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, p.15
 - 19. R. Queneau, Saint Glinglin, p.175

undermining the story's credibility. For D.I. Grossvogel, the modern novelist should assume that credibility is already lost:

The devising which is the novel starts after the loss of faith, once successful imitation has become problematical because of a reader who refuses the subterfuge of the word and shows his sophistication through his interest in the mode of an author's fiction rather than in the fiction's simple statement. 20

Where Queneau aims to ensure this loss of faith through irony and to fix the reader's attention on the formal arrangement, Grossvogel insists that technique must consist of the author's effort to re-engage the reader's belief. He can, for example, resort to the device of engaging the reader at the level of dialogue. In this respect, an author's pose of disclaiming his characters' reality, as when 'Cervantes' joins in the mockery of Don Quixote, Sterne betrays Walter Shandy, Kafka plays tricks Joseph K.', is part of the devising. The author pretends to assume that his fiction is 'mere pattern - a recognisably fraudulent object'²⁰, but

this is generally but the author's preliminary guile: if he can engage his reader in a dialogue about the literary circumstances of his characters and their actions, the extrafictional nature of that dialogue will give a first measure of reality to those characters; to talk even disparagingly about someone is to acknowledge his existence. 21

If this is not so, if alienation is an end in itself, then the art fails in what seems to Grossvogel its function: it avoids 'the human appeal and the human quandary for an impersonal aesthetic', leaving the writer someone

concerned primarily with not being a dupe, a purposeless Cervantes standing off his creation by means of irony and refusing to consider it more than a game. Such pattern without purpose... represents little more than dereliction on the part of the author - an acceptance of new elements however they may impoverish his writing, rather than an attempt to overcome them. 22

What Grossvogel's approach overlooks is that the creation of such 'pattern without purpose' may express an author's attitude which

20. D.I. Grossvogel, The Limits of the Novel, New York 1968, p.256

21. ibid., p.257

22. ibid., p.258

is anything but 'dehumanized'.²³ As is the case with Queneau, it may express two things: first a profound uncertainty about the value of human judgements (his primary concern, rather than with not being a dupe himself, is with the gullibility of men who accept such judgements on face value), second, a belief in the capacity of literature constructed according to an impersonal aesthetic to discover the kind of human predicament and moral truth which Grossvogel feels, a writer should be using all his guile to express in credible form. In Queneau's own words, a certain approach to literature can imply the essence of certain philosophies, just as a writer can imply the essence of life by describing an egg.²⁴ According to such a view, the writer's responsibility is aesthetic; it is not to use technique purposefully as means of illustrating a truth already discovered. The impersonal approach has the potential to give new insights into the human quandary. Grossvogel's, if it is the only one, can only present in a different way an already established idea, which, as Valéry suggests,²⁵ can always be reduced to its original form. Grossvogel is, therefore, unwittingly arguing the superfluousness of the novel.

23. Grossvogel substantiates his argument by reference to Ortega y Gasset's The Dehumanization of Art. He is presumably referring specifically to the conclusion of the chapter entitled 'Artistic Art'.

'When we analyze the new style we find that it contains certain closely connected tendencies. It tends (1) to dehumanize art, (2) to avoid living forms, (3) to see to it that the work of art is nothing but a work of art, (4) to consider art as play and nothing else, (5) to be essentially ironical, (6) to beware of sham and hence to aspire to scrupulous realization, (7) to regard art as a thing of no transcending consequence.' (The Dehumanization of Art, and other essays on art, culture and literature, by J. Ortega y Gasset, translated into the American by H. Weyl, Princeton 1948, new edition 1968, p.14)

Grossvogel fails to point out that Ortega's essay was first published in 1925, that those works which are 'new' to Ortega are the same near-classics to which Grossvogel himself refers approvingly, and that Ortega's essay is far less tendentious than we might otherwise imagine. 'I have been moved', he says in his conclusion, 'exclusively by the delight of trying to understand.' (ibid., p.53)

24. Cf. 'Interview', p.

25. Cf. Part 1, p.40, n.103

In his essay on L'École des Femmes, Jacques Guicharnaud argues that the significant innovation of Molière's play lies in the fact that the mask of farce 'suddenly becomes three-dimensional'. In all his attitudes except one, Arnolphe is a reasonable man holding conventional bourgeois attitudes. The comedy therefore directly involves the reality of the spectator's own potential raideur in relation to specific issues. Arnolphe's obsession is an analogy for the mania of all otherwise reasonable men:

Although Harlequin when he is now revived remains an esthetic delight and even a reminder of the essence of theatre, Arnolphe is truer, while just as stylized: Harlequin speaks to us of theatre, Arnolphe speaks to us of man. 26

The masks of Queneau's fiction are without exception one-dimensional, his primary aim is aesthetic achievement; his novels speak to us directly of literature, not of man. All this suggests a movement back towards the commedia dell'arte (or at least an acceptance of its premises), which itself is consistent with what Queneau calls his 'nostalgie de la littérature innocente'²⁷. For Grossvogel, the fact that Queneau's novels go no deeper than his characters' masks should be sufficient reason to dismiss him, as indeed he does²⁸. Yet to be consistent with his own basic assumptions, he is wrong to do so, because Queneau's novels are incidentally characterised by a few powerful and recurrent 'human' themes. These themes are discovered by a technique which rejects the usual mimetic conventions. The aim, as Michel Butor sees it,²⁹ is to force reality to reveal itself.

26. J. Guicharnaud, 'Introduction', Molière, 20th Century Views, ed. J. Guicharnaud, New Jersey, 1964, p.5

27. Cf. 'Interview', p.128

28. Though on other grounds: Limits of the Novel, p.42-3, 'Like all surrealist novels...no more than mood creations, polemics, or humorous fantasy.' (of Pierrot mon ami)

29. Cf. Part 1, n.85

A device Queneau frequently uses to this effect is the technique of incongruous substitutions: A recognisably conventional form of human activity is replaced throughout the novel by an incongruous convention. What the technique discovers is the mechanics of human activity, since the imaginary convention appears no more absurd than the real one. This perception explains, in part, at least, Queneau's preoccupation with 'les fous littéraires', those men who propose alternative premises for human behaviour without achieving any following for their theories. What is questioned is not the fallacy of their assumptions but the justification for our own. Accordingly, in several of Queneau's novels some kind of clairvoyance replaces rational thought as the motivation for characters' actions;³⁰ in Le Dimanche de la Vie. Valentin receives metaphysical guidance from the imbecile, Jean Sans-Tête; in Pierrot mon ami, Pierrot's human companions are replaced by two animals. Indeed, in this case, the reader is introduced to them first as Pierrot's work-mates. It is only after they have been seen to achieve some kind of harmonious relationship based on mutual understanding that we discover that one is a chimpanzee, the other a wild boar. The picture Queneau presents, on the other hand, is hardly utopian. Pierrot's companions are by no means perfect; their weaknesses are manifold. As Yvonne, who shares their bedroom says,

Le petit sanglier était bien gentil, mais le singe, quel cochon! 31
Condemnation, therefore, is not always implied in the device. Its function is to isolate features of human behaviour and objectify them. In this perspective, Queneau's 'phonetic spelling' can be seen as part of the same design:

30. This plays a major role in Les Dernier Jours and Le Dimanche de la Vie.

31. R. Queneau, Pierrot mon ami, p. 169

Sous la plume de Queneau le langage se fait étrange. D'abord parce qu'il est écrit. Le mot le plus connu devient méconnaissable, brusquement ramené à ce qu'il cachait d'arbitraire, de cri d'animal mécanique, si sa graphie transcrit la prononciation. 32,33

Queneau's phoneticism often emphasises not the word's real meaning but its objective existence. As Etienne says in Le Chiendent,

Les mots aussi sont des objets fabriqués. On peut les envisager indépendamment de leur sens. 34

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b) One paragraph from Loin de Rueil

Since the assumption is that the human appeal Grossvogel demands will be implied as a necessary incidental of the technical exercise, it is revealing to consider a passage from one of Queneau's novels to see precisely what can be inferred at the level of detail. Several passages invite such close examination because of deliberate and easily discernible stylistic distinctions which isolate them from their context. A particular example from Loin de Rueil shows the poet, des Cigales, suffering an attack of asthma³⁵.

The passage is rendered as one long paragraph which represents a hiatus in the first chapter, otherwise entirely made up of conversations which serve to introduce most of the characters who will appear in the novel. Even typographically, then, it stands out as a solid chunk of prose surrounded by fragments of dialogue. For the convenience of

32. Y. Belaval, 'L'Envers du lyrisme', Poèmes d'aujourd'hui, Paris 1964 p.153

33. Incongruous substitution is used to objectify a different feature of language in Loin de Rueil: lice become the subject of ritual conversations where normally we would expect to hear about the weather. Cf. 'The theme of language and communication', p.72

34. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, p.126

35. It is a scene which has occurred in a previous novel. Cf. Les Enfants du Limon, pp.204-206

reference, the paragraph has been divided into fifty-six separate breath-units,³⁶ that is, into units determined by pauses which seem imposed by the meaning, the syntax, or by Queneau's own punctuation.³⁷ At the end of each enumerated unit the number of syllables it contains is noted.³⁸ The pattern created by the particular relation of the number of syllables in each breath-unit to the number of units in the paragraph is most clearly shown in the appended graph.³⁹

By dividing the number of syllables in the whole passage by the number of breath-units, we find that the average unit is between twelve and fifteen syllables long. The reader can assume those units of under six syllables to be significantly short, those of over twenty-eight significantly long. As the graph shows, there are three sections in the passage containing one or two significantly long units, and four containing a succession of significantly short units. The shortest (numbers thirty-seven to forty-one) is juxtaposed with the longest (forty-two and forty-three).

The shorter units appear, at first, an attempt to give the reader an objective idea of what it feels like to be Louis-Phillipe des Cigales during an attack of asthma; the longer ones use metaphor⁴⁰ and abstraction

36. Cf. 'Appendix', pp. 137-139

37. Obviously there are cases which are open to discussion, where allowance is made for a pause which another reader may consider unnecessary and vice versa. Cf. 'Appendix', 138, n.l.

38. Again, this may be the source of possible difference, particularly since the passage is rendered in a style parlé: French pronunciation is by no means uniform and, in such a case, there are no applicable syllabic conventions. Neither of these instances of possible disagreement is significant, since it is the general syllabic pattern of the whole paragraph which is being shown, not that of particular breath-units.

39. Cf. 'Appendix' (d), p. 140

40. In particular that of the landed fish, which is also prominent in the corresponding passage from Les Enfants du Limon (Cf. n.35), as is the association of physical pain with metaphysical anguish.

to suggest analogies. At the level of words and their meaning, the attempt fails. But the failure of words is contrived by the author so that a greater effectiveness may be achieved by the paragraph as a whole.⁴¹

In the pattern of 'stop and try again', which is repeated throughout the passage, is suggested the desperation of Louis-Philippe des Cigales trying and failing to draw a satisfactory breath:

on ne peut pas dire qu'il halète, non on ne peut pas dire ça mais
il est affligé en ce moment.....⁴²

The device Queneau is applying clearly demands the participation of the reader's imagination. It can best be appreciated if the reader imagines himself reciting the passage out loud: the longer units leave him out of breath, the shorter ones involve him, like des Cigales, in the process of trying to get his breath back. Those units of around average length (whose arrangement echoes the more extreme pattern) use up the breath that has just been retrieved, and so ensure that the reader is never quite 'ahead'. This lends an air of desperation to the whole procedure. Significantly, too, three of the paragraph's last six units are of more than twenty syllables. The imaginative reader will feel, at least mentally, out of breath by the end of the passage.

The length of breath units 3, 23, 42, 43, 52 and 56 also indicate des Cigales' attempt to resist the symptoms of his condition. They suggest an attempt, on the one hand, at calm detachment (particularly since they represent an attempted abstraction) and, on the other, at slowing

41. Cf. G. Steiner, 'Silence and the Poet', Language and Silence, London, Pelican 1969, pp. 60-63. Steiner sees poetry, that of Dante in particular, at its most intense and expressive when the poet brings the reader to realise the inadequacy of words.

42. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.41, (breath-units 5, 6, 7, Cf. 'Appendix', p.137)

down. The device recalls a technique common in Proust,⁴³ although, in this case, it is a third person narration, Queneau's own style indirect libre. Through it, he manages to suggest a precise state of mind in his subject without having to do so explicitly and therefore diverting the reader's attention from what is actually happening. We are not once told what des Cigales is thinking; all we are given is an attempt to describe the symptoms of his condition,⁴⁴ an attempt which deliberately fails. It is nothing but the arrangement of words⁴⁵ Queneau uses, apparently to tell us something else, which indicates both what his character is trying to do and how unlikely he is to succeed.

This, of course, has added a delicacy to the operation and, furthermore, has meant that the novelist avoids any direct implication to the effect that he can see into his characters' minds,⁴⁶ while he does not deprive the reader of such an insight. Quite clearly, it has also allowed complete stress to fall on the physical experience of an attack of asthma, even to the extent of making the reader 'feel' it to a certain degree. It is an effect magnified by the very precise description of where the pain is felt which makes use of a deliberately clumsy medical vocabulary and

43. Cf. D. Lodge, The Language of Fiction, pp.20-23, in which Lodge examines a single sentence from the 'Overture' of Du Côté de Chez Swann (in which Marcel describes the moment during his childhood when his mother climbed the stairs to kiss him goodnight). Lodge indicates that by insistence on detail in the words describing the mother's dress and appearance (only indirectly relevant to the child's emotions), nouns 'lengthily and elaborately qualified', Marcel suggests his young self half-consciously trying to 'arrest the inexorable passing of time'. The hopelessness of the effort - like des Cigales' - is conveyed not by what we are told but by the way words describing the mother with apparent (and yet irrelevant) objectivity are arranged. (The sentence is from the same passage examined in detail by Auerbach in Mimesis.)

44. It is not exactly asthma but 'une ontalgie...maladie existentielle qui ressemble à l'asthme mais c'est plus distingué.' (Loiade Rueil, p.15)

45. Cf. D. Lodge, The Language of Fiction, p.73

46. Queneau's avoidance of this is, here, purely technical. It is not a question of doctrine. Occasionally we are given such insights; whether they are to be trusted or not is another matter. Cf. Part 3, p.102-113

which again, fails. Queneau is consciously confronting the poet, the man who fashions dreams out of reality (and des Cigales is man who boasts that even the basest subject is not unworthy of his poetry), with reality at its harshest and most unpoetic.

Queneau is more explicit in the corresponding passage from Les Enfants du Limon:

Un homme torturé renverse tous les systèmes et détruit toutes les idéologies. 47

In this case, des Cigales, is the tortured man and what is overthrown, at least for the moment, is his own, rather reassuring notion of the poet's role. His relief comes with an injection of morphine, symbolic of deflation: an illusion is punctured and replaced by another, more obviously artificial, dream. In this perspective, des Cigales' wish to avoid deliverance through morphine is understandable: it forces him to recognise an even more painful truth. Again, the idea itself, that some subjects are too painful to express, is commonplace. It is, on the other hand, discovered in a very real way by the failure of Queneau's own words and his honesty about the technical limitations of the writer in that, rather than conceal the failure, he accentuates it. The passage therefore discovers much wider implications.

The fact that the perpetually changing centre of pain is impossible to locate is suggestive of Montaigne. No conclusion is possible, 'et le jugeant et le jugé étant en continuelle mutation et branle'.⁴⁸

47. R. Queneau, Les Enfants du Limon, p.205

48. If there is no direct allusion to Montaigne's Apologie in this passage, there is an obvious one in the corresponding section of Les Enfants du Limon (pp.205-206): *Tout est fugitif mais le mal s'accroît sans cesse...Le vrai mal est celui qui vient de l'homme; non celui qui vient de la nature.'*

The reminder this also carries of the Baroque poets of the sixteenth century is equally deliberate, as is suggested by the wildness of the imagery and the sudden, unannounced, metaphysical correspondences:

Et maintenant et maintenant ça ne va plus du tout, car c'est pire qu'un étranglement, pire qu'un encerclement, pire qu'un étouffement, c'est un abîme physiologique, un cauchemar anatomique, une angoisse métaphysique, une révolte, une plainte, un coeur qui bat trop vite, des mains qui se crispent, une peau qui sue. 49

This presents one of the more striking examples in Loin de Rueil of the way Queneau examines the relationship between imagined worlds and the real world. Throughout the novel, involuntary dreams are seen to compensate for mediocrity and unhappiness,⁵⁰ except in a few extreme examples, and this is one, where the pain of reality, while inexpressible, is too insistent to be forgotten. Later in the novel, especially when Jacques' dreams begin to dominate, we are often by no means certain of what is and what is not fantasy. In this passage, because of the stress Queneau gives to the physical experience, we can be quite sure.

Such themes are not peculiar to Loin de Rueil. They recur because the honesty of Queneau's approach to technique discovers them and because the aesthetic preconceptions which govern that technique have not changed to any great extent since Le Chiendent, although, he insists himself, his opinions on specific features have themselves changed. Because the task of constructing a novel requires an inter-relation of two basic elements, words and structures (plot), the themes which most persistently recur are:

49. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.22 (breath-units 30-41). Note also the emphasis in the insistent rhythm: '..un coeur qui bat trop vite..'

50. The significance of the title, Loin de Rueil, is that Rueil stands as the epitome of suburban mediocrity. The only way a character can escape 'far' from this is through fantasy, either via dream or the illusion of the cinema. The eventual escape of Jacques into the film world is no more real than his dream of becoming Pope.

1. Language and communications (words)
2. Patterns of existence (plot)⁵¹.

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c) The Theme of language and communication

Queneau has written at great length on the present state of the French language,⁵² on the distance which separates the spoken from the written idiom. He considers it to be as great as that which separated Classical Latin from the early Romance languages and argues the need for a third French: a written expression of the spoken language. Dominating his fiction is the theme of language and communication and the inadequacy of any language to express what people want to say. The subject is one which imposes itself in almost every public interview Queneau has given. The longest of these, the Entretiens avec Georges Charbonnier, gave him the opportunity of expressing his concern in depth. He referred immediately to 'un livre qui me paraît particulièrement significatif, c'est un ouvrage d'un médecin, le docteur Carson, un livre qui s'appelle Les Vieilles Douleurs, in which are recorded conversations between doctor and patient. What strikes Queneau as 'notable et manifeste, évidente et qui se retrouve dans toutes les conversations,'

c'est l'incapacité de ses malades à s'exprimer; l'incapacité je dirai presque maladive à manier le langage. Il semblerait que le langage soit un instrument relativement facile à manier pour dire qu'on a mal à la tête ou qu'on a mal au ventre. Eh bien, pas du tout! Il semble que ce soit déjà une activité très complexe et presque littéraire de savoir dire qu'on a mal à la tête ou qu'on a mal au ventre!

