

## ANDRÉ FRÉNAUD'S PLURAL VOICE

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That "I" is someone else is clearer to us since Rimbaud. And "I" is most particularly someone else in literature, thanks to the dramatising urges and consequent projections of the "I" who holds the pen. Proust was right to insist in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* that "a book is the product of a different self from the one we display in our habits, society and vices."<sup>1</sup> While the Romantics rashly chose to make sincerity a criterion in literary evaluation, the present century has made an important distinction: a work forges its own criteria, survives independently of its emotional roots, and is indeed free to grow new ones in its new relations with its readers. Between intention and achievement falls a shadow partly determined by the (self-) conscious artist, but also lit by unconscious, unknown forces. Too much self-analysis and lucidity can be a danger (as Cioran suggests in the case of Valéry), but there is evident interest in exploring a poet's identity through his poems, recognising the virtues of projection, tracing dramatic presentation and viewpoint, and so determining more fully the multiple facets of his art and being.<sup>2</sup> What is revealed may correspond neither to intention nor to external biography. The case of André Frénaud rewards scrutiny in this respect and helps define his particular voice, a plural one, in modern French poetry.

Unlike some others, Apollinaire or Saint-John Perse, Frénaud does not seem to have been tempted by pseudonymity, that mask that protects and projects through an initial duplication of self. Only for a clandestine publication during the Nazi occupation did he sign with other than his own name. His "Roi mage," a highly personal portrayal of one of the Three Kings at Christ's nativity, is doubtless a self-projection, but does not offer so complete or so insistent a character as, for example, Jarry's Ubu, Valéry's Teste or Proust's Marcel. Although his "Petit Vieux" adds his tones of facetious banter, mocking bourgeois assumptions, Frénaud as readily lends his voice to

a prostitute as he does to God. Indeed, his characters in turn often break into multiple and contradictory voices. So the following lines from "La Sorcière de Rome" (The Witch of Rome) are worth pondering:

Dans les voix qui se répondent, se retrouvent  
 nous reconnaissons la voix perdue,  
 nous recouvrons notre parole. (SR, p. 57)<sup>3</sup>

The central importance, for a poet, of rediscovering a "lost voice," "our speech," a language which resides both in words and beyond them, is apparent. If it is found in answering voices, in the plurality of voices which express the multiple self, it is of great value to record the poet's various spokesmen and so establish the guidelines of his dialogue with being.

That dialogue is not limited to Frénaud's characters: it is conducted as a raw, contradictory polyphony between an affirmative and a moderating Frénaud. The poet's demands, as Alain Lévêque has observed (*Sud*, p. 213), are translated by a constant self-multiplication in the poems themselves. Like the Actéon of his poem "La Mort d'Actéon," he is aware that "la meute qui de toujours le dévorait, c'est lui" ("the pack that had always hounded him was himself," *DTD*, p. 123). He is by definition his own worst enemy. And the work becomes the field for close combat where he gives shape to the parry and thrust of opposing voices, at once innocent prey and cruel beasts, which spell out and denounce the ambiguity of the "I."

It is not mere chance that Frénaud chose as epigraph for his first collection some lines from Whitman, the poet of camaraderie. They could stand as an epigraph to his complete works, so uncertain are the aims of the journey and its effect on the striving travellers:

Dear camarado! I confess that I have urged you onward with me, and still urge you, without the least idea what is our destination.

Or whether we shall be victorious, or utterly quell'd or defeated.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Whitman always spoke in his own voice and in his own name. Frénaud seems instinctively to recognise that poetry throws a bridge across to its reader but does not enjoy—or no longer enjoys—the

community of audience inherent in theatre. So he strives to recreate links with society by the dramatisation of his poetic language. His pages are not primarily intended for the stage, but are nonetheless inherently dramatic. Language itself is seen as social, and Frénaud's poetry shows certain qualities of oral production: narrative is spiced with metaphor and allusion readily assimilated by an attentive audience. The syntax is rarely so complicated that it requires re-reading, and if it occasionally falls apart, it is so that certain meanings or effects can be conveyed. Frénaud in fact enjoys reciting his poems, committed to memory, in his burly voice—in public, in private, even over the telephone—with his rolling Burgundian *r*. Here, in short, is a man speaking to other men, one who by dramatising his work revives a sense of the community through shared languages.