51. Cf. 'Interview', p.

52. There is a third element - character - which in Queneau's case can be seen as merely a part of the 'pattern' of the second. The significance of Queneau's avoidance of any real characterisation is considered in Part 3: "Surface and truth".

He goes on to quote an example:

Le médecin demande au malade: "Qu'est ce qui vous avez?" Le malade répond: "Des anomalies." Le médecin demande: "Quel traitement avez-vous suivi?" L'autre répond: "On m'a fait trois radios." "Quel métier exercez-vous?" Le malade répond: "Je suis inspecteur au bâtimentB." "Et en quoi cela consiste au juste?" "C'est le bâtiment au fond de la cour." 53

Although the two subjects (the incongruity of written and spoken French and the inadequacy of any language as a tool of communication) are obviously connected, and Queneau's preoccupation with the first can be seen to spring, in part, from his concern over the second, it is nevertheless possible to consider the two more or less separately with regard to his writing.

As has already been suggested,⁵⁴ it is misleading to look on Queneau's fiction as an obvious extension of the argument he offers against current literary French. As far as it goes, his position on this subject is plain: he is presenting a solution to a specific problem. As regards the inadequacy of language in general, he merely perceives a 'zone of trouble'⁵⁵ for which there is no simple or obvious solution. His technical exercises examine the problem and the ways in which it can be surmounted. Nevertheless, whatever Queneau has written on the first subject can indicate the direction from which he will approach the second.

He considers that the general application of a style parlé écrit will give a new impetus to literature, indeed that it will be the

53. R. Queneau, Entretiens avec G. Charbonnier, Paris 1962, pp.14-15

54. Cf. Part 1, p.19-20

55. The term is used by Martin Esslin throughout his essay in The Novelist as Philosopher.

source of a whole new literature.⁵⁶ The language itself will give much more than a new style, it will impose an entirely different (and much-needed) kind of literary creation. Queneau's conclusions are based on his interpretation of past experience:

C'est l'usage de l'italien qui a créé la théologie poétique de Dante, c'est l'usage de l'allemand qui a créé l'existentialisme de Luther, c'est l'usage du néo-français de la Renaissance qui a fondé le sentiment de la liberté chez Rabelais et Montaigne. Un langage nouveau suscite des idées nouvelles et des penseurs nouveaux veulent une langue fraîche. 57

One assumption stands out from behind these theories: that ideas cannot be considered separately from the language used to express them. Their existence is not only relative to the synchronics of a language but wholly dependent upon them. This aspect of the relationship between word and idea is at its most obvious in neologisms (a new word amounts to a new idea), and at its most complex in syntax (the 'algebraic' relationship between words.)⁵⁸ There are numerous examples of such coinage in Queneau. His 'pleurire' is perhaps the simplest: by making one word out of two, rather than have one qualify the other, he establishes the existence of a definite condition which is neither laughter nor tears, but both. Naturally, the condition exists before the word is found to describe it, but the perception of it as a distinctive phenomenon does not. The creation of new forms of expression therefore has the power to expand our perception of the existing world. It is fairly clear, then, that if new words and new syntax combine today, they will occasion a whole new way of thinking, just as they have done

56. But the application must be general (cf. Part I, n.45). For the present, it is not and, indeed, much of Queneau's linguistic humour exploits this fact:

Je vis à une époque où effectivement il y a cette contradiction là.
(Entretiens avec G. Charbonnier, p.74)

The effect of Queneau's innovations requires a reader who bears the 'correct' form in mind.

57. R. Queneau, 'Le Chinook', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.63

58. Cf. Queneau's reference to Vendryès, 'Ecrit en 1937', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.13

in the past:

Un Empereur changea les moeurs des Chinois en modifiant la langue, voilà qui me paraît fort possible. 59

Applying the argument to imaginative literature, it is fairly clear, too, that the idea, as expressed in character, plot, etc., cannot be considered separately from the words used and the order in which these words are arranged. It is therefore unsound practice to consider what a writer of fiction has to say and then how successful he is in fulfilling his intentions. In other words, the old rhetorical notions of 'appropriateness' of form which are still applied to the novel by some critics, are out of place. They beg the question 'appropriate to what?':

Since the imaginative writer does not use language to describe an existing set of circumstances,

David Lodge has noted,

his 'denotative' use of words is of aesthetic significance... We cannot assume in poetics that there is a denotative level of language at which meaning is embodied prior to the expressive activity of the reader... The writer creates what he describes. 60

Lodge makes a direct challenge to those, like J.R. Warburg, who seek to 'substitute a theory of efficiency for a theory of value'⁶¹ For Lodge and equally for Queneau, 'the fictional world of a novel is a verbal world, determined at every point by the words in which it is represented.' This being so, the role of the critic is

to go deeper than the basic descriptive terms, such as character and 'plot', and to examine the 'verbal arrangements' in which these are created. 62

59. R. Queneau, 'Conversation avec G. Ribemont-Dessaigues', Bâtons chiffres et lettres, p.45. The reference is to an anecdote recounted to Queneau by Jean Paulhan (Cf. ibid., p.51)

60. D. Lodge, The Language of Fiction, p.64

61. Cf. J. Warburg, 'Some Aspects of Style', The Teaching of English, Studies in Communication 3, London 1959, pp.47-75

62. D. Lodge, The Language of Fiction, p.73

He is right to insist that his approach should be tested by applying it to the work of those novelists who seem at first to challenge its validity, rather than those linguistically self-conscious novelists whose work abounds in what must seem tempting verification. This is not only because to indicate a primary aesthetic concern in Zola is to give more striking proof of generality, but also because the work of a novelist like Queneau adds a significant complication. The 'idea' his words express is more often than not directly concerned with language itself and with the nature of literary expression. Gaëtan Picon, for example, would at first appear to be supporting Lodge's contention when he says of Queneau,

Que le sujet ne soit rien, que seule compte la forme, c'est ce que nous laissent entendre...Les Temps Mêlés et surtout Exercices de Style. 63

and when, to describe Queneau's fiction, he uses phrases like 'exercices de mots'.

But if the language a novelist uses cannot be considered separately from what is being said, if to change a single word or comma is to change the significance, then, the reverse must be true: language cannot be used to say nothing. When we say 'It's a nice day,' what we are communicating may have nothing at all to do with the weather, but it does express something, if only a desire to break a silence. This desire is communicated owing to a process known to linguistic psychologists as redundancy. The same process in a different context is referred to by Queneau in the Entretiens avec Georges Charbonnier:

63. G. Picon, La Nouvelle Littérature Française, Paris 1949, p.104

Il y a des télégrammes, rituels en quelque sorte, que l'on peut envoyer en les désignant simplement par un chiffre, cela se fait couramment aux Etats Unis... Il y a un télégramme de félicitations, un télégramme pour le baptême, le mariage, etc. Et alors au lieu de transmettre de nombreuses phrases, on dit: 1,2,3,4,5,.... 64

Indeed to use language and appear to say nothing is arguably to make an extremely profound statement. Whether it is made consciously or not, it is a statement concerning the nature of language. The man saying 'It's a nice day', is communicating no objective information. He is using a euphemism for 'This silence is embarrassing', or even, 'Please talk to me', and so on. Implicit in his pronouncement is a comment on the difficulty - which is partly linguistic and partly social - of expressing what he has to say.

To conclude of Pierrot mon ami, as does Picon, that since the novel se présente comme un roman policier (où) on ne sait même pas si le crime a eu lieu, s'il s'est réellement passé quelque chose, le livre n'est donc qu'un poème - entendons: un exercice de mots. 65

is to go no deeper than 'the basic descriptive words such as 'character' and 'plot', and, finding none, to claim an absence of meaning. To draw such conclusions implies a belief in the 'pure musicality of words'⁶⁶, but, as Lodge stresses,

The writer's medium differs from the media of most other arts - pigment, stone, musical notes, etc., - in that it is never virgin: words come to the writer already violated by other men, impressed with meanings derived from the world of common experience. 67

64. R. Queneau, Entretiens avec G. Charbonnier, p.27

65. G. Picon, La Nouvelle Littérature Française, p.103

66. Cf. J. Bory, 'Raymond Queneau, poésie et français parlé', Romanic Review, 1966; No.57, p.49, in which Bory points to Queneau's own satire of such beliefs, as in Chêne et Chien,

Dans le noir jus je trempe une tartine grasse.. (R. Queneau, Si tu t'imagines, Paris 1968, p.58).

The word jus at once answers Mallarmé's call for the neuter and the vague and, at the same time, epitomizes the 'violated' word, meaning in vulgar speech, quite precisely, 'coffee'.

67. D. Lodge, The Language of Fiction, p.47

To seek to avoid these implications is, again, to make forceful implications. In this respect, Mallarmé's 'ptyx' is the most loaded, most impure, word in all his poetry.

Redundancy is a key factor in this process of 'violation'. If, as Picon says, after two-hundred odd pages, the reader still does not know if anything at all has happened, his doubt must imply something. If to say 'It's a nice day' is to imply a comment on the nature of everyday communication while saying nothing about the weather, to write two-hundred pages and still 'say nothing' must be to make a similar, if infinitely more complex, comment on the nature of literary expression.

The significance of Pierrot mon ami, of course, does not only concern language. Queneau's own prière d'insérer is illuminating:

En écrivant Pierrot mon ami, l'auteur a pensé qu'évidemment le roman-détective idéal serait celui où non seulement on ne connaîtra pas le criminel, mais encore où l'on ignorerait même s'il y a eu crime, et quel est le détective.

...Un grand savant l'a dit: "il y a un certain plaisir à ignorer parce que l'imagination travaille."

Plainly, Picon has based his remarks on these words. The task Queneau set himself bears an obvious reminder of Conrad's Lord Jim, a work whose influence Queneau readily acknowledges.⁶⁸ Like Marlowe, who plays the role of disinterested investigator in Conrad's novel, the reader of Pierrot mon ami sets out to make a specific discovery and fails. He does make incidental moral discoveries, and these, says the narrator in Under Western Eyes, should be 'the object of every tale':

The task is not in truth the writing in narrative form a précis of a strange human document, but the rendering... of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of the earth's surface; conditions not easily understood, much less discovered in the limits of a story, till some key word is found; a word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the pages, a word which, if not truth itself, may perchance to hold truth enough to help the moral

68. Cf. 1) 'Interview' p.131, 2) Entretiens avec G. Charbonnier, p.50-52

discovery. 69

Queneau's notion of 'the object of every tale' may not be the same, in spite of a declared admiration for Conrad's literary methods, and the reader, of course, has no guarantee that the narrator speaks for Conrad. Nevertheless, the advice to the critic is quite sound; the objective is discovery, not demonstration. Picon makes his conclusions without giving evidence of having looked for any key word. One such word, moreover, does stand out from Pierrot mon ami: ne. Nothing is achieved or demonstrated; whatever is done has no discernible motive. The subject does not 'count for nothing', it is nothing, or rather, nothingness.

Taking the structure of the traditional detective novel, Queneau systematically deprives the reader of what would normally appear to make him read on. That is, a piece by piece revelation of information leading up to a moment of complete illumination on the last page.

'J'avais la volonté de ne pas informer,' says Queneau.⁷⁰ In this way, he can investigate what actually makes the reader persevere. Queneau calls his novel 'un anti-roman policier'.⁷¹ As is often the case with anti-novels, its discoveries are positive: since no objective information is transmitted, the will to read on must be connected with the arrangement of words and, even in a detective story, involve the pleasure derived from the formal design.

Picon is right to affirm that this involves the criteria of poetry

69. J. Conrad, Under Western Eyes, London 1911, 1, p.iii

70. Cf. 'Interview' p.134

71. Cf. 'Interview', p.134

rather than those more normally (and, Lodge would say, quite incorrectly) associated with the novel. But he is wrong to conclude, as he does,⁷² that the novel is therefore simply an exercise in words taking no account of meaning. The patterns of words do have a meaning, which may objectively have little to do with the subjects they raise, and much more with the way these subjects are expressed, that is, how the novelist has arranged and juxtaposed them. What they have in common are the implications they automatically carry about language. In the first quotation made from the Entretiens avec Georges Charbonnier,⁷³ Queneau said:

Il semble que ce soit déjà une activité très complexe et presque littéraire de savoir dire qu'on a mal à la tête ou qu'on a mal au ventre.

In his novels, he uses the contrivance of fiction to investigate the ways of overcoming these obstacles:

En effet, puisque le langage est relatif, pourquoi les obstacles au langage ne seraient-ils pas relatifs aussi?

Queneau's conscious use of popular speech at its most banal is therefore suggestive. He is not trying to change the way people speak, but using the spoken language in a literary context and using literary artifice to discover what people are really expressing when they use the conventional and apparently meaningless formulae of everyday conversation. To highlight the processes, he again turns to the technique of incongruous substitutions. Thus in Loin de Rueil, lice are mentioned twenty-two times in all. Six of these occasions concern the meeting of strangers or of people who have not seen each other for considerable lengths of time. Each time, the conversation follows the same ritual pattern: someone scratches nervously, probably out of embarrassment, and the

72. Cf. Part 2, n.65

73. Cf. Part 2, n.53

subject is introduced. A discussion follows on the different varieties of louse which necessarily involves experience from military service. One of the characters then refers to a breed which expresses his own personal preoccupations. Thus the would-be perverter of young girls, Linaire:

- D'ailleurs, dit Linaire en s'adressant tout particulièrement à Pierrette, d'ailleurs, dit Linaire après s'être passé la langue sur les lèvres, d'ailleurs il n'y a pas seulement que les poux de cheveux, ma petite, il faut savoir cela, il y a aussi des poux de corps, de certaines parties spéciales, bien spéciales.
- Quelles parties? demanda poliment Pierrette, que la question n'intéressait pas spécialement.
- Allons, allons, monsieur Linaire, dit Jacques, soyez sérieux.
- Le phthirius pubis, commença Linaire. Ginette se leva.
- Oui, dit Jacques, c'est ça. Il est temps de rentrer chez soi. ⁷⁴

Convention of one kind prevents Linaire from expressing himself directly but the fact that, in Loin de Rueil, lice are as conventional a subject of conversation as the weather,⁷⁵ allows him the chance of expressing indirectly what he really wants to say. The obstacles in the way of effective communication are not overcome by any process of linguistic purification but, on the contrary, by taking account of all the corruptions a word derives 'from the world of common experience.' Similar examples occur throughout Queneau's novels. Since such devices can be used by his characters to communicate with each other, they can be used by the novelist to communicate with his reader, and the subject of lice is also used to this end in Loin de Rueil. The technique is one anticipated by Corneille. Acknowledging François Rostand's L'Imitation de soi chez Corneille, Queneau remarked,

74. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.124

75. In Saint Glinglin, the process is reversed: weather, as such, has been abolished. Owing to the 'chasse-nuages', the sky is perpetually cloudless; that is, until the contraption is sabotaged. After that it rains perpetually. In this situation, when there is absolutely no information to communicate, each conversation is prefaced by an observation of the weather. Invariably, in the first half of the novel it is 'Fait beau', in the second, 'Y pleut'.

Corneille s'est recopié lui-même; il a utilisé des vers de ses précédentes pièces dans les pièces suivantes. Il y a même quatre ou cinq vers qui passent comme cela d'une pièce à l'autre. A ce moment là évidemment... l'information est nulle, puisqu'il utilise ses vers comme des véritables formules passe-partout. 76

Because Queneau is concerned with drawing the reader's attention to the device itself, and because of the opportunity it affords for internal 'rhyming', he repeats himself in the same way not only from novel to novel, but also several times within a single novel.

However, if ritual conversations automatically express something, what they do express is not necessarily of any interest. Jacques and Camille meet by chance in Loin de Rueil. After a conventional dialogue concerning their parents' health,

Ils se regardèrent. Ils entrevoient très légèrement là où peut vous mener la connerie du langage humain. 77

They may, too, serve as a means of avoiding reality: in the same novel Jacques quite factually declares his love for Camille's sister, Dominique. She prevaricates. While appearing to analyse the situation, she uses talk as a means of avoiding a decision. Her affirmations, meaningless in one sense, betray an indecision which is self-evident anyway, and Queneau holds the whole process up to ridicule.

By the same token, not to say anything at all can communicate much more: Dominique finally convinces Jacques that the thought of a love-affair fundamentally repels her; he makes the decision for her and leaves Paris. On the train he chances to meet his old school-friend, Lucas, who by a similar chance had met Dominique three or four months previously:

76. R. Queneau, Entretiens avec G. Charbonnier, p.30

77. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.73

- Ça c'est la première fois que je l'ai vue, continua Lucas, à voix plus basse encore. Tu comprends que je n'en suis pas resté là.
- Ah oui?
- Oui. J'ai tout de suite vu que c'était une femme qui couchait.
- Eh alors?
- Eh alors en effet: elle couchait. 78

These words mark the end of the chapter and of Section II. Jacques Guicharnaud analyses the effect of the silence:

Queneau has us jump immediately to the beginning of part III: "Du haut de la colline ils aperçurent San Culebra del Porco..." Jacques state of shock is just symbolized, with-out any explanation, by that huge jump in space, which at once leads us to South America.⁷⁹

The technique is reminiscent of the cinema. Jean Queval sees this as a major influence on Queneau's work⁸⁰ and a possible source of Queneau's phenomenological approach to the problems of description: unless there is a narrator, the spectator at a film often has to interpret the thoughts and emotions of the characters for himself. In the context of a novel, Queneau's technique expresses a belief in the power of the reader's imagination. Queval, moreover, sees in Queneau's novels not only the cinema's influence, but also Queneau's anticipation of the developments of the 'nouvelle vague'. There is considerable evidence to this effect, as anyone who knows the Resnais/Robbe-Grillet L'Année dernière à Marienbad will realise: the deliberately contrived setting, the self-consciously random selection of detail on which to focus attention, the confusion of fact and fantasy and the odd snatches of conversation systematically repeated, all combine to ask a question which can only be solved by the spectator's imagination, and then, never conclusively. More than this, even, Queval sees in Queneau's technique an improvement on the cinema, while the technique remains clearly cinematic. Among the

78. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.180

79. J. Guicharnaud, Raymond Queneau, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, New York 1965, p.40

80. Cf. J. Queval, Essai sur Raymond Queneau, Paris 1960, pp. 149-159

numerous examples Queval cites is the scene from chapter two of Pierrot mon ami⁸¹: through a telescope Pradonet follows the path of a young loafer (Pierrot) paying court to his daughter. From Pradonet's angle we watch the young man cross L'Uni-Park like a shadow in the background:

C'est du cinema amélioré, ou tout au moins d'usage assez rare. (Hitchcock même ne recourt à cette figure de style dans Fenêtre sur cour qu'avec une moindre souplesse..) 82

Similarly,

entre les chapitres 8 et 9 du Dimanche de la Vie s'étend un fondu enchaîné puisqu'on passe de Nanette à Nanette, mais de Nanette vivante à Nanette morte. Elle était à la caisse, or maintenant: "Nanette avait belle allure avec sa mentonnière. On l'emballe et on la porte au cimetière de Reuilly." 82

'Cinematic silence' plays an important role in Queneau's narrative. Where he does use language descriptively, his tone is predominantly conversational - though not exclusively so. At such times, the narrative can be seen in general terms as an attempt to show how much can be said in the French language in its most 'violated' condition - as it is spoken in the streets - given the advantage of literary contrivance. Although the manner is more poetic than realistic, it necessarily carries a reminder of reality because, as reality changes, so, if it is to remain functional, must the spoken language.

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d) Patterns of Fiction

In his preface to Nathalie Sarraute's Portrait d'un Inconnu, Sartre said:

81. R. Queneau, Pierrot mon ami, pp.42-43

82. J. Queval, Essai sur Raymond Queneau, p.153

Il s'agit de contester le roman par lui-même, de le détruire sous nos yeux dans le temps qu'on semble l'édifier, d'écrire le roman d'un roman qui ne se fait pas, qui ne peut pas se faire, de créer une fiction qui soit aux grandes oeuvres composées de Dostoïevsky et de Meredith ce qu'était aux tableaux de Rembrandt et de Rubens cette toile de Miro, intitulée Assassinat de la peinture. Ces oeuvres étranges et difficilement classables ne témoignent pas de la faiblesse du genre romanesque, elles marquent seulement que nous vivons à une époque de réflexion et que le roman est en train de réfléchir sur lui-même. 83

The fact that the fictional world is first and foremost a verbal world means that, for Queneau, language and its effectiveness as communication must always be a theme in his writing. Similarly, the consciously fictional pattern of his characters' activity must inescapably stand in some relation to the real patterns of human activity.

As he has himself repeatedly emphasised, the aesthetic principle behind Queneau's fiction aims above all at mathematical harmony. At the level of the words he arranges into sentences, that harmony may be called algebraic,⁸⁴ at the level of external structures, as will be shown, it may be called geometric. There is a constant desire to formulate the problems of construction, symptomatic of the self-consciousness of Queneau's method. A good illustration of his mathematical predisposition can again be found in Loin de Rueil, dominated as the novel's construction is by Queneau's desire for symmetry. In his 'Conversation avec Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes', he mentions the place of what he calls 'rhyme and echo' in his technique.⁸⁵ As is effectively demonstrated in Loin de Rueil, these are repetitions within the cycle of the novel's external structure. The plot does not draw a straight line of cause and effect leading to a conclusion in the final pages, but

83. J.-P. Sartre, 'Préface', N. Sarraute, Portrait d'un Inconnu, Paris 1956, p.7

84. Cf. Reference to Vendryès' Le Langage, R. Queneau, 'Écrit en 1937', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.13

85. Cf. ibid., p.42

rather starts as an arc, and, by the end of the novel, has described a full circle. But to indicate only one arc would be to over-simplify the essentially complex construction, which involves more than one full circle and the life of more than one character. Since symmetry is the governing principle, the first event of the novel is the last to be repeated, the second the penultimate, and so on. The two main cycles in the life of the protagonist, Jacques L'Aumône, (atleast in as far as the reader is witness to his life⁸⁶) begin at a precise moment of his childhood in Rueil: his total identification with the heroes of both films in a double programme at the local cinema. Queneau achieves a careful and wry confusion between Jacques' personal fantasies and the narration of what occurs in the films, in both of which the hero loses his screen name and, for the reader, becomes 'Jacques':

...et l'on montre enfin la gueule du type, un gaillard à trois poils, un mastard pour qui la vie des autres ne compte pas plus que celle d'un pou, et Jacquot n'est nullement étonné de reconnaître en lui Jacques l'Aumône.

Comment est-il là? C'est assez simple. Après avoir abdiqué pour des raisons connues de lui seul Jacques conte des Cigales a quitté l'Europe pour les Amériques et le premier métier qu'il a choisi de faire en ces régions lointaines est celui d'orlaloua. 87

The second is a rather sordid melodrama showing the decline of an unfortunate scientist. It ends,

cocufié, méconnu, ruiné le pauvre inventeur meurt.
Revient la lumière. 88

The first is a conspicuously more impressive film. It is a western with a far more satisfying conclusion:

Ça galope pendant cinq minutes ça barde pendant trois et en fin de compte il délivre la mignonne mais comme ça l'embête de l'épouser car il n'a pas envie de faire une fin il préfère s'acclimater une balle mortelle dans l'buffet quitte à réssuciter ultérieurement. 89

86. Cf. 'Interview', p. 128

87. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p. 39

88. ibid., p. 46

89. ibid., p. 43

If, to ignore the chapter divisions, the novel can be seen to have four sections corresponding to four stages in Jacques' life (the boxer, the scientist, the travelling actor and the American), it will be seen that the second circle is completed with the end of Jacques' career as a scientist in section two: cocufié, méconnu, ruiné, he leaves his wife and child to join a troupe of travelling actors⁹⁰. The completion of the first circle (that which begins with the cowboy-film) finally closes the novel: Jacques has become the American film-star James Charity. In Rueil his son and namesake goes to the cinema with his 'stepfather', des Cigales: the Ramon Curnough Company presents The Skin of Dreams with James Charity and Lulu L'Aumône. The film begins in France; the camera's focus on the first cinema, a hangar full of benches:

Des tas de gosses sont là, l'objectif distingue l'un d'eux, un de ses camarades lui crie "Eh James" un autre "eh Charity". On a compris: ce joli petit garçon brun bouclé c'est le futur grand acteur James Charity.

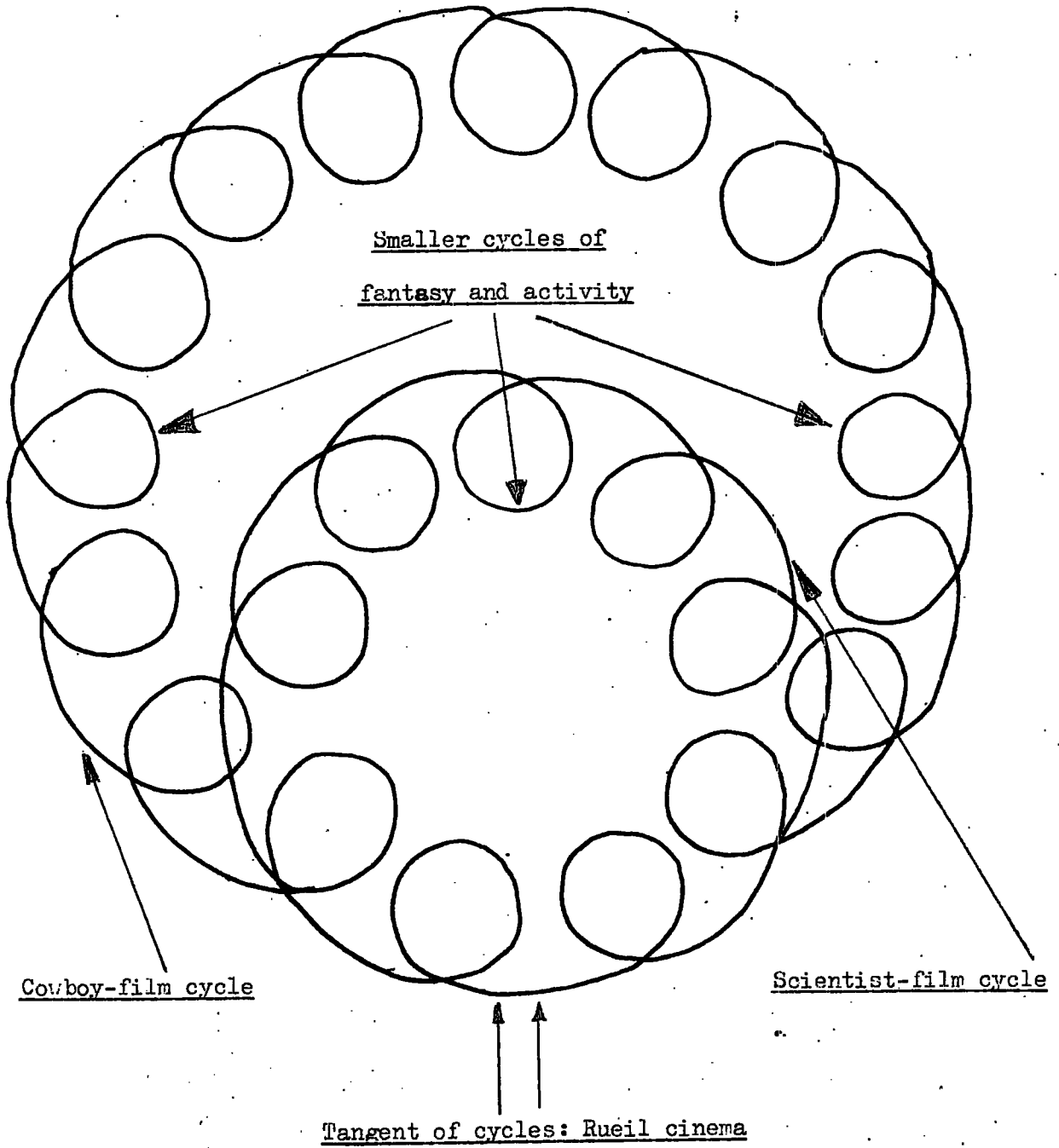
On projette un film de cow-boys avec William Hart. Enthousiasme des mômes. L'un d'eux, c'est James Charity, se lève, monte sur la scène, entre dans l'écran. Il a grandi, il est devenu homme, il est habillé en cow-boy maintenant, il saute sur un cheval et le voilà qui galope. Poursuites, coups de revolver, jeunes filles blondes et bottées, Indiens à plumes, morts violentes. L'action se termine. James embrasse l'héroïne sur la bouche, puis il sort de la toile, redescend de la scène et reprend sa place, de nouveau petit garçon. 91

The simple design, then, is an outer circle beginning and ending with the cowboy film, containing an inner circle of Jacques' unlucky career as a scientist, with the tangent as the cinema in Rueil. But pattern has a further complication; the film itself describes a minor circle of its own. While Jacques' life in the novel describes two circles, in the process

90. This does not correspond exactly to the death of the scientist in the film. But Jacques does not reappear as a scientist. The correspondence seems more exact if the reader considers the attitude of Queneau's narrative in Le Chiendent to the disappearance of characters: 'ils s'éloignent, et pour ainsi dire, meurent. (Le Chiendent), p.213)

91. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, pp.228-229

THE GEOMETRIC STRUCTURE OF LOUIS DE RUEIL



of tracing these lines his life completes several smaller circles (see diagram) in two apparently distinctive ways: in what he does and in what he imagines.⁹² For example, during his career as a petty crook (section one), he defrauds des Cigales out of 400 francs, with the promise of publishing a collection of his poems. Having gone to great lengths to exploit the poet's unfulfilled dreams, Jacques is remorseful:

Il prit un taxi pour la rue du Louvre et envoya un mandat-carte de quatre cents francs à des Cigales.
Il revient à pied.
- Je suis un peu con tout de même.
Il suivit les quais. 93

He is as penniless as he was at the beginning of the lengthy episode. All of Jacques' actions take him round in circles; he never achieves anything by his own initiative.

The clearest illustration of Jacques' circles of fantasy occurs in the incident (to which reference has already been made⁹⁴) where his imagination imposes the identity of Dominique on an unsuspecting bus-conductress. A scene of courtship takes place in his mind and completes its own circle with the deflation of the dream: Jacques is simply sitting on a bus staring into space. For the reader, this circle is all the more disturbing since it is not immediately recognisable as fantasy. The deliberate confusion could be called surreal: whatever takes place in a character's mind has as much reality as that which forms part of his actual experience.⁹⁵ The effect is to bring into question the distinction the reader must make between the actual and the imagined if

92. The existence of the minor characters is also repetitively circular.

93. ibid., p-87

94. Cf. Part I 1, n.63

95. The technique is also reminiscent of the 'Circe' episode in Ulysses in which Joyce uses the excitement of his characters to blend the real and the imaginary and eventually to activate inanimate objects into a kind of burlesque dance.

he is to follow Jacques' story at all. If Jacques can impose a false identity on a bus-conductress and for a few pages convince both himself and the reader of its actuality, then he is capable of doing the same to anyone else and sustaining deception for the duration of the novel. When a scene of courtship actually appears to take place later in the novel, the reader has no guarantee that the woman in question is really Dominique. This being so, there is no story to follow. All the reader is left to appreciate is the pattern and the implications of his own uncertainty.

Although there does seem to be a level at which the language of the novel informs and even tells a story, Loin de Rueil appears, in this light, no less impenetrable than Finnegan's Wake, a novel which pretends to offer the reader no information. Whatever information Queneau offers is finally undermined by the simple suggestion that it may all be quite false. There is, then, no possible distinction between what the reader assumes Jacques to have done and 'tous les germes de figures sociales qu'il avait irréalisées', some of which he enumerates during a pensive interlude in the novel.⁹⁶ The elusive 'real' figure of Jacques becomes no more than a framework which contains a pattern drawn out of some of the things he is not, just as Mr. Porter's subconscious is no more than a vessel serving to contain an infinity of possible identities and confusions in Finnegan's Wake, 'the whole of History in a night's sleep', according to Anthony Burgess.⁹⁷ It is a history which can be sketched in outline or recorded in the minutest detail.

96. ibid., pp.139-140

97. A. Burgess, A Shorter Finnegan's Wake, London 1964, p.8

The reminder of Finnegan's Wake is certainly not accidental. Queneau points to it clearly in the naming of his characters. The first to appear in Loin de Rueil is Louis-Philippe des Cigales, whose name Jacques assumes in fantasy as readily as Mr. Porter assumes the equally entomological Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker.⁹⁸ In spite of the allusion, however, the role of Queneau's characters does not depend on those in Joyce's novel. Des Cigales' name, of course, alludes to La Fontaine's fable, which Joyce retells as 'The Oндt and the Gracehoper' with the artist Shem, Earwicker's son, like des Cigales, in the role of supplicant.

All of Queneau's novels reflect this desire to contain his characters within the symmetrical pattern of his own external structures, in this case represented as a fantasy. It is his awareness of the infinite number of possible identities and confusions he could create which makes it essential to contain them. A dream at least has a beginning and an end, however abrupt that end may be, and there is no sense unless an end exists. Frank Kermode relates the problem to the definition of time in its simplest form: the ticking of a clock:

We ask what it says: and we agree that it says tick-tock.
By this fiction we humanize it, make it talk our language. 99

But whereas the first interval (between tick and tock) is 'organised and limited', the second (between tock and tick) is not:¹⁰⁰

The fact that we call the second of the two related sounds tock is evidence that we use fictions to enable the end to confer organization and form on the temporal structure. The interval between the two sounds...is now charged with significant duration. The clock's tick-tock I take to be a model of what we call plot, an organization that

98. Or Persse O'Reilly, which plays on the French perce-oreille, 'earwig'.
99; F. Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, Oxford 1968, p.44

100. 'It can be shown by experiment that subjects who listen to rhythmic structures such as tick-tock, repeated identically, "can reproduce the intervals within the structure accurately, but they cannot grasp spontaneously the interval between the rhythmic groups," that is between tock and tick, even when this remains constant. (ibid., p.45)

humanizes time by giving it form; and the interval between tock and tick represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort we need to humanize. 101

By the suggestion that the whole is contained in the fantasy world of an undefined 'real' figure, Queneau encloses and so defines his novel in the same way that each isolated circle of fantasy is defined once the reader sees it for what it is.

What Queneau contrives and emphasizes in this way throughout his novels is their finality. He describes Le Chiendent as 'comparable à un homme qui, après avoir longtemps marché, se retrouve là, d'où il était parti'.¹⁰² This is an over simplification. Following the analogy it would be more accurate to say that, as in Loin de Rueil, the man walks a path which is already defined by the author and which describes several smaller circles before completing the enclosing circle. The pattern of both novels reflects the design of Ulysses, also circular and with a central section ('The Wandering Rocks') which in structure (circular) and technic (labyrinth) 'may be regarded as a small-scale model of Ulysses as a whole'. Corresponding to the eighteen major sections of the novel,

'The Wandering Rocks' consists of eighteen short scenes followed by a coda describing a viceregal passage through Dublin. All these scenes take place in the streets of Dublin between the hours of 3 and 4 p.m., and their synchronism is indicated by the insertion in each fragment of one or more excerpts from other fragments, which serve to fix the correspondence in time. 103

Each large circle of activity in Loin de Rueil contains a central passage in which whole conversations or odd sentences from earlier sections are repeated. If the completion of a circle corresponds to the rhyming last

101. ibid., p.45

102. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.31

103. S. Gilbert, James Joyce's Ulysses, p.225

syllable of traditional poetry, these minor echoes are equivalent to internal rhymes and alliterations. Le Chiendent is even more striking in the way it recalls the principles of Joycean construction.

With one or two exceptions, Queneau tells us,¹⁰⁴ each section of Le Chiendent is a unit in its own right and each section individually observes the rules of the Three Unities. To these may be added the unity of manner, pure narrative, narrative broken by reported speech, direct speech (the dramatic, according to Lubbock's formula¹⁰⁵), internal monologue, reported monologue, spoken monologue (the dramatic again), letters,¹⁰⁶ cuttings from newspapers or recital of dreams. Of these units, each thirteenth, that is the last in each chapter, is placed outside the chapter, 'dans une autre direction ou dimension'; these are reflective pauses occurring where we would expect to find the chorus in Greek tragedy. 'Inevitably' their manner is either monologue, reported dream or newspaper cutting. The ninety-first section is the exception: it returns to the pure narrative of section one and so closes in the circle.

The approach is overwhelmingly Joycean in the manner with which device, figure of speech, mood, and so on, are made to succeed and repeat each other according to a pre-established pattern. The treatment is almost symphonic, with the 'récit purement narratif' as the simple melody. The difference is that whereas in music (as in traditional poetry) the pattern depends very much on convention, here it depends on the free will of the author. It is in this sense that the novels of Joyce and Queneau may

104. Cf. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.31

105. Cf. P. Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, London 1921

106. Here the technique parodies not only the epistolary novel, but also 'certaines lettres d'injures de la belle époque du surréalisme' (Cf. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.23)

be called personal, even egocentric. At the same time, the insistence on a rigid geometric pattern ensures an objective attitude to the characters and events within that pattern. The mathematical approach, therefore, expresses not only the personal taste of the author but his desire to preserve a detachment, suggested in Queneau's case by the reticence of his most obviously autobiographical creation, Roland Travy:

...une partie de mes idées ne s'accordent pas très bien avec le matérialisme, même dialectique.