In his very first poem, "Épitaphe" (*RM*, p. 13), Frénaud makes the void speak. The effect is so startling that the distinction between poet and narrator tends to be overlooked. The idea of wiping off debts on the slate at the local café rapidly gives way to moral and philosophical resonances; impending death, rather than merely a zero account, is seen as the nothingness faced. A new dimension is suddenly revealed, as in the cape of Hugo's "Mendiant" or in Blake's grain of sand. The poet as fellow-drinker is both a lucid mortal being and, vertiginously, the welcoming void.

The phenomenon of self-quotation appears to be the temporal equivalent of this spatial fragmentation of self. Yet it is both separation and reunification of self, a fragmentation of earlier poems and simultaneously a regrouping (thanks to memory) of the poet's identity. This is the level at which sincerity is valid in poetry, where opposites interact and an essential, irremediable ambiguity is revealed. Frénaud refers to Hegel in showing his awareness of what is at stake:

A poem is an ambiguous piece of work, not an effusion of pure Spirit. The new harmony it produces cannot restore man to Unity.

It is no mean victory if, from the midst of our improbable depths, a poem arises, born of Oneness to help us recall it and, however inadequately, bear witness to it, transgressing our usual limits; and, even if not having a lasting undermining effect, at least revealing our affliction as bereft of remedy, it is not so little if a poem realises and conveys to a willing hearer a transformation in relationships between the one and the multiple, between

identity and contradiction, somehow giving effect to what the philosopher calls "the identity of identity and non-identity."<sup>5</sup>

Frénaud recognises furthermore the "endless rumination of which his poems give fragmentary representations on an intermittent stage" (*NIF*, p. 93). The statement is central to my purpose. There is inevitable dissatisfaction and a sense of inadequacy in fragmentation and intermittence; as for "endless rumination," it brings the poet back time and again to the same metaphors, the same situations, the same words—or nearly. But this does not make his effort at objectivity any less real, as he remarks of several clearly distinct characters in his work:

The hero is not the poet, but a specifically designated character. . . . Of course the poet is behind each one, but he has tried not to subject the character in question to the demands of an alien subjectivity which would distort him. If the sole object and subject of poetry is both the poet himself and man himself, I should like each of my protagonists to express himself according to his own truth. (*NIF*, pp. 144–45)

As the poet alone is master of his choice of subjects, a family likeness is retained from generation to generation of poems: it is always a matter of the unity of the poet's self, of his sought identity, beneath the diversity of his characters. In short, authenticity demands a certain degree of imposture, as the poet recognises (*NIF*, p. 113), so that the threefold attention—paid to the world, the word, and self—remains free of distortion and complacency. The reader needs to be aware of this interplay of mirrors.

He is made so at the poet's prompting when informed that a woman is speaking. This is the case in "La Vie dure" (*RM*, pp. 62–63, a title that both "Life Endures" and "A Hard Life" translate; cf. *RM*, p. 147, *IPP*, p. 179, *SF*, p. 17), where the information is redundant but where our attention is drawn to the obvious in order to alert us to the fact that the creative imagination has adopted a female voice, that the poet's empathy can stretch, that the monologue is really a dialogue between the poet and his creation, that compassion is engendered by the interaction of two voices, one on- and one off-stage.

Other short poems reveal other voices, almost as if they were

practice runs for the great voices of the long poems from General Krivitski to the Roman Witch. The paradoxical "Air du colporteur" (*SF*, p. 31) echoes the street-cry of a peddler, but one who has nothing to sell:

Pas d'échalotes, pas de lacets,  
pas d'eau des saintes, pas d'almanach

...

Le monde est vide, il n'y a rien à vendre.<sup>6</sup>

The peddler's voice is displaced or dubbed by the poet's in a more or less direct but reversed echo of Rimbaud's "Solde" in the *Illuminations*.

Only thanks to Frénaud's commentary do we know that "Le Conquérant" (*NIF*, pp. 237-43) is meant to borrow Hitler's voice. There too we learn that "Ultime encouragement" (*SF*, p. 34) is intended to speak for Stalin. But one of the most searing voices that the poet adopts is that of the Nazi executioner (*SF*, pp. 151-54) who embodies evil. Bereft of moral standards, he exonerates himself from the outset and plunges deeper and deeper into evil so as to please his superiors. He devises improved machines for torture and death, standing high by belittling others, like a monster devouring the flesh it destroys. He is a kind of bad soldier Schweik, a small-minded survivor, but in his case surviving only through the annihilation of other people. He accepts the appalling logic of the "final solution," of the holocaust and plays his part, displaying useless remnants of misplaced moral scruples:

Une fois qu'une solution s'impose, il faut en tirer les conséquences jusqu'à l'extrême limite. Il faut qu'ils meurent tous et que l'on n'en parle plus jamais. . . .