- Par exemple en mathématiques?

- Oui. Je crois toujours à leur objectivité intrinsèque.

Je suis plus près de Platon que de Marx. 107

But Travy is still a fictional creation and his evidence may be suspect.

Confirmation can be found, however, in Queneau's essay 'La dialectique des mathématiques chez Engels':

Ainsi la mathématique supérieure ou non a subi pendant tout le cours du XIX^e siècle une évolution en tout point contraire au programme d'Engels: elle a éliminé toute apparence de dialectique. 108

It is to this end that the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (OULIPO), the society which Queneau founded with the mathematician François Le Lionnais, may be seen to work. Writing of it in the Times Literary Supplement, Queneau said that since 1960 it has been working towards

the discovery of new or revived literary forms, the research being inspired by an interest in mathematics. Its aim could be described as the foundation of a new kind of rhetoric, a new rhetoric which ...nowadays could not do without mathematics. 109

In spite of this preoccupation, not all of Queneau's novels are as perfectly symmetrical as Le Chiendent or Loin de Rueil. While they all have circular form, the circles are not always completed with such pinpoint accuracy. Having established the need for complex formal

107. R. Queneau, Odile, Paris 1937, p.94

108. R. Queneau, 'La dialectique des mathématiques chez Engels', Bords, Paris, Hermann 1963, p.134. Cf. J. Queval, Raymond Queneau, p.164

109. R. Queneau, 'OULIPO', The Times Literary Supplement, 1967, pp.863-4

structures, Queneau occasionally allows himself some freedom in practice, like a poet taking certain liberties with conventional forms. Speaking of Gueule de Pierre, Queneau said,

Le mouvement circulaire ne retrouve pas son point de départ, mais un point homologue, et forme un arc d'hélice. 110

Paul Gayot claims to find a distinction between cyclical and linear structure in Queneau's novels. The classification is particularly arbitrary, with both Loin de Rueil and Les Enfants du Limon seen as part of the linear group, and no place at all found for Pierrot mon ami.¹¹¹ If any such distinction is to be made, it is between the cyclic, that is internally repetitive novels, and those which are simply enclosed in a circle of activity whose end in some way echoes the beginning.

To bring a character back to his 'point de départ' (or even to a 'point homologue') is more or less to negate any idea of purpose or meaning in his journey (or rather, to show that whatever significance there is is illusory), in that it can achieve nothing apart from tracing the line of an arbitrary route. Accordingly, almost all human activity in Queneau's novels

is ceremonial rather than practical in nature - assiduous movie attendance, shopkeeping (devoid of profit), walks (devoid of destination), conversations (devoid of meaning), quests (devoid of object), courting rites (generally devoid of consummation), not to mention the many funerals scattered throughout his pages. 112

As Brée and Guiton say, 'the contrast between the gravity and the vanity of these occupations suggests a meaning more subtle than satire.'¹¹²

110. R. Queneau, 'Technique du roman', Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.29

111. Cf. P. Gayot, Queneau, pp.68-70

112. G. Brée and M. Guiton, An Age of Fiction, p.171

The pattern of meaningless activity carries the force of moral theme when it is considered in relation to the characters' attitude towards its meaninglessness:

De juillet Tuquedenne ne conserva aucun souvenir. Plus tard, il s'en étonna et chercha ce qu'il avait bien pu être pendant ce temps, mais il ne parvint jamais à se le rappeler. Il lui sembla toujours qu'il y avait un mois de sa vie, trente jours que l'oubli avait vidés comme les charognards curent les yeux du bétail mort. Ainsi juillet disparut, gobé par le néant. 113

But Tuquedenne, preoccupied as he is with giving 'un sens à sa vie', is an exceptional hero in Queneau's novels. More often than not, they are merely indifferent and fail to react to their circumstances in any conscious way. They tread the narrow line which, by Queneau's definition,¹¹⁴ separates philosophes from voyous. This is the case with Pierrot in Pierrot mon ami. He drifts through the events of the novel with a kind of bemused disinterestedness, making no attempt to order his life along the lines of any personal philosophy, or even to attach any meaning to what happens:

C'était un des épisodes de sa vie les plus ronds, les plus complets, les plus autonomes. 115

His acceptance of the absurdity of his condition is as total as it is unconsidered:

- Monsieur a l'air rêveur, dit le veilleur de nuit.
- Ce n'est pas mon genre, dit Pierrot, Mais ça m'arrive souvent de ne penser à rien. 116

Pierrot is in many ways a comic equivalent of Camus' Meursault. Unlike Meursault, however, he is never forced to consider the value or meaning of his existence; its routine is endless.

113. R. Queneau, Les Derniers Jours, p.108

114. Cf. R. Queneau, 'Philosophes et voyous', Les Temps Modernes, Jan.1951, pp.1193-1205. The essay is basically a reflexion on the etymology of voyou. The word is generally agreed to derive from voie. Queneau examines ironically the implications of it perhaps having the same source as voir.

115. R. Queneau, Pierrot mon ami, Paris 1943, Livre de Poche, p.174

116. ibid., p.166

Jacques L'Aumône, perhaps the most self-conscious of Queneau's heroes, does evolve some kind of code of behaviour and try to live accordingly: 'Je voudrais tant devenir un saint.'¹¹⁷ A one-time boxing champion, he unthinkingly insults a man in the street and is struck on the face. To the disappointment of the crowd, he does not retaliate:

Jacques se réjouissait en son coeur d'avoir pour la première fois de sa vie accompli un acte d'humilité. Un champion (de France) (amateur) de boxe (poids mi-lourd), se laissa calotter simplement pour ne pas montrer sa supériorité. 118

'Je deviens humble,' he tells Dominique,

je veux devenir humble. Pas modeste. Humble. C'est très difficile d'ailleurs, très compliqué, pas simple du tout. 119

But even this is as self-defeating as any other circle of activity, since he aspires to absolute humility:

Ce qu'il y a de calé là-dedans c'est dire qu'on est humble c'est ne plus l'être, le penser même c'est déjà ne plus l'être. 119

Valentin Brû in Le Dimanche de la Vie conceives the same desire:

'Vers le milieu de cet hiver, Valentin entreprit de devenir un saint'.

At the outset he is more confident of success than Jacques:

La chose lui parut d'autant plus facile que, ne croyant tout au plus qu'à un faux dieu, et encore si peu que rien, il pensait avoir un avantage immédiat sur ses collègues chrétiens candidats à la béatification, puisque l'espoir d'une récompense quelconque ne viendrait jamais jeter une ombre sur l'un quelconque de ses actes.¹²⁰

His approach is the same:

Lorsqu'il parvint à faire la corvée de chiottes quotidiennement sans que Foinard s'en aperçut, il se félicita d'avoir ainsi atteint sans tapage un certain degré dans l'abnégation. 121

And the difficulty is inevitably the same:

117. R. Queneau, Loind de Rueil, p.157

118. ibid., p.148

119. ibid., p.146

120. R. Queneau, Le Dimanche de la Vie, p.290

121. ibid., p.292

Ensuite il fallait s'abstenir de se féliciter, ce qui devenait beaucoup plus difficile. Et lorsqu'il découvrit qu'il prenait un vif plaisir à tracer un chemin dans la neige ou à vider les ordures, il estima justement n'y avoir aucun mérite et par conséquent n'avoir même pas fait un pas dans le chemin de la sanctification. 122

The desire 'd'accomplir pour les autres les tâches les plus emmerdantes', presents a curious variation of Pascal's wager. The self-imposed asceticism of Jacques and Valentin corresponds to the free-thinker who humbles his intellect by observing Catholic ritual. Like Jacques, Pascal admits that absolute success is unattainable: God can never be obliged to extend his grace. Jacques' only hope is that 'ce marquer-le-pas représentant un manque signifiait un mieux'.¹²³ The difference is, of course, that his saintliness is atheistic, although his confusion with des Cigales, by its allusion to Finnegan's Wake¹²⁴ making him the Gracehoper, perhaps suggests a subconscious desire to believe. But before Jacques achieves any radical change, his humility degenerates into an indifference similar to Pierrot's:

Moi, ça me gêne pas. La mort ou autre chose ça m'est bien égal. 125

There is, on the other hand, no condemnation implied in Queneau's depiction of indifference. He is not trying to convince the reader of any need to find a meaning in existence:

It is precisely because Pierrot is not troubled by the unrealized possibilities of his adventures... because therefore he remains in the realm of being and moves forward without any strong desires or predetermined plans, that he avoids disappointment and remains wholly free. 126

It is in this context the the quotation from Hegel which prefaces Le

122. ibid., p.292

123. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.166

124. Cf. Part 2, pp.82-83

125. ibid., p.163

126. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.91

Dimanche de la Vie should be seen as significant:

C'est le dimanche de la vie qui nivelle tout et éloigne tout ce qui est mauvais: des hommes doués d'une aussi bonne humeur ne peuvent être foncièrement vils ou mauvais.

The Hegelian idea that the artist must rid himself of his particular identity and become nothing before he can assume universal identity is reflected with Queneau's characteristic irony in Le Dimanche de la Vie. Valentin seeks to make his mind totally blank:

- Mais voyez-vous meussieu, je pense au temps, pas au temps qu'il fait, je crois que c'est inutile quand on vit dans une région tempérée, non, je pense au temps qui passe et, comme il est identique à lui-même, je pense toujours à la même chose, c'est à dire que je finis par ne plus penser à rien. 127

But Valentin is no artist. Once his mind is blank he is happy to remain in the vacuum.

If the external structure of the fiction which contains a character is circular, the character's existence must also turn in circles if he is to remain in harmony with his environment. Once an action begins it cannot avoid circular progression, cannot be complete, until it has cancelled itself out; then it may begin again. In Queneau's novels,

characters alone or in groups of two or three... advance and retreat at regular intervals and mirror each other's words and gestures. Our final impression is that of a dance, at times stately, at times wildly orgiastic, but always ceremonial in nature. 128

The lives of characters in a novel cannot be anything but ritualistic if the author's attitude to fiction is that it is first and foremost a question of patterns.

And if it were to be argued that the imposition of such purely arbitrary patterns must need produce an extremely arbitrary picture of reality, Queneau's answer would undoubtedly be that this, indeed the poet's and the artist's task: the world itself is arbitrary

127. R. Queneau, Le Dimanche de la Vie, p.286

128. G. Brée and M. Guiton, An Age of Fiction, p.170

and absurd; only the thinking individual can give it a pattern, however arbitrary. Things have meaning only in so far as they exist in a mind, so the mind is free to impose its own pattern on being. 129

Queneau's picture is consciously arbitrary because he feels that this is the one essential feature of imaginative literature. Fiction cannot but be arbitrary in its design, so it should display its nature honestly. But the effect of Queneau's self-consciousness has more wide-reaching implications,¹³⁰ implications which assume the form of ironic contrast. The language used to reflect a disordered world and the structures which contain that language, by drawing attention to the heavily contrived nature of their own order and meaning (in other words to their falseness), emphasise simultaneously the very unattainability of any such order and meaning in the natural world. Fictional order, moreover, can not only indicate the absence of real order, it can compensate for it:

...we no longer live in a world with an historical tick which will certainly be consummated by a definitive tock. And among all the other changing fictions, literary fictions take their place. They find out about the changing world on our behalf; they arrange our complementarities. They do this, for some of us, perhaps better than history, perhaps better than theology, largely because they are consciously false...It is not that we are connoisseurs of chaos, but that we are surrounded by it, and equipped for co-existence with it only by our fictive powers. 131

129. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.82

130. Cf. G-E. Clancier, 'Le discours et les méthodes', L'Arc, No.28, Special edition on Queneau, 1^{er} trimestre 1966, pp.71-75

131. F. Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p.64

Part 3. Surface and the underlying truth

a) The problem discovered: the identification of characters

In his treatment of character Queneau plainly rejects the psychological approach which attempts to show a relation between a character's personality and his circumstances. Speaking of Edgar Allan Poe's 'analytic' works, in which 'Poe se montre... un précurseur de Conan Doyle et du roman policier', Queneau wrote:

Tous ces essais ou contes sont basés sur une même théorie; que l'esprit humain est perméable à l'esprit humain, que toute ruse, toute astuce est démasquable, que l'inspiration même laisse démontrer ses prestiges lorsqu'analysée par un esprit suffisamment pénétrant, c'est à dire par Poe lui-même. 1

The characters in Queneau's own novels offer the reader a significantly different problem: while Poe's are presented for analysis, Queneau's characters are presented with the assumption that any analysis is quite pointless; they are impermeable. It is evident, then, that one of the main problems for Queneau is how to give his characters some kind of individual identity without suggesting impossible insights into their minds. Any surface feature which might distinguish a character is therefore carefully examined to determine its real value and, consistent with Queneau's technique, the method of examination is integrated into the novel's development. It is perhaps here, moreover, that Queneau has been most influential in terms of the progress of French Fiction: speaking of the New Novel, John Sturrock says,

It must never be read as an exercise in naive realism or naturalism but as a studied dramatisation of the creative process... (It displays) the novelist at work. 2

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1. R. Queneau, 'Poe et l'analyse', Bords, pp.69-70
 2. J. Sturrock, The French New Novel, p.4

For Queneau the particular problem is strictly technical and literary but the examination discovers implications of unmistakable moral and philosophical significance.

The most straightforward illustration involves the apparently simple process of giving a character a name. Many of Queneau's characters are named in a way that leaves them barely more distinctive than if they were entirely anonymous. Not surprisingly, the principle is most explicitly demonstrated in Le Chiendent.³ Throughout the first chapter the character we eventually know as Etienne Marcel, when he is distinguished from others, is qualified rather than named.⁴ Even when he is eventually asked his name and therefore becomes Etienne Marcel, it is hardly a distinguishing designation, as is emphasised by the dialogue which follows:

- ...Ah alors non, sûr qu'il n'a pas eu vot'chance, meussieu?
meussieu?
- Meussieu Marcel.
- Vous êtes coiffeur?
- Oh non je m'appelle Etienne Marcel. 5

A similar intention governs the designation of Mme Cloche: cloche, in French slang, can mean simply 'daft'⁶, which is of course what she appears to the reader. Instead of 'Mme Cloche', Queneau could equally well call her 'la dame cloche'; the name does not confer any specific identity. The same principle may also be seen to work with the hero of Pierrot mon ami: 'Pierrot' denotes a clown no more individual than Harlequin. Queneau is not claiming universality for his characters but rather refusing to delineate them. Each character represents a collection of attributes which are brought together in one personality for reasons

3. Cf. Part 1, p.11

4. Cf. Part 1, p.22

5. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, p.35

6. '...used more or less affectionately'. Cf. J. Marks, French-English Dictionary of Slang and Colloquialisms, London (Harrap), 1970, p.60

which, in imaginative literature, should be purely technical. The reader cannot turn to the author's psychologizing to explain away the discrepancies of personalities he encounters in fiction, for any such psychologizing is necessarily false (a fictional solution for a fictional problem) and, in Queneau's case at least, consciously so.

Queneau's devising can, of course, lead us into the trap of over-reading. There is a danger of seeing the qualification of names as absolute: cloche, it should be remembered, has more than one meaning. Queneau is playing a game with the reader's intelligence: first a name appears to describe a character's rôle and then the process is reversed and the name is reduced to a simple means of reference. An over-responsive reader may be tempted to view the widow in Zazie dans le métro as an Everyman figure because of the way she chooses to introduce herself:

- Eh bien moi, dit la veuve en rougissant un tantinet, je m'appelle Mme Mouaque. Comme tout le monde, qu'elle ajouta. 7

But such a plan is far too pompous for Queneau. What his irony tells us is that he is sceptical of the writer's ability to create a man, let alone Everyman. In this case he is simply making a joke by isolating a common verbal mannerism.

Frequently, moreover, a character may have several names, and, in the case of Brabant (Martin-Martin, Blaisolle, Dutilleul) in Les Derniers Jours, a different personality to accompany each one, a peculiarity which Queneau is at pains to emphasise: after hearing the

7. R, Queneau, Zazie dans le métro, p.102

tale of a business contact who has been blinded in a fight,

M. Blaisolle les laissa disserter et sortit en murmurant:
- C'est horrible.
Dans la rue, M. Dutilleul bougonnait:
- Deux mille balles qui me passent devant le nez.
Au Soufflet, M. Brabbant demanda au garçon:
- Dites donc, Alfred, c'était un bon jour aujourd'hui? 8

In Loin de Rueil, Jacques l'Aumône often confuses his own name with the poet Louis-Philippe des Cigales'. The reader can never be sure whether it is conscious or not and whether the justification for the confusion (which assumes a union between the poet and Jacques' mother) is real or fantastic.⁹ Similarly, the aristocratic descent which des Cigales may or may not have passed on to Jacques may be, for all the reader knows, illusory. If the connexion does not exist, it is at least desired on both sides, which suggests the analogy of the theme of Hamlet and fatherhood which runs through Ulysses. By the end of the novel the childless des Cigales, disappointed by Jacques, finds a substitute in Jacques' own son, Michou, and by this time, too, Jacques has become the American film star James Charity. Those members of his family who regularly attend the cinema appear unable to recognise him simply because they cannot translate aumône into English.

Paul B., the brother-in-law of Le Dimanche de la Vie is quite gratuitously given a different surname each time he is mentioned. At first this seems to indicate his family's contempt for him but the narrative also pursues what becomes the convention of finding a new designation each time he appears. His relations do seem to agree on his Christian name, Paul, but Queneau has him call himself Jules.

8. R. Queneau, Les Derniers Jours, p.127.

9. Cf. Part 2, n.95

Queneau is clearly being ironic since the slang words jules and julie usually refer to adulterers and, while his wife is persistently unfaithful, Paul remains apparently incapable of retaliation.¹⁰

This device is reversed in Le Dimanche de la Vie. While one character is given several names, one name is used at different intervals by three different people: Mme Saphir, the clairvoyante, dies and her name and place in the community are assumed first by Mme Brû and later by Mme Brû's husband Valentin.¹¹ The change of protagonist does not change the clairvoyante's role and, to the rest of the community, Mme Saphir remains Mme Saphir.

An early chapter of Les Enfants du Limon is devoted entirely to the complicated genealogy of the Limon/Chambernac family.¹² It is detailed in such precise terms that the reader would be justified in the assumption that, in this case at least, the insertion has been made to relieve his confusion. Unless the reader is familiar with Queneau's novels, and so naturally suspicious, he has no reason at all to doubt the genealogy's authenticity until, several chapters later, Henry de Chambernac begins to reflect on the circumstances of his brother Edmond's death. The manner of the reflection ("Reportons-nous vingt-cinq ans en arrière, commença Chambernac d'une voix mouillée..") suggests that for

10. Jules, of course, has other connotations (cf. J. Marks, French-English Dictionary of Slang and Colloquialisms) but its precise implication in this example is made even more clear by the fact that his sister-in-law, who is equally preoccupied by the thought of her husband's infidelity, is called Julia.

11. Valentin provides a second example of the way names can fail in their primary function: even after four years in the same regiment, there is no record of his name on the army files. The novel opens with a search for Valentin emphatically complicated by this fact. Exactly the same circumstances are repeated at the end of the novel once he has been recalled for war service.

12. R. Queneau, Les Enfants du Limon, pp. 40-41

a brief moment he may be off his guard, that he may, therefore, be revealing some hidden truth:

"...tout était calme, stable, tranquille, chacun avait sa vie assurée, avec des petites rentes on pouvait faire l'oisif, bref on vivait comme des cochons - des cochons qu'on a saignés en 1914, je ne dis pas ça pour mon pauvre frère, ce pauvre Henry.
Il se mit à pleurer. 13

The effect of this is to undermine the credibility of the genealogy and to cast doubts on the identity of each individual member of the family. Names in Queneau are never reliable; they merely create uncertainty.

This uncertainty is intensified by Queneau's practice of giving his characters stations in life which are superficially at variance with their preoccupations and patterns of behaviour. Jacques L'Aumône starts his career as a boxer, a semi-underworld figure, and becomes a microbiologist before turning to acting. Such change as does take place in his attitudes, and it is considerable, has little relation to the changes in his situation. Throughout the novels, Queneau's heroes are shown to be capable of extreme changes of circumstance without being personally affected in any way. It is natural enough, therefore, that Queneau should conspicuously seize on all popular French myths which believe such incongruity to be the essence, almost, of certain occupations. To be a tramp so imbecilic as to be incapable of connected speech is to be a profound mystic, to be a concierge or a waiter is necessarily to be a philosopher. Promiscuity is centred around priests and middle-class housewives, moral severity around prostitutes, and so on. The manner is ironic, but Queneau does challenge that instinct which supposes a relation between what a person is underneath and what he appears on the surface, a challenge which is wholly consistent with his own lack of

sympathy for the existentialist case.¹⁴ Equally persistently, however, ^{ch} he refuses to indicate exactly what a character is underneath, or rather, insists on his incapacity to do so.

As if to emphasise this incapacity, a year after the publication of Zazie dans le métro, Queneau issued 'un chapitre écarté de Zazie'¹⁵ expanding the biography of Marceline, Gabriel's 'wife'. The final chapter of the novel had revealed her to be a man, Marcel,¹⁶ a fact which is now further qualified by the revelation that he is also a deserter from the German army and what is more, a 'connaisseur et exégète de Clausewitz.' The addition is disturbing not so much for what it reveals but for the implication that there are any number of other possible revelations from which this one was chosen. It does not bring the reader any nearer the truth but, rather, indicates that the gap which separates him from the truth is unbridgeable.

It is perfectly appropriate, therefore, that a character in a novel may occasionally be able to see through another's disguise while the reader is still completely deceived:

Enfin apparurent une paire de bas de soie d'une extrême finesse et le personnage qui les utilisait, laquelle, était-il jugé, ne pouvait être que l'étoile. Elle s'appelait Rojana Pontez, du moins sur les affiches collés sur les murs de la ville... 17

Once the reader discovers (several chapters later) that Rojana is in fact

14. Cf. J-P. Sartre, L'Être et le Néant, Paris 1943, p.11: 'Il est certain qu'on s'est débarassé en premier lieu de ce dualisme qui oppose l'existant l'intérieur à l'extérieur. Il n'y a plus d'extérieur de l'existant, si l'on entend par là une peau superficielle qui dissimulerait aux regards la véritable nature de l'objet. Et cette véritable nature, à son tour, si elle doit être la réalité secrète de la chose, qu'on peut pressentir ou supposer mais jamais atteindre parce qu'elle est 'intérieure' à l'objet considéré, n'existe plus.'

15. Livres de France, 10.12.1960

16. Cf. Part I, p.15

17. R. Queneau, Loin de Rueil, p.129 (my italics).

the Camille of chapter one, the negative value of the words 'du moins' becomes clear. But we must assume that for Jacques and Camille, coincidences of this sort are the most normal thing in the world since neither shows any sign of surprise, although, as the reader learns later, they do recognise one another. We must assume also that disguises are equally commonplace since they, too, appear unworthy of comment. Both Jacques and Camille are natives of Rueil and, the implication is, that since they must both share the desire to escape from Rueil, they connive at each other's success by their silence. But this is all revealed later. At the time, the reader has very little reason to suspect Rojana's identity and none at all to suppose that he has met her before.

This device is the reverse of one more frequently used by Queneau. Normally a character who assumes a disguise, or at least a false name, assumes a different personality to go with it. When Mme Cloche dresses up as l'abbé Rounère in Le Chiendent she is not simply posing as a priest, she effectively becomes a priest and the narrative accordingly refers to her no longer as Mme Cloche but as le curé.¹⁸ Again this should plant a significant element of doubt in the reader's mind. Rather than simply taking a sceptical attitude towards the role and motives of l'abbé Rounère, he is obliged to reconsider his attitude towards Mme Cloche herself. There is no reason why the authenticity of the figure dressed up as a priest should be any more doubtful than the one who may well be dressed up as Mme Cloche. It is not enough to argue that the figure appeared first as Mme Cloche and is accepted (or appears to be accepted) as such by the other characters, since what is involved is a knowledge of

18. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, p.190

events prior to the moment where the novel begins. These in turn may involve the deception of the other characters or possibly their connivances at the disguise. There is good reason, for example, to suspect the motives behind des Cigales' failure to recognise James Charity at the end of Loin de Rueil. He may, of course, be as unsuspecting as any of the other characters. On the other hand, Jacques' legitimate wife has by then become his mistress and so he has a vested interest in Jacques' truancy. Queneau is characteristically careful not to suggest that either alternative is the more likely.

In Queneau's case it cannot be argued that the reader must simply take on trust that a character is who the author says he is. From the very beginning Queneau deliberately undermines the reader's faith by his systematic irony. Although the initial effect is comic and this has value in itself, it can reasonably be argued that Queneau is simply being honest about his art. By challenging the traditional relationship between the novelist and the reader which depends on some kind of 'suspension of disbelief', Queneau shows that the essence of fiction is something far less restrictive than credible characters in credible situations. There is no particular reason why a novelist who has emphasised the gratuitous nature of his choice of when and where to begin his narrative should concern himself with settling the reader's uncertainty about something outside the limits he is free to impose on his fiction. Moreover, it can be inferred that these prior events may involve an infinite number of disguises, deceptions and connivings and therefore that the novelist is as incapable as the reader of finding the truth or the real motivation behind the behaviour of his characters.

In this context, what might be called the entomological obsession of Loin de Rueil can be explained in terms Queneau made clear on two separate occasions in 'Lectures pour un Front', the 'chronique littéraire' he wrote weekly for Front National from September 1944 to November 1945. In the first of these instances, he refers to the insect world to illustrate how a surface conceals rather than expresses the reality underneath:

Les mœurs de ces bestioles sont ignobles, affreuses, immondes. Tout ce beau monde se dévore, vorace et impitoyable, avec des ruses abominables, tout ce beau monde vit plus ou moins d'excréments et de cadavres. Lorsque le calme règne dans la campagne et qu'un sôt s'extasie sur cette paix, il y a des milliers d'insectes qui s'entremangent ou préparent de futurs festins en pondant sur des oeufs dont leurs larves, plus tard, dégusteront vivantes les larves qui en naîtront, cependant que de plus petits insectes ont déjà parasité les prédateurs, et ainsi de suite. 19

The conflict between surface impression and reality is a fact of nature and a fact obviously reflected throughout Queneau's novels. But the deception, as far as it goes, is accidental and involves the inadequacy of the observer's perception rather than wilful deceit. In a later article, in which he reviews L. Chopard's La Vie des Sauterelles, Queneau draws our attention to those mimetic insects who do consciously deceive their observer:

Les habitués du vivarium du Jardin des Plantes connaissent bien les phyllies qui présentent l'aspect des feuilles, tant pour la forme que pour la couleur et jusqu'aux nervures mêmes. Leurs oeufs ressemblent à des graines. Mais certaines sauterelles-feuilles les dépassent encore dans l'art de l'imitation: leurs formes ont non seulement l'apparence de feuilles, mais encore de feuilles rongées par une chenille, avec ces dentelles formées par les nervures laissées de côté, comme trop résistantes. Chez d'autres, les ailes ressemblent à des feuilles attaquées par une moisure, et aux différentes étapes de cette corruption. Enfin, une espèce va même jusqu'à imiter les petits points noirs que font les oeufs d'une larve rongeuse sur la feuille qu'elle copie...

The problem is no longer simply to distinguish between the impression

and reality, but to discover the motive for the deception. It has been proved, as Queneau points out, that predatory animals can easily distinguish between the insect and the real leaf, however sophisticated the disease, and so the instinct for self-protection can no longer be seen to provide a complete explanation for the phenomenon of camouflage in nature. Equally unsatisfactory to the scientist is the 'evolutionist' argument:

On conçoit mal le processus qui pourrait amener des sauterelles à s'évertuer de génération en génération à imiter une feuille rongée par une larve qui a déposé ses oeufs dans un coin.

In despair of a solution, Queneau tells us, one modern biologist has turned to psychoanalysing grasshoppers in search of the 'infra-consciousness' of insects,

ce qui revient à jeter son filet à papillons par dessus les moulins.²⁰

It is a solution which, for strikingly similar reasons, has attracted a number of modern novelists faced with the problem of motivating their characters.

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b) The problem defined: the motivation of character

Claude Simonnet's analysis of the chronic uncertainty which Queneau systematically plants in the reader's mind approaches an explanation of its significance:

En même temps que la largeur du dessin, une certaine imprécision calculée, l'espèce de halo d'indétermination qui entoure les êtres, concourent au même résultat. Le caractère incertain des héros suppose un jeu d'ombres et de lumière, d'unité et de diversité, de particulier et de général: ainsi dans Le Dimanche de la Vie, le beau-frère de Brû, sous la diversité de ses dénominations, perd sa vaine particularité de contrôleur de poids et de mesures pour acquérir

20. ibid., pp. 217-220

une sorte de généralité symbolique de petit bourgeois opportuniste et inconsistant. 21

But finally Simonnet misses the point. The word 'inconsistant' covers a diversity of meaning which demands expansion: the fact is that the brother-in-law has a complete change of identity in the second half of the novel. From nowhere he acquires the opportunism which turns him into a highly successful armaments manufacturer at the outbreak of war. Just as Mme Cloche becomes the priest, ~~so~~ he becomes the haut bourgeois and, indeed, plays the part with great panache, only reverting to his original role in the final chapter. In spite of the lip-service it pays to the notion of 'généralité symbolique', Simonnet's analysis seeks to reduce the character of the brother-in-law to a particular common denominator and implies that all Queneau's heroes can be similarly reduced. It presupposes an acceptance of the approach which looks for the essence of a character's psychology as the means of identifying him, and this is precisely the approach Queneau's characterisation challenges.

Queneau's concern with the novelist's technical problem of identifying his characters and the demonstration he makes of its ultimate insolubility can be seen in the play of masks and disguises which are the foundation of each novel's structure. This is his means of indicating what seems to him the only possible response to the problem. The implication behind his refusal to identify which of the several masks is the real one is that no character can honestly be reduced to an essence. In his Essai, Jean Queval distinguishes between the three ways a character in Queneau's novels can deceive the reader as to his identity. Two of these involve involuntary deception: metamorphosis and resurrection.

21. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.69

The third is conscious disguise.²² More often than not, however, when the reader is faced with actual examples, these distinctions are impossible to make.

As with the silence of des Cigales at the end of Loin de Rueil, if the origins of conduct are unknowable then notions of consistency of character are inappropriate. This leaves the novelist free to impose whatever façade he chooses on any of his characters. As if to emphasise his own freedom, Queneau shows the same freedom at work among the characters themselves. Since a figure presents what is effectively carte blanche, he can hold any number of distinct identities and, less than the variety of his own particular personality, these express the preoccupations of those people considering him. Accordingly, the grocer, Gramigni, in Les Enfants du Limon can harbour idyllic dreams about the daughters of the Limon family because (at first, at least) he is unresentful of the social barrier which divides himself from them. Indeed it is the girls' very unattainability which preserves his illusion and, for him, they represent the apotheosis of purity and charm. For le fils Bossu (whose name, common though it is, is obviously intended to suggest an image of physical distortion and bitterness), beset by social and sexual anxieties, they are the opposite. 'Moi, à ta place,' he remarks with considerable violence to their chauffeur,

il y aurait longtemps que je me la serais envoyée; Ces filles là ça ne demande que ça. Tiens mon vieux toutes ces belles mômes qui vivent dans le luxe, ça me baratte le coquentin. Je finirai par en devenir fada si ça continue. Quand je pense qu'il y a des petits gars parce qu'ils sont riches qui peuvent y toucher comme ça leur plaît et s'enfourer la figure entre les cuisses, tiens, ça me tord là, juste au-dessous de la cravate que je n'ai pas. Rien que d'en

22. cf. J. Queval, Essai sur Raymond Queneau, pp. 141-145

parler j'en soulève la table avec mon dard.
- Tu as de l'imagination, dit Florent. 23

To accentuate the device, at this early stage in the novel Queneau allows the reader to assume that the truth about Agnès and Noémi lies half-way between the two projected images. While not as innocent as Gramigni would have them, their comfortable upbringing has protected them from the baseness of le fils Bossu. Later, however, this estimate is undermined. The girls assume totally different identities. Noémi marries her first cousin and joins the classe commerçante while Agnès becomes deeply committed to a role in popular politics. If Agnès's attitudes appear sincere, Queneau makes it clear that they are no less of mask, projected this time not by another character but (consciously or not) by herself. Just as for le fils Bossu she is what he imagines her to be in this case she is what she imagines herself to be. The latter is no less of a fictional idea than the first and both, of course, depend on the caprice of the novelist. As for what Agnès really is, we cannot expect to know.

Similarly, in *Le Chiendent*, le père Taupe is hiding a vast store of riches simply because such an idea possesses Mme Cloch as she appears to the reader. The realisation that she is probably wrong and that the old man is as poor as he looks does not bring the reader any closer to the real mystery of Taupe. He may not be hiding money, but he may well be hiding something else. He may equally well not; the uncertainty is what counts. In his first novel Queneau illustrates how a simple literary contrivance can produce a succession of meanings which, for all

his irony,²⁴ are philosophically significant. He shows how one set of implications can introduce others which, in this case, lead to a baroque accumulation of uncertainties.²⁵ Queneau's technique here is to place a character in an enclosed situation with only the most banal objects on which to focus his attention (in this case the shoes of a fellow traveller). 'Serré dans son coin de wagon par un obèse puant du bee,' Etienne Marcel, in a ruminative mood which has been carefully created from the opening section,²⁶ falls into considering the need for systematic doubt as a preliminary to any philosophical research:

Tout ce qui se présente, se déguise. Ainsi, par exemple la chaussure droite du type qui se trouve en face de moi. Bien sûr, elle paraît chausser son pied; elle paraît. Mais peut-être a-t-elle quelqu'autre sens. D'une façon élémentaire, ça peut être une boîte; il y a de la coco cachée dans le talon. Ou bien ça peut être un instrument de musique. ça pourrait faire un numéro de music-hall; ou bien peut-être encore qu'elle est comestible, c'est peut-être un Meussieu prudent qui craint de se trouver sans ressources, alors il mangera ses croquenots. Et bien d'autres choses encore, et les hommes, c'est encore pis que les choses; et le monde et tout ce qui se passe. On croit qu'il se passe ceci et c'est cela. On croit faire ceci et l'on fait cela. Toute action est déception, toute pensée implique erreur. Précisément par naïveté: on admet la sincérité de toute apparence, alors qu'au contraire il faut en douter.

And so, it seems to Etienne, Mme Cloche deserves praise for her suspicions; she appears to mistake Etienne for a gangster for the right reasons:

Elle ne se limite pазozap-parences. Je me présente comme employé de banque, honnête, scrupuleux, marié, beau-père de famille et le reste; bref comme la chaussure droite du type qu'est en face. Mais Mme Cloche ne se laisse pas prendre. Elle cherche plus loin. Et me découvre bandit...

Also so preliminary doubt does not ensure the right conclusion:

...l'on peut douter d'une apparence et se gourer, car toute chose a de multiples apparences, une infinité d'apparences. Cette chaussure droite possède une infinité de prétentions. Qui toutes sont fausses. Il y a des prétentions et des déguisements. Bien sûr, tout ça c'est pour le Meussieu qui regarde. L'autre, celui

24. Much of which is aimed at Descartes.

25. More usually Queneau allows the reader to make these inferences for himself, but, as has already been suggested (Cf. Part 1, p.11) Le Chiendent is in many ways a conscious statement of the principles from which the rest of Queneau's fiction does not significantly deviate.

26. Cf. Demonstration of the cogito, Part1, p.23

la qu'est en face de moi et plie soigneusement son Petit Journal, l'autre se sert de sa chaussure; que lui importe les apparences. Mais s'il ne s'était pas aperçu que cette godasse, on l'avait fabriqué avec une matière soluble dans l'eau et qu'un jour de pluie il se retrouve trempant ses chaussettes dans la boue? Ça lui apprendrait à prendre tout ce qui vient pour argent comptant. Il n'y a pas d'argent comptant, il n'y a que de fictives opérations de banque. 27

The total uncertainty, concentrated in Etienne's perception that 'toute chose a de multiples apparences' and which Queneau insistently forces on his reader from novel to novel, leads Bernard Pingaud to the realisation that Zazie dans le métro in particular can only be interpreted in terms of 'une traversée des apparences'.²⁸ With the possible exception of that early semi-autobiographical trilogy (Les Derniers Jours, Odile and Un Rude Hiver²⁹), Pingaud's conclusion stands for any of Queneau's novels, although Zazie dans le métro arguably offers the clearest formulation of Queneau's approach, including a few broad hints from the author.³⁰ Queneau is obviously quite aware that, once he has indicated the superficial nature of his depictions, he evades consideration of these depths of potential truth concealed by the surfaces of his fiction. As Pingaud has noted,

Zazie était venue à Paris avec l'espoir de voir le métro. Dans métro il y a être. Ce n'est pas par hasard si cet animal qui rode sous terre, donc derrière les apparences, est en grève au moment où l'aventure commence; ce n'est pas par hasard non plus si l'aventure s'achève au moment où le métro se remet en marche, laissant à Zazie le souvenir d'une découverte trop brève. 31

If we take the underground as the symbol of real being as opposed to appearance, we find in Queneau's suspension of it the symbol of his

27. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, pp.222-224

28. B. Pingaud, Zazie dans le métro, Esprit, March 1959, p.531

29. Cf. Part 1, n. 17.

30. Cf. R. Queneau, Zazie dans le métro, p.54:

Ce n'était pas un satyr qui se donnait l'apparence d'un Faux flic, mais un vrai flic qui se donnait l'apparence d'un faux satyr qui se donne l'apparence d'un vrai flic.