Il faudrait arriver à éliminer le sang, le sang est déraisonnable à voir, aussi leurs regards. . . . Mais on a le droit de baisser les paupières quand les yeux vous font mal et si la mise en application du plan est difficile, c'est un devoir d'accepter sa peine et de sacrifier pour la grandeur de la patrie. . . . (*SF*, p. 152)<sup>7</sup>

The executioner's scruples would do him honour if he had not based his morality on an assumption of obscene cruelty. His self-

justification attempts to hide a basic delusion. In denouncing inhumanity, Frénaud also denounces our capacity for moral blindness and complacency. The executioner's argument appears logical but is vitiated at its core and loses its purchase on reality.

Insofar as we recognise in the executioner a reflection of our own habitual cowardice, we draw a second lesson from his monologue, one not restricted to particular circumstances. Since Dostoevsky at least we have been aware that everyone bears a potential executioner within him. Frénaud shows him as the "enemy within" and denounces him accordingly, but knows that he cannot eliminate him. Whoever accepts orders or rules and tries to please his superior contributes wittingly or otherwise to the overthrow of humanitarian values and is guilty to some degree. The psychological mechanism of self-justification leads to escapism and to empty and solipsistic self-indulgence:

Et voici que l'effort où je me ruais en hurlements confus s'est résolu en un vertige délicieux. . . .

La vie. . . . Toujours on s'y jette contre des murs, et il n'est pas d'autre évasion qu'à se branler lâchement avec des rêveries. (*SF*, p. 153)<sup>8</sup>

For Frénaud it seems a natural step from there to a critique of existentialism, in which social responsibility is in inverse proportion to the act that makes the individual:

Un jour *je suis passé à l'acte* et maintenant quand je dis "supplice" du vrai sang coule et c'est moi qui le fais couler. . . . Finies l'angoisse et l'impatience d'être si peu, au bord de l'anéantissement, finies les voix de ce qu'ils appellent la pitié. . . . Je me suis rassemblé dans mon désir, je renais total quand je t'anéantis. . . . *Je suis enfin*. . . . (*SF*, p. 153)<sup>9</sup>

Sartre's arguments suggesting that self-fulfilment requires a free act (even of murder), as in the case of Orestes in *Les Mouches* (The Flies) do not stand up to scrutiny if one considers what becomes of the freedom to act of the victim. Although Frénaud has often been called an existentialist poet, he is not unaware of the contortions of the philosopher who recognised and so aptly named his "non-hope." And

his executioner, having suppressed freedom, has in fact created a moral prison for himself. Insofar as we are his accomplices, we share his cell.

This prose text, "La Nourriture du bourreau" (Food for the Executioner) dating from 1945, was not published until 1983 nor included in *La Sainte Face* until the second edition in 1986. To the same edition Frénaud also added "Le Petit Vieux adhère au P[arti] C[ommuniste]" (The Little Old Man Joins the C[ommunist] P[arty]; *SF*, p. 84), the last of an important group of poems spoken by the "Petit Vieux" or Little Old Man. He is the most sustained persona of the poet outside the long poems. We first come across him in "Vision d'un petit vieux" (*SF*, p. 35), and he is still muttering on in *Haeres* (p. 106).

The sequence of "Poèmes du Petit Vieux" (*SF*, pp. 55–73), where the little old man is centre stage, is dated 1944–48 and inscribed to "Paul Eluard alive forever." The manner adopted is a tribute to Eluard's poetic style, including marked anaphora, and the free verse is generally shorter than elsewhere in Frénaud. Yet his preoccupations remain unchanged. It is the "little old man" inside him who is speaking, not fully representing the poet's voice but nonetheless flexing certain vocal cords otherwise rarely used. "Fin de vie" (End of a Life) expresses the limited view of the little old man, happy with his mediocrity and proud of his prowess at bowls. Family achievements—a birth, a death, a daughter who makes clothes, a son who drinks too much, a wife who, among other attributes