31. B. Pingaud, Zazie dans le métro, Esprit, March 1959, p.53.

reluctance to answer the questions his novels pose. Revelations such as those concerning Marcel/Marceline, rather than reducing confusion, add to the reader's uncertainty. That Marceline is a man appears to answer the question raised by Gabriel's sexual ambiguity.³² At the same time, however, it raises another question: while it is reasonable to expect Gabriel himself to be shy of publicising the intimate details of his 'marriage', what of the other characters? Are they deceived, or do they combine with Gabriel to deceive all strangers, including the reader? In particular, the ingenuousness of Gridoux's vehement defence of Gabriel in front of the faux flic³³ is made to seem highly suspect. If Gridoux's innocence is to be questioned, so must that of the cab-driver, Charles, and the rest of Gabriel's circle.

In this context, Pingaud's cautious reflexion on his own uncertainty appears perfectly reasonable: Zazie dans le métro, he argues, is a novel so carefully planned that when our laughter is provoked we must ask ourselves if Queneau is not using humour to conceal, behind the very spontaneity of our laughter, a deeper sense to his novel:

Peut-être le piège consiste-t-il, d'ailleurs, à nous laisser croire que le sens existe. Tout art est dissimulation. Mais la dissimulation la plus fine n'est-elle pas celle qui se dissimule elle-même, pareille à ces trompe l'oeil très étudiés, dans lesquels certains peintres sont passés maîtres, et qui donnent à s'y méprendre l'illusion de la profondeur. Je ne suis pas certain que Zazie dans le métro soit un livre profond. L'art de Queneau consiste précisément à faire en sorte qu'il nous paraisse tel. Et c'est peut-être cela la vraie profondeur. 34

Confirmation of Pingaud's idea can be found in the whimsical observation of the concierge, Saturnin, during the wedding feast in Le Chiendent:

32. Cf. C. Simonnet, Queneau déchiffré, p.65-66

33. R. Queneau, Zazie dans le métro, pp.76-78

34. B. Pingaud, 'Zazie dans le métro,' Esprit, March 1959, p.534

Ils ne se doutaient pas que l'assiette pleine cachait une assiette vide, comme l'être cache le néant. 35

The remark has obvious associations with Saturnin's version of Plato's Parménides, his discourse on 'l'être et le non-être', which appears later in the novel.³⁶ Our attitude to the latter passage, as Jean Queval has shown,³⁷ should in turn be modified by the earlier dialogue between Pierre and Etienne, which Etienne concludes with:

Ce n'est pas tout. Cette question, en elle-même, a-t-elle un sens? est-ce que le mot être a un sens?

The implication here seems to be that the distinction Saturnin makes between being and nonbeing (as opposed to being and nothingness) is purely linguistic, corresponding to nothing we can actually relate to common experience. Its place is among literary abstractions and hypotheses, just like the novel itself. If this is the case, we can find a distant echo of the same idea in the leitmotif of Zazie dans le métro, Laverdure's

Tu causes, tu causes, c'est tout ce que tu sais faire.

In Zazie dans le métro the reader's uncertainty is extended not only to the motivation of the characters, but also to apparently verifiable details of Parisian topography. Suddenly exasperated, Gabriel exclaims,

La vérité!...(geste), comme si tu savais cexé. Tout ça (geste), tout ça c'est du bidon. Le Panthéon, les Invalides, la caserne de Reuilly, le tarmac du coin, tout. Oui, du bidon. 38

It is a fact that for the stranger in Paris the métro is the most

35. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, p.182

36. ibid., pp.256-258

37. J. Queval, RRaymond Queneau, p.118

38. R. Queneau, Zazie dans le métro, p.14

reliable means of orientation. The inference to be made is that, once this has been suspended, the stranger (the reader?) has to rely on the word of residents, policemen and taxi drivers, none of whom, in the novel at least, are in any way reliable.³⁹

Zazie dans le métro represents the clearest and most extreme formulation of the problem which has preoccupied Queneau since Le Chiendent. By almost doubling the speed with which characters assume and reject their various disguises and by giving us the image of the underground on strike, Queneau has given symbolic expression to his concept of the novel. Reality is also suspended. In one sense, there must be a true figure behind the endless succession of masks, but that figure is no more real since it can be nothing more than an extension of the author's imagination. Fiction cannot have any other essence than its imaginary condition.

There can be few writers whose views differ as widely from Queneau's as do those of the American novelist Mary McCarthy.

I think this technical development has become absolutely killing to the novel,

she said in an interview.⁴⁰ And yet they appear to agree on one fundamental point. Earlier in the same interview, she remarked,

What I really do is take real plums and put them in an imaginary cake. If you're interested in the cake, you get rather annoyed with people saying what species the real plum was.⁴¹

That Gabriel and Marcel are homosexuals is no real discovery since even to say 'they are men' is strictly untrue. To emphasise the point,

39. Cf. P. Gayot, Raymond Queneau, p.110

40. 'Interview with Mary McCarthy', Paris Review, Winter-Spring, 1962, p.91

41. ibid., p.67

Queneau plants what amounts to an obsession with 'the underlying truth' in his reader's mind, and sets him the task of discovering something which he resolutely withholds. In the last short chapter of Zazie dans le métro, with the reader no nearer his goal, the métro begins to work again. This signifies that the novel has reached its end and that the reader must return to the real world, where the pursuit of truth is a legitimate, if vain, occupation.

The novel therefore demonstrates a point which could be called a moral truth, and demonstrates it in full awareness of its hypothetical nature. But the demonstration is a by-product of the novel's construction; it is not made within the novel but implied by its conclusion. Within the novel, Queneau sets out to formulate rather than solve the technical problem of giving his characters and their location an identity. Also, but incidentally, it raises the fundamental moral question of any human being's fictional idea of himself and other human beings. Even the apparently simple problem of naming a character in a novel, as David Lodge has pointed out,⁴² involves criteria which are first and foremost aesthetic. Whether the writer's final choice is loaded with implications, as when William Faulkner gives a character the initials J.C.,⁴³ or whether it is deliberately nondescript, as with Queneau's Pierrot, its significance concerns the role of the character within the formal structure of the novel. Important moral or philosophical implications are made, but they are discovered in the course of the formal exercise.

D.I. Grossvogel, in his dismissal of purely formal fiction, refers

42. D. Lodge, Language of Fiction, p.44

43. Joe Christmas in Light in August.

to Harry Levin's contention that Zurich, during World War I, was not only Joyce's headquarters, but also that of Jung and the 'international psychoanalytic movement';⁴⁴ and suggests that some kind of cross-fertilisation, however vague in nature, probably took place. Free association and stream of consciousness are seen to be the point of intersection and the natural issue of movements in the arts such as Impressionism and Bergsonian philosophy. These 'endeavours' are all characterised by a

common desire to reach the unknown in man - that ultraman sensed beyond the shortcomings of normative definitions. ⁴⁵

Against this background and that of the birth of Dada and Surrealism, Ulysses is seen as an attempt to

contrive a novel that would record the minute scrutiny of a private awareness. ⁴⁶

Thus far, Grossvogel gives us a useful reminder of the context in which so many of these innovations were made. But again he returns to his theme of 'committing the reader' to an interest in the developing psyche of an imagined being.⁴⁷ This is, for Grossvogel, the real aim of Joyce's technical experimentation. We are given a rather naive image of that modern literature which seems worthwhile: it fights an unwilling and sceptical reader along a path which leads deeper and deeper in the search for 'ultraman'. That fiction which diverges from this path is dismissed as 'mere contingency'.⁴⁷

It is remotely possible that Joyce's intentions fit in with this view, although his irony seems to indicate the contrary. But those

44. H. Levin, James Joyce: A Critical Introduction, London 1960

45. D.I. Grossvogel, Limits of the Novel, p.261

46. ibid., p.262

47. ibid., p.265

post-Joycean novelists, Queneau in particular, whom Grossvogel dismisses for missing their cues, have been in a position to see the fallacy of a search for truth in depth. If these were Joyce's intentions, he is influential because he has been misinterpreted. The fiction of these novelists may be 'mere contingency'. More disturbingly, it may also have discovered the mere contingency of existence. In itself, of course, there is nothing new in the discovery, but it is at least refreshing to find some reaction against credulity, to find a reminder of the tradition of French scepticism which, if it begins with Montaigne, was certainly brought into the modern age by Flaubert, the Flaubert of Bouvard et Pécuchet in particular.

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c) Queneau and Flaubert

Queneau has made no secret of his admiration for Flaubert. In his three prefaces to Bouvard et Pécuchet,⁴⁸ he confesses to almost complete sympathy with Flaubert's attitudes to the technique and themes of his fiction. It could perhaps be argued that Queneau's admiration for Flaubert stands in contradiction with the view that Queneau sees the imaginative writer as ideally concerned, first and foremost, with technical accomplishment and not with moral or philosophical issues. In his novels, it may be argued, Flaubert presents highly charged moral situations whose effect, moreover, is often achieved by the direct opposition of a character and his own particular ethical code. Almost invariably, it is the code itself which suffers in the comparison. Characters are frequently seen to be

48. The first published in Fontaine, Algiers 1943, the second N.R.F., Paris 1947 (collected in Bâtons, chiffres et lettres), the third as an introduction to the Livre de Poche Bouvard et Pécuchet, Paris 1959

trapped within the inflexibility of the moral systems they have imposed on themselves. Flaubert, on the other hand, clearly did not write romans à these. Such moral conflict should not be seen as part of an argument committed to the demonstration of Flaubert's own particular case (he is hardly consistent enough to have a case), but as part of the raw material from which an aesthetic whole is constructed. As much as Queneau, Flaubert was concerned above all with designing patterns. This is, at least, how Queneau interprets Bouvard et Pécuchet.

Queneau readily admits that his approach to the business of criticism has more to do with personal taste than with scholarship.⁴⁹ While there is little doubt that he has been an important influence behind current readiness to accept Bouvard et Pécuchet as one of Flaubert's major works, in themselves, his prefaces represent a relatively slight contribution to the field of Flaubert criticism. In his presentation of Flaubert as virtually the ideal novelist, on the other hand, we are given an insight into the preconceptions which govern Queneau's own work as a novelist. This is not to belittle Queneau's perceptiveness as a critic. The prefaces offer valuable insights which do not depend solely on sympathy and intuition, but reveal a close familiarity with Flaubert's writings. Queneau, nevertheless, insists on the subjectivity of his judgement, an attitude which allows him to make assumptions without seeking to justify them. There has been much critical speculation on the subject of Flaubert's personal attitude towards his heroes. On this point, Queneau is unequivocal:

Le fait que les deux copistes soient finalement en mesure d'établir non seulement l'Album mais encore le Dictionnaire montre d'autre part qu'ils sont devenus, dans une certaine mesure, les porte-

49. Cf. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, pp.98-99

parole de Flaubert, Bouvard surtout, dont les méditations sur la philosophie et le monde, les critiques de la religion ou les attitudes philosophiques sont bien celles de Flaubert lui-même.⁵⁰

It might be said that Queneau's limits as a critic are perhaps uncomfortably demonstrated by his readiness to embrace the 'Bouvard, c'est moi' interpretation. He does, nevertheless, go on to justify this assumption:

Lorsque Bouvard déclare: "La science est faite suivant les données fournies par un coin de l'étendue. Peut-être ne convient-elle pas à tout le reste qu'on ignore, qui est beaucoup plus grand et qu'on ne peut découvrir", c'est du Flaubert - ou presque.⁵¹

It is hard to believe that Queneau has missed the double irony of Bouvard's pronouncement. The last sentence, at least, is worthy of a place in any dictionnaire des idées reçues. This, of course, does not negate its wisdom, but rather emphasises the essential ambiguity of the projected 'dictionary'. Neither does it deny the possibility that Bouvard is speaking for Flaubert; the platitudinousness of real wisdom is arguably a major theme of his fiction. Queneau is, moreover, aware that his own 'wisdom' as a critic may also merit a place for his words in le Dictionnaire, but he argues, justifiably, that the author's use of irony gives no excuse for the reticence of the critic.⁵²

Queneau's argument is most explicit in his second preface:

Bouvard et Pécuchet se termine sur une conclusion sceptique - au sens où scepticisme et science sont identiques...
... Flaubert est pour la science dans la mesure justement où celle-ci est sceptique, réservée, méthodique, prudente, humaine. Il a horreur des dogmatiques, des métaphysiciens, des philosophes.⁵³

50. ibid., p.104

51. ibid., p.105

52. The remark implies a rebuke to A. Thibaudet, Cf. ibid., pp.97-100

53. ibid., p.121

Though he fails to acknowledge Flaubert's notorious inconsistency, Queneau establishes a convincing relationship between his assessment of the novel and Flaubert's own pronouncements. Two of these are given particular emphasis: first,

..."je ne m'étonne pas de gens qui cherchent à expliquer l'incompréhensible, mais de ceux qui croient avoir trouvé l'explication, de ceux qui ont le bon Dieu... dans leur poche. Eh bien! oui, tout dogmatique m'exaspère. Bref, le matérialisme, et le spiritualisme me semblent deux impertinences. Après avoir dernièrement lu pas mal de livres catholiques, j'ai pris la philosophie de Lefèvre ('dernier mot de la science'): c'est à jeter au latrines. Voilà mon opinion. Tous ignorants, tous charlatans, tous idiots, qui ne voient jamais qu'un côté d'un ensemble.⁵⁴

and, of course, 'L'ineptie consiste à vouloir conclure.'⁵⁵ Too many readers of Flaubert, in Queneau's opinion,⁵⁶

ont vu dans Bouvard et Pécuchet un "scepticisme stérile". Le scepticisme, d'abord, lorsqu'on en fait bon usage, n'est jamais stérile. ⁵⁷

Given the measure of his approval, it should hardly be surprising to find Queneau's sympathy with Flaubert reflected in his own novels. In particular cases it is often difficult to say with any certainty whether Queneau is consciously echoing Flaubert or not. The reader who is familiar with Queneau's work will be accustomed to finding occasional passages in which allusion and parody are used more or less obviously to indicate the author's respect for a precursor. On the other hand, since Queneau appears to share so many of Flaubert's fundamental attitudes, the 'echoes' may result just as frequently not from conscious borrowing but from the principles the two writers hold in common. This 'condominium' is summarised by Jean Queval in terms of a philosophical approach:

54. ibid., p.122

55. ibid., p.124

56. It is an indication of the liberties Queneau allows himself that he does not feel any need to say precisely who these people are.

57. R. Queneau, 'Préface' to Bouvard et Pécuchet, Livre de Poche, p.10

Le bon usage du scepticisme n'est jamais stérile: N'importe quel usage du fanatisme est monstrueux. Or le fanatisme résulte toujours d'une conclusion toujours prématurée. 58

In defining these attitudes, Queval indicates the importance of Queneau's 'Lectures pour un Front'.⁵⁹ Understandably, since it belongs to time immediately following the Second World War, much of Queneau's weekly column is concerned, directly and indirectly with an exegesis of Fascism. Given the circumstances, it would be unfair to take too literally much of the rationale. In tone it has a great deal in common with Camus' Lettres à un ami allemand. Unlike Camus, however, several years later Queneau allowed selections from the work to be republished without any preface pleading the particular circumstance.⁶⁰ What is more, in the attitudes Queneau expresses towards the more fashionable reactions to the moral and philosophical questions raised by German militarism, the reader is given a useful way into the foundations of Queneau's thought (rather than material which will help a fair assessment of its quality).

In 'Lectures pour un Front', Queneau is mainly concerned with the relationship between literature and life; that is to say, he is less concerned with the reflexion of life in literature and more in conjecture upon the ability of literature to affect the course of History, whether at a political or a social level. The atrocities perpetrated by the Germans represent the incursion into 'le réel' of those grotesque absurdities which hitherto had been apparently confined to the imagination and revealed only through artistic expression of one form or another, as in Sade's Les cent vingt jours de Sodome, or,

58. Cf. J. Queval, Raymond Queneau, pp. 174-175

59. Cf. Part 3, n.19

60. In both editions of Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, Paris N.R.F, 1950 and Idées, 1965

more recently, the jokes of Dada and Surrealism:

Que six semaines après la délivrance de millions d'esclaves du joug nazi, un joyeux raciste écrive dans les couloirs du métro: 'Les juifs nous reviennent gros et gras', voilà, encore, de l'humour noir.

What disturbs Queneau about black humour is that its practical expression appears quite invariably to be essentially reactionary. Nazi Germany, he claims, 'applied' black humour with deliberate method:

elle a mis en oeuvre une sorte de dadaïsme politique dont les précurseurs, sur le plan littéraire, pourraient être Nietzsche et Sade, elle a réalisé l'atmosphère des romans de Kafka, elle a rigoureusement appliqué les méthodes préconisées par Swift, elle a trouvé dans son Volk de nombreuses incarnations d'Ubu - tous noms qui figurent dans L'Anthologie de l'humour noir d'André Breton. 62

Kafka is the most plainly disturbing of the writers Queneau names because he presents his dark jokes in such a way as to make us believe. It is 'sa façon de traiter un "imaginaire" avec des méthodes purement réalistes'⁶³ which forces the reader to take the nightmare seriously.

There is a clear moral in this for Queneau:

Le nazisme est l'humour noir pris au sérieux et non moins "destructif" sur le plan "réel", que l'humour noir sur le plan des idées. 64

Queneau sees all these writers sharing an intellectual nihilism, 'dernier mot, fin et principe de l'idéologie nationale-socialiste d'après Rauschning'.⁶⁵ It appears beyond question that the world imagined by Sade is 'la préfiguration hallucinante' of the world ruled by the Gestapo:

Or Sade fait partie intégrale de l'idéologie surréaliste, par exemple, et Breton, dès 1939, montrait quelque embarras dans l'exégèse de cet auteur. Que Sade n'ait pas été un terroriste..., que son oeuvre ait une valeur humaine profonde (ce que personne ne peut contester), n'empêcheront pas tout ceux qui ont donné une

62. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, pp.192-193

63. ibid., p.184. Queneau sees the same technique displayed in the fiction of Erskine Caldwell.

64. ibid., p.194

65. ibid., p.216

adhésion plus ou moins grande aux thèses du marquis de devoir envisager, sans hypocrisie, la réalité des camps d'extermination avec leurs horreurs non plus enfermées dans la tête d'un homme, mais pratiquées par des milliers de fanatiques. 65

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d) Conclusion: the novelist as sceptic

Queneau's misgivings are so often expressed in relation to the particular example of Dada and Surrealism, not only because of his own involvement in the Surrealist movement, but also, and much more emphatically, because of Surrealism's claim to be a way of life. To Queneau's way of thinking, the danger of any philosophy lies with the transition from imagination to reality. The fallacies of any philosophy are discovered far more painfully if they are discovered through experience rather than intellect. It is on these same grounds that Queneau quarrels with Existentialism: for all its claim to be humanistic, 'L'existentialisme passe pour un mode de vie,'⁶⁶ and so condemns itself.

Several attempts have nevertheless been made, notably by Martin Esslin,⁶⁷ to make something of an existentialist of Queneau. Speaking of Etienne's inflation from a shadow among a million other shadows into a three-dimensional human being in Le Chiendent,⁶⁸ Esslin points out that not only does Etienne exist because he has shown himself capable of thought, but also because a third person begins to take an interest in him and observe his movements:

66. ibid., p.167

67. Cf. Part 1, n. 128

68. Cf. Part 1, p.23

Thus Etienne acquires, at one and the same moment, not only subjective being but also objective existence in the eyes of an observer - or in Sartrean terms Being-for-itself as well as Being-for-others. 69

What Esslin overlooks in his desire to establish the seriousness of Queneau's thought, despite its humorous presentation, is the technique Queneau uses to achieve humorous effect. Etienne's illumination bears the same incongruously trivial relation to Descartes' (and therefore, indirectly, to Sartre's⁷⁰) sober rationale as Blooms' call for breakfast in bed does to the heroics of Odysseus at the end of Homer's epic.⁷¹

Esslin continues:

The affinity between Queneau's thought and Sartre's existentialism, which was formulated at a much later date, is certainly striking. What Sartre calls the nothingness at the centre of Being-for-itself, the pure potentiality at the core of human consciousness which is nothing but freedom, the realization that man perceives himself in his ability to choose between modes of being, is very much akin to Queneau's conception that in the absurdity of the universe reality is a product of chance, choice and the curious by-products of consciousness, the perception of true and false ideas. 72

The plain fact is that the 'ideas' Martin Esslin attributes to Queneau are more than commonplace. It would be singularly difficult to find a philosopher, whatever his bias, who would attempt to refute them.

It is only by rigorously selective reading that agreement between Sartre and Queneau can be posited. The one passage from Le Chiendent which Esslin quotes at length contains statements by each of the characters involved which obviously undermine the possibility of placing them in any philosophical category. These have been 'edited out' by Esslin:

1. - Vous réfléchissez longtemps à ces questions? demanda Pierre.
- Oh non, répondit Etienne, je les invente au fur et à mesure. Je parle et ça veut dire quelque chose. Du moins pour moi; du moins je le suppose. Est-ce que vous trouvez un sens à ce que je dis? 73

69. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.83

70. By way of other philosophers; cf. Part 3, p.123

71. Cf. Part 1, n.97

72. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.84

73. R. Queneau, Le Chiendent, p.126

2. - Et vous savez, ajouta Pierre, je ne tiens pas plus que cela à que je viens de vous dire. Je m'exprime rarement en termes métaphysiques. 74

If both statements do not entirely deflate what is said, they at least indicate that it can be interpreted in any number of ways and that neither attitude is the burning preoccupation Esslin makes it out to be. Esslin goes further than this even, for he introduces the quotation with 'For Etienne, or Queneau, said⁷⁵...' It is obviously very dangerous, given the detachment of Queneau's manner, to assume that any of his characters fill the role of mouthpiece, even in the early trilogy⁷⁶ in which elements from Queneau's past are clearly recognisable. If Queneau does have a mouthpiece in Le Chiendent is it not more likely to be Pierre, the observer, than Etienne, the observed?

There is, however, one point of agreement between Sartre and Queneau which Martin Esslin overlooks and that is their common reaction from the preconceptions of essentialist psychology. It is true, moreover, that the reader of Queneau's highly allusive fiction will encounter many of the philosophical preoccupations commonly associated with Sartre's existentialism. But a perfectly reasonable explanation for this lies in the literary ancestry Sartre and Queneau hold in common, and this does not imply any philosophical sympathy. Montaigne, Descartes and Pascal are among the more obvious writers to figure in their French ancestry and to these may be added the German philosophers Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger:

Queneau himself tells us that he and Bataille were reading and discussing together, in the period 1929-1932, not only books by Wahl, Gurvitch and Lévinas dealing with Hegel, Husserl, and current German philosophy in general, but also the works by

74. ibid., p.127

75. M. Esslin, 'Raymond Queneau', The Novelist as Philosopher, p.86

76. Cf. Part 1, n.16

Heidegger and Husserl first published in French in 1931. In other words, Queneau and Bataille were reading some of the philosophers who later helped Sartre to develop his existentialist philosophy; at the time, however, Sartre himself was not quite ready to understand them. Simone de Beauvoir admits that she and Sartre read the translation of Heidegger's Was ist Metaphysik? which appeared in the periodical Bifur in 1931 without understanding a word of it. Bataille and Queneau, presumably, understood it better. 77

Each one of these writers can now be seen as a seminal influence behind various modes of thought which now stand in direct opposition.

Occasionally, as with Montaigne, this can be explained by the conscious inconsistencies in the detail of their argument. More often, it has been because particular sections of their thought have been isolated to corroborate the 'new' thinking: Hegel and Heidegger can be quoted approvingly by surrealist and existentialist alike. In the same way, Martin Esslin isolates particular features of Queneau's fiction and then reduces the whole to a kind of corroboration of existentialism. Queneau's real distinction in the twentieth century is that, having no personal axe to grind, he is able to appreciate the arguments of his precursors in full breadth, or at least to look upon the apparent certainty of his contemporaries with a scepticism appropriate to his own awareness of the past.

Queneau's most explicit response to modern French existentialism is largely provoked by Simone de Beauvoir's Pyrrhus et Cinéas, an essay which proposes indifference as the common enemy of men. Paul Gayot quotes Queneau as saying that to think

que c'est un tort pour un intellectuel de ne pas être dans l'action à l'heure actuel, c'est supposer qu'il faut agir pour agir. 78

77. V. Mercier, The New Novel (from Queneau to Pinget), New York 1971, p.62. Cf. 'Interview' p.135; also R. Queneau, 'Premières confrontations avec Hegel', an article mainly concerned with Georges Bataille and Queneau's early association with him, Critique, August 1963; also G. Bataille, 'La Méchanceté du langage', mainly an analysis of the different versions of Saint Glinglin, but making reference to the relationship between Queneau's fiction and Hegel's philosophy, Critique, December 1948.

78. P. Gayot, Queneau, p.36

This is precisely the supposition Simone de Beauvoir makes. Presenting the classical argument⁷⁹ which gives Cinéas the role of wise man, she makes a direct assault on the idea of that wisdom:

Simone de Beauvoir...propose donc, pour lutter contre la tentation de l'indifférence, le secours de l'action, et souligne que l'homme n'est pas seul au monde: "Nous avons besoin d'autrui pour que notre existence devienne fondée et nécessaire". 80

Queneau's attitude is that as soon as any philosophy which involves other people (as forcibly as does existentialism) becomes a way of life, it is in serious danger of degenerating into Fascism:

C'est ainsi que je n'ai jamais compris les efforts faits par certains pour absoudre Nietzsche de toute responsabilité dans l'histoire allemande depuis l'autre avant-guerre. Quelques citations défavorables aux Prussiens et favorables aux juifs n'empêcheront pas le fait incontestable que pan-germanistes et hitlériens ont pu lire Nietzsche avec fruit...Il est bien plus intéressant de réfléchir sur Nietzsche en tenant compte de sa postérité même illégitime...que de l'abstraire totalement du monde moderne; il y a dans cette dernière attitude quelque chose de cette tendance de l'homme de lettres à refuser la responsabilité de ses écrits et à accorder cette innocence à tous ses confrères. 81

The last remark, of course, can hardly be an appropriate criticism of existentialists, and, in making it, Queneau shows that he shares at least some of their attitudes. Simone de Beauvoir, one imagines, would prefer to be convinced of her responsibility for any action rather than to face the vacuum of innocence. Such an indiscriminate approach to the idea of action (and Queneau would argue that any real discrimination is impossible) lays Sartrean existentialism open to the same kind of distortions as Nietzsche's superman. Even when one's struggle aims at the eventual liberty of self and others,

79. Pyrrhus makes plans for war and, before departing, tells Cinéas that he will rest only after he has conquered the world. Cinéas replies, 'Why not take your rest now?'

80. G. Gennari, Simone de Beauvoir, Paris 1965, p.31

81. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.215

Il faut que la liberté des autres se situe à mon propre niveau. 83
For Queneau, any vacuum is preferable to this kind of responsibility.

His objection is perhaps an obvious one. Existentialists would reply that the kind of fanaticism Queneau fears is incompatible with the self-consciousness they preach and that to argue the possible distortions of a philosophy is not legitimate criticism, however much Simone de Beauvoir's essay seems to demand such a reply. On the same, perhaps simplistic level, Queneau reiterates his case with an example:

...Bien que Camus se défende de faire du théâtre à thèse, il est évident que dans son Caligula il a voulu montrer quelque chose, à savoir que la liberté à laquelle parvient le tyran est une liberté mauvaise, car elle s'exerce contre les autres hommes.,.

Lorsque Camus montre les poètes ridicules "lécher leurs immortelles tablettes" sur l'ordre de Caligula, on sent la balance pencher en faveur de celui-ci - alors que dans la "vie réelle" Camus a été un de ceux qui ont lutté précisément pour empêcher Hitler de faire lécher aux poètes leurs immortelles tablettes. 84

In the same way, many of Queneau's heroes call out sympathy through their very indifference, which amounts to a respect for the individuality of others.⁸⁵ If his argument is platitudinous and even, to some, irritating, so is the wisdom of Cinéas, of Bouvard (in the latter part of Flaubert's novel) and indeed of Flaubert himself.⁸⁶ It is nevertheless wisdom and offers a remarkable contrast to Queneau's own attitudes as a young surrealist. Maurice Nadeau makes an interesting note on Queneau's personal reaction to the exile of Trotsky in 1925:

Queneau marque l'insuffisance et le danger d'une action individuelle qui ne peut retomber que dans le scepticisme et la poésie, alors que l'action collective est seule efficace et, dans ce but, doit être l'oeuvre d'individus moralement propres. 87

In a footnote, Nadeau quotes a letter from Queneau which could have been written twenty years later by Simone de Beauvoir:

83. ibid., p.167

84. ibid., pp.168-170

85. Cf. Part 2, p.89

86. Sartre, for one, certainly finds Flaubert's wisdom irritating.

87. M. Nadeau, Histoire du Surréalisme, p.174

La littérature guette son homme au carrefour du scepticisme et de la poésie. L'action collective peut seule redresser les égarements individuels...Il s'agit donc de vaincre le confusionnisme qui semble obnubiler la plupart des esprits...Il ne faut pas trahir les ouvriers qui font la Revolution: les questions personnelles se posent lorsqu'il s'agit de traitres. 88

Queneau's later qualms, more in line with the attitude expressed by Ribemont-Dessaignes to André Breton at the time of l'Affaire Trotsky,⁸⁹ are not restricted to any particular philosophy but cover any system which advocates an approach to existence depending on faith in absolutes. The innate danger of any such faith is, for Queneau, the moral to be discovered in Bouvard et Pécuchet:

Ils sont épris d'absolu et ne peuvent supporter les contradictions. Ils croient à la validité absolue du fonctionnement de l'esprit humain confronté avec les phénomènes. 90

As Jean Queval has indicated, their problem is one familiar to any student of Hegel:

Comment réconcilier la finalité de la vérité à laquelle aspire la pensée rationnelle avec le caractère conditionné, relatif et incomplet de toute pensée humaine. 91

Hegel was by no means the first to see this as the fundamental problem. That such a reconciliation is impossible is the assumption governing the arguments of Montaigne and Pascal. The sober conclusion Queneau makes in 'Lectures pour un Front' is worthy of the assertive scepticism of Montaignes:

Les charniers complètent les philosophies, si désagréable que cela puisse être. 92

Queneau's own novels, with their systematic refusal to state the

88. ibid., p.174, n.1

89. "Ainsi, voilà à quoi aboutit toute votre volonté commune: jugement, jugement, jugement, jugement et de quelle sorte! En somme avez-vous jamais fait autre chose?...Je m'élève de toutes mes forces contre les moeurs que vous voulez maintenir, contre la mauvaise foi qui a régné durant la réunion de la rue du Chateau et contre le guet-apens mal organisé...qui se cachait sous le prétexte Trotsky". (ibid. p.175, n.1)

90. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.120

91. J. Queval, Raymond Queneau, p.194

92. R. Queneau, Bâtons, chiffres et lettres, p.215

absolute truth behind each character's mask, indicate how seriously he takes his own dictum. This partially explains why his approach to fiction is nearly always resolutely technical: Queneau is too apprehensive to use the novel to impose his own ideas. Although a convinced, if unwilling sceptic, his application of some form of methodological doubt is a technique rather than an aim of his fiction. There is perhaps an underlying hope that 'le doute, en s'exprimant, se nie', as Georges-Emmanuel Clancier suggests,⁹³ but the aim is not to replace doubt with certainty, rather to create a vacuum of contented insignificance of the kind abhorrent to Simone de Beauvoir.

A paragraph entitled 'De l'âge d'or' from Une Histoire Modèle gives the reader an insight into the assumption which governs Queneau's approach to the art of fiction:

Dans cette hypothèse, on considère un groupe humain plongé dans le bonheur. Cet âge n'a pas d'histoire. Lorsque l'histoire cesse, cet âge on réintègre. ⁹⁴

It is this consideration which seems to justify his pursuit of 'pattern without purpose' and which shows his poem 'Bien placés bien choisis/ quelques mots font une poésie', from Pour un art poétique, to be less flippant than it may appear:

on sait pas toujours ce qu'on dit
lorsque naît la poésie
faut ensuite rechercher le thème
pour intituler le poème. ⁹⁵

This being so, the task of Queneau's critics should not be to examine the ideas discovered by his novels, since in so doing they can only describe what is obviously there, but to examine the means by which these ideas are discovered. This in turn would necessarily involve an investigation of the role of language and its ability to control our perceptions, an activity which should even satisfy the demands for human enlightenment made by such critics as Grossvogel.

93. G-E. Clancier, 'Raymond Queneau et le roman', Livres de France, December 1960, p.5

94. R. Queneau, Une Histoire Modèle, Paris 1966, p.25

95. R. Queneau, Si tu t'imagines, Paris 1968, p.240

APPENDIX

a) Interview with Raymond Queneau

The text which follows is the transcript of two separate interviews which took place in M. Queneau's office at La Nouvelle Revue Française, 5 rue Sébastien Botin, Paris, on March 24 and July 13 1971.

The text has been revised and corrected by M. Queneau himself.

H.: Vous connaissez, peut-être, l'essai de Jacques Guicharnaud sur L'Ecole des Femmes où il prétend que la grande innovation de Molière dans cette pièce est de présenter des personnages presque réels - du moins qui ont trois dimensions: 'Malgré le plaisir esthétique qu'il nous fournit, Harlequin ne nous parle que du théâtre; Arnolphe nous parle des hommes.' Dès Le Chiendent, n'est-ce pas, vous montrez un pareil souci quant au nombre de dimensions que possèdent vos personnages?

Raymond Queneau: Oui.

H.: Mais les vôtres n'en ont qu'une seule, qui n'est pas plus profonde que leurs masques.

Raymond Queneau: Vous trouvez que mes personnages manquent de profondeur? Eh bien, je ne sais pas...

H.: Non, je voudrais savoir si vous reconnaissez, dans vos romans surtout, une réaction vers la littérature du temps de la commedia dell'arte. Et sinon une réaction, une nostalgie peut-être?

Raymond Queneau: Ah oui. Certainement. J'ai eu une nostalgie de la littérature, disons, innocente. Je l'ai toujours.

H.: Vous n'essayez jamais, ou presque jamais, de pénétrer la surface, la couche du masque, de vos personnages. Est-ce que ce refus représente une attitude consciente? Que vous indiquez par cela que, vous non plus, vous ne pouvez pas connaître les secrets de vos personnages?

Raymond Queneau: Oui, mais... Il y a là deux voies plus ou moins contradictoires. Il y a l'autonomie de mes personnages. Je n'en sais pas plus que le lecteur. J'ignore tout ce que le lecteur attentif ignore. En même temps il y a le fait incontestable que mes personnages font

ce que je veux qu'ils fassent. Ils ne sont pas autonomes jusqu'au point de me défier.

H.: C'est cette contradiction que vous illustrez dans Le Vol d'Icare. Vos personnages ne sont pas autonomes au point de pouvoir s'évader.

Raymond Queneau: C'est ça.

H.: Toujours sur cette question de réaction, votre premier roman se caractérise par sa rigueur et par sa complexité formelle. N'était-ce pas une réaction contre le manque de forme des textes surréalistes?

Raymond Queneau: C'est exact. J'ai réagi contre la doctrine de l'écriture automatique, une réaction très volontaire. J'avais surtout le souci de la construction, ce qui n'était pas du tout surréaliste. C'était par nostalgie, si vous voulez, ou par volonté de classicisme.

H.: En même temps, l'opinion de certains intellectuels de l'époque était contre le roman. Je pense surtout à l'Hommage à Marcel Proust de Valéry et au Premier Manifeste de Breton. Dans ce contexte, n'était-ce pas réactionnaire de penser, même, à écrire un roman?

Raymond Queneau: C'est à dire qu'à l'époque il n'y avait pas de vrai roman français comme il y avait un roman anglais.

Mais par la réaction, que vous qualifiez de volontaire, ne visiez-vous pas précisément les arguments de Valéry et de Breton? Est-ce que vous défendiez le roman contre eux?

Raymond Queneau: Précisément? Non. J'avais envie de développer le roman par la construction, une construction complexe qui ne le réduise pas au récit linéaire.

H.: C'est alors que l'opposition qui paraît, pourtant, très nette est coïncidentale. Donné votre nostalgie du classicisme, vos soucis

formels, vous vous opposiez naturellement à Valéry, qui voulait prétendre que le roman n'avait pas de forme.

Raymond Queneau: Oui, ça, peut-être.

H.: Vous avez parlé du roman anglais de l'époque. Il y avait surtout Ulysse, que vous avez lu, je crois, au moment où vous quittiez les surréalistes en 1929. Quels traits de ce roman vous ont d'abord frappé le plus?

Raymond Queneau: C'était surtout sa construction.

H.: Dans son essai sur vous dans The Novelist as Philosopher, Martin Esslin prétend que c'était en même temps la virtuosité linguistique de Joyce, et surtout sa façon de manier le langage populaire...

Raymond Queneau: J'ai lu Ulysse en 1929 dans la traduction française, et quelques années plus tard dans le texte original avec l'aide du livre de Stuart Gilbert. Alors, quant au langage d'Ulysse, il est peu probable que j'aie été tellement sensible à ses nuances à l'époque et, même, je n'en aurai sans doute pas compris les complexités de sa construction sans l'aide de Gilbert.

H.: Un bon exemple de la critique littéraire qui a pu influencer le cours de la littérature. La critique a donc son rôle à jouer?

Raymond Queneau: Oh oui. Et il y a un autre exemple d'a peu près la même époque. C'est Axel's Castle d'Edmund Wilson, un livre qui a eu pour moi une importance particulière, surtout là où il traite de la technique du roman.

H.: C'est en partie grâce à Edmund Wilson que vous vous êtes mis à mieux connaître la littérature anglo-saxonne?

Raymond Queneau: Oui.

H.: Et c'était surtout les questions de technique qui vous intéressaient là dedans?

Raymond Queneau: Oui.

H.: Est-ce que Joseph Conrad a pu vous influencer dans ce domaine?

Raymond Queneau: Bien sûr. Conrad a donné, avec son Lord Jim, un modèle de construction complexe, et je crois que Wilson l'étudie dans Axel's Castle.

H.: C'est toujours une question de technique? Vous avez fait des études de philosophie, mais vous ne vous considérez pas un écrivain philosophique. Il n'y a pas, si je comprends bien, d'idées prédéterminées à communiquer au lecteur, comme le suggère Valéry de tout roman - et il dit même que ces idées peuvent être facilement 'résumées'?

Raymond Queneau: Mais non. Une certaine pratique de la littérature implique une certaine philosophie.

H.: Sans que ce soit le but envisagé par l'auteur?

Raymond Queneau: Oui, sans que ce soit son but. De la même façon, on peut décrire objectivement un oeuf. La description implique l'essence de la vie, mais le but c'est de décrire l'oeuf.

H.: Donc on peut envisager l'application d'une technique comme un voyage de découverte, de découverte morale, philosophique, etc.

Raymond Queneau: C'est ça. Parfaitement.

Vous avez dit, lors d'un entretien avec Marguerite Duras, que ce qui vous rebute le plus dans les romans des autres c'est le laisser-aller.

Raymond Queneau: C'est possible.

H.: Mais cela ne vous empêche pas d'aimer Stendhal, paraît-il.

Raymond Queneau: Oui. Stendhal a pratiqué la technique du laisser-aller, du moins l'a-t-il dit. Nous n'en sommes pas sûrs. De toute façon, il en donne l'impression et c'est peut-être l'exception qui prouve...
Oui, eh bien, Stendhal est pour moi une faiblesse.

H.: Vous considérez ces restrictions formelles qui paraissent absentes chez Stendhal, comme l'équivalent des conventions poétiques?

Raymond Queneau: Oui.

H.: Mais n'y a-t-il pas de différence? Le romancier a plus de liberté, n'est-ce pas? Il peut inventer les conventions qui s'accordent le mieux avec son sujet, tandis que celles de la poésie sont limitées et beaucoup moins flexibles.

Raymond Queneau: Effectivement, le romancier a plus de liberté de choix. Ce qu'il faudrait, afin d'établir des conventions romanesques, c'est d'écrire cinq ou six romans ayant la même structure et des sujets tout à fait différents.

H.: Pour revenir à cette question du langage, vous avez dit dans Bâtons, chiffres et lettres que vous concevez vos écrits pour être lus à haute voix. Vous avez appelé la rime pour l'oeil 'une stupéfiante convention...qui ne peut aboutir qu'aux Calligrammes et à Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard'.

Raymond Queneau: Il y a toujours une oreille...Je veux dire que lorsqu'on lit tout seul, on entend quand même les sons qui sont représentés sur la page. De toute façon, si j'ai dit cela, c'était il y a assez longtemps et...

H.: Vos opinions ont changé?

Raymond Queneau: Bien sûr. Vous me posez des questions sur des choses que j'ai écrites il y a vingt ou même trente ans et... Et d'ailleurs il y a un petit essai que j'ai écrit récemment intitulé Errata, où je révisé un peu mes idées. Je reconnais que l'écart entre le parlé et l'écrit ne s'accuse pas, comme on pouvait le croire avant le développement de la radio et de la télévision où les gens s'efforcent de parler comme on écrit avec plus ou moins de réussite.

H.: Et votre emploi du langage parlé dans l'écrit, est-ce pour vous comme une épreuve des idées classiques de les redire dans le langage le plus contemporain?

Raymond Queneau: Une épreuve? Non, je ne dirai pas cela. C'est, si vous voulez, un renouvellement, un rajeunissement plutôt.

H.: Ce discours de Saturnin dans Le Chiendent, par exemple. Il n'y a pas de commentaire implicite?

Raymond Queneau: Cela vient du Parménide, naturellement. Il y a certains critiques qui ont vu dans ce procédé une dérision des petites gens. Il n'y a aucune dérision. Au contraire, il me semble que l'intelligence est bien disséminée parmi toutes les classes sociales et qu'en France depuis Napoléon la philosophie est devenue beaucoup trop universitaire.

H.: Au sujet de Pierrot mon ami, Gaëtan Picon a dit que puisque au bout de deux cent pages environ on n'a aucune idée de ce qui s'est passé, ce roman ne peut-être qu'un exercice de mots 'où le sujet n'est rien, où seule compte la forme'. 'Le sujet n'est rien,' est-ce possible?

Raymond Queneau: Eh bien, j'avais la volonté de ne pas informer, certes, mais cela non au niveau du langage mais au niveau de la structure. C'est là, je crois, l'erreur de Picon. Pierrot mon ami, c'est, si vous voulez, l'anti-roman policier.

H.: Dans le même roman, et surtout dans les relations entre Pierrot et les deux animaux qu'il transporte, peut-on voir un désir de dégonfler le mythe de la camaraderie humaine tel que le présente Hemingway?

Raymond Queneau: Oh, je ne crois pas que j'aie eu l'intention de dégonfler aucun mythe. La camaraderie? Eh bien, au contraire, c'est ce qui est montré. Pierrot et les animaux, ce sont des camarades, des copains.

H.: Vous n'aviez pas l'intention de dégonfler Hemingway?

Raymond Queneau: Non. Et pourtant, je n'arrive plus à comprendre l'estime qu'on a pour lui. Hemingway doit appeler l'indulgence comme Stendhal.

H.: Mais dans Saint Glinglin n'y a-t-il pas une parodie de The Sun Also Rises, avec la Fête de la Vaisselle, ses aficionados, les nombreuses scènes de bistrot, la 'star' étrangère, Alice Phaye. Est-ce que cela ne vise pas la tauromachie etc. chez Hemingway? Alice n'est-elle pas en quelque sorte Brett?

Raymond Queneau: Oui, peut-être, il y a un peu de cela. La tauromachie et la Fête de la Vaisselle, si vous voulez. Quant à Alice Phaye et Brett, je ne crois pas. C'est possible, mais je ne pense vraiment pas.

H.: Et dans ce même roman, est-ce que le début avec Pierre dans l'aquarium parodie Pascal devant les étoiles?

Raymond Queneau: Non. Mais il y a quelques années, dans un bouquin sur Paris qui s'appelait Paris vu par l'Académie Goncourt, ou quelque chose comme ça, j'ai écrit un petit essai qui s'intitulait 'Paris qui bouge' sur les services de transport en commun. Et bien sûr, à ce moment là, j'ai pensé à Pascal.

H.: Les parodies ont toujours quelque chose d'ambigu. On ne peut pas savoir si vous êtes vraiment pour ou contre. Mais que pensez-vous des gens qui veulent voir en vous un existentialiste? Vos passages dits 'existentialistes', ne sont-ils pas des parodies? Et n'y a-t-il pas autant des passages ouvertement anti-existentialistes?

Raymond Queneau: J'ai toujours été anti-existentialiste. Il me semble, d'ailleurs, que c'est un mode littéraire qui n'a vraiment pas duré.

H.: Vous avez été pris pour un existentialiste, peut-être, parce que vous connaissiez des textes vénérés par eux bien avant que L'Etre et le Néant...

Raymond Queneau: Oui, et surtout La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit que j'ai connue bien avant. Mais il y a aussi des critiques qui veulent voir en moi un précurseur du Nouveau Roman. Le plus récent c'est Vivian Mercier. Cela me paraît beaucoup plus juste.

H.: Vous êtes très conscient des mouvements et des traditions littéraires?

Raymond Queneau: Ah oui. J'ai toujours été sensible aux mouvements ou, plutôt, aux modes littéraires, par mon métier d'éditeur.

Dans Pour une Bibliothèque Idéale, votre propre liste comprenait, en tête des auteurs français, Montaigne, Descartes, Pascal...

Raymond Queneau: J'effacerais maintenant Descartes.

H.: Complètement?

Raymond Queneau: Complètement.

H.: Pourquoi?

Raymond Queneau: Comme ça?

H.: Vos idées sur la technique du roman ont autant changé?

Raymond Queneau: C'est à dire qu'il y a comme un cercle. Au début j'étais préoccupé par la technique, la rigueur, jusqu'à je ne sais pas, mettons Pierrot mon ami, et puis je m'en suis moins servie. Maintenant j'y suis revenu, surtout avec l'OU-LI-PO...où les questions de technique nous obnubilerait d'une façon presque maniaque si nous n'y voyons aussi l'aspect jeu.

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- b) Breath-units, Loin de Rueil pp.21-23.
1. Louis-Philippe des Cigales des deux poings appuyés sur ses genoux. (17)
 2. Louis-Philippe des Cigales penché commence à mal respirer tout simplement (20)
 3. c'est à dire qu'il est en train de prendre conscience de sa respiration par le simple fait qu'elle ne fonctionne pas épatamment en ce moment. (36)
 4. Louis Philippe des Cigales (7)
 5. on ne peut pas dire qu'il halète (8)
 6. non on ne peut pas dire ça (7)
 7. mais il est affligé en ce moment, (10)
 8. ce moment après la prise de conscience de la difficulté de respirer, (20)
 9. Louis-Philippe des Cigales est affligé d'une constriction des poumons, (18)
 10. des muscles pulmonaires, (6)
 11. des nerfs pulmoneux, (5)
 12. des canaux pulmoniques, (6)
 13. des vaisseaux pulmoniens, (6)
 14. c'est une espèce d'étouffement, (7)
 15. Mais ce n'est pas un étouffement qui prend par la gorge, (13)
 16. par le tuyau d'en haut, (6)
 17. c'est un étouffement qui part d'en bas, (9)
 18. qui part des deux côtés à la fois aussi, (11)
 19. c'est un étouffement thoracique, (8)
 20. un encerclement du tonneau respiratoire. (12)
 21. Et maintenant (4)
 22. et maintenant ça ne va plus du tout. (10)
 23. Ce n'est pas un étouffement qui prend par le cou comme si on tenait ledit col de deux poignes solides, (26)
 24. non c'est un étouffement qui monte des ténèbres du diaphragme, (16)
 25. qui se déploie à partir de l'aisne, (9)

26. et puis aussi c'est un étouffement triste, (10)
27. un effondrement du moral, (8)
28. une crise de conscience, (7)
29. Et maintenant (4)
30. et maintenant ça ne va plus du tout, (10)
31. car c'est pire qu'un étranglement, (8)
32. pire qu'un encerclement, (6)
33. pire qu'un étouffement, (5)
34. c'est un abime physiologique, (9)
35. un cauchemar anatomique, (7)
36. une angoisse métaphysique, (7)
37. une révolte, (3)
38. une plainte, (2)
39. un coeur qui bat trop vite, (6)
40. des mains qui se crispent, (5)
41. une peau qui sue. (4)
42. Louis-Philippe des Cigales n'est plus que le poisson jeté sur le plancher d'une barque et qui ouvre la bouche désespérément parce qu'il se sent mourir et parce qu'il va mourir. (42)
43. Louis-Philippe des Cigales qui sans bouger de son fauteuil a été lancé dans un monde où les hommes ne parviennent pas plus à respirer que les aquatiques sur terre arrachés à leur eau, (48)
44. Louis-Philippe des Cigales ne mourra pas bien qu'il se sente mourir, (17) 1
45. il ne mourra pas cette fois-ci, (10)
46. il respire de plus en plus fort, (8)
47. et la respiration s'arrête, (8)
48. rien ne rentre dans la poitrine, (8)
49. on croit qu'il n'y a pas moyen de tenir, (10)

1. Obviously a pause could be justified by the placing of bien que in this unit. Cf. n.2.

50. et puis on tient quand même. (6)
51. La grande atmosphère qui entoure ce globe où pas plus grand qu'un pou vit Louis-Philippe des Cigales, (24)
52. la grande atmosphère bien qu'il ouvre spasmodiquement le bec avec des amplitudes croissantes, (23) 2
53. elle n'arrive pas à pénétrer ses profondeurs à lui, (14)
54. l'homme pas plus grand qu'un pou, (6)
55. il y a un petit espace où elle ne pénètre point, (14)
56. un petit espace tout ramifié pareil à un arbre double et qui ne veut pas de la grande atmosphère. (28)

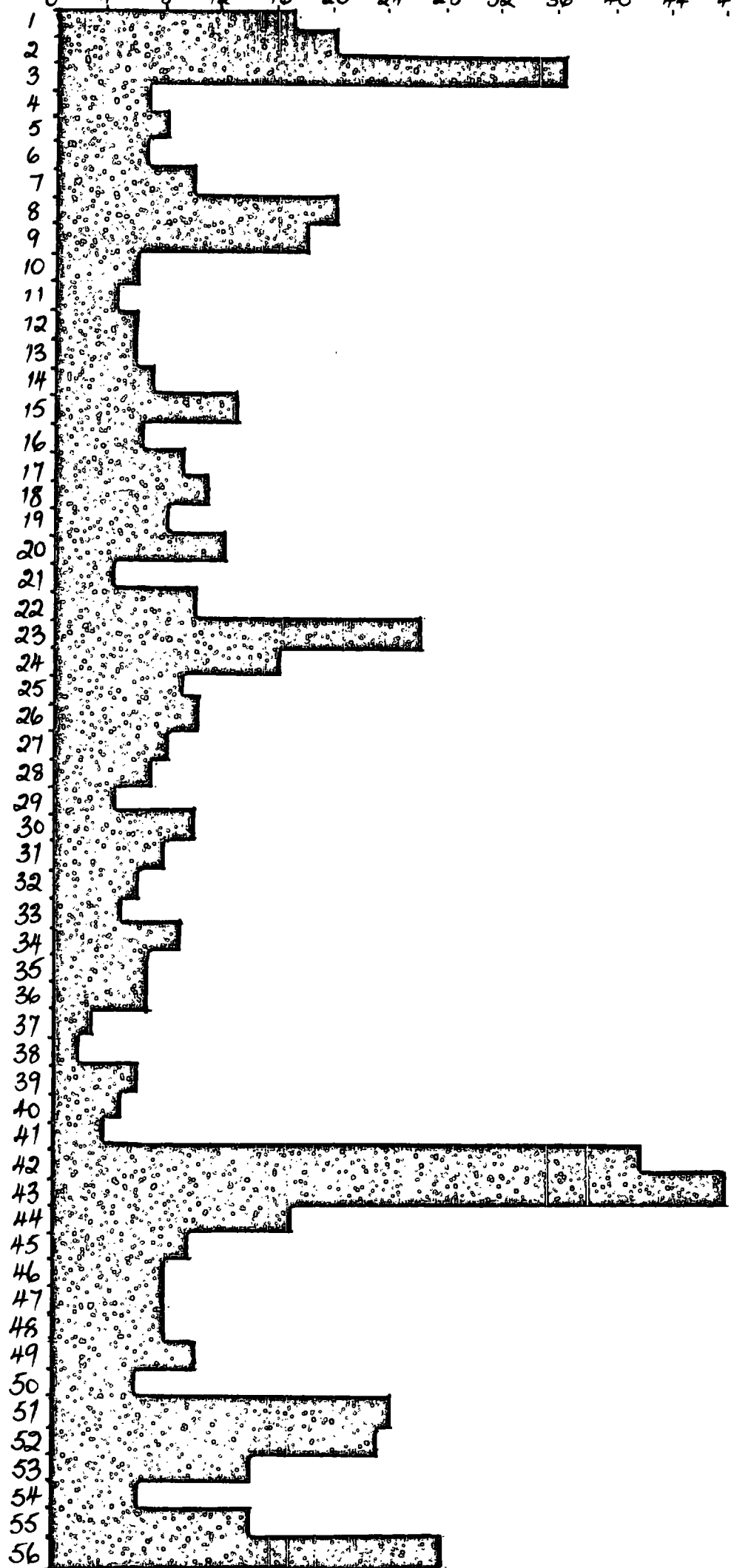
2. Cf. n.l. (Appendix b)

- c) Graph of syllabic arrangement in one paragraph from
Loin de Rueil

NUMBER OF SYLLABLES

0 4 8 12 16 20 24 28 32 36 40 44 48 52

NUMBER OF BREATH-UNITS



d) Bibliography

The bibliography is divided into two main sections; first, a complete list of works by Queneau: fiction, poetry, drama, essays, prefaces, etc., each subdivision being listed in chronological order of publication. Also in chronological order is the second section which provides a complete list of secondary sources, with subdivisions for books devoted to a specific study of Queneau's work, books containing a consideration of Queneau's work at a more general level and articles about Queneau in newspapers and periodicals in France, Belgium, Britain and America from 1933 to 1970. A short third section lists only those general critical works to which direct reference is made in this study.

Note: The editions quoted in this study are as listed in the bibliography except:

1. R. Queneau, Pierrot mon ami,
2. R. Queneau, Zazie dans le métro.

In these two cases, reference is made to the Livre de Poche editions.

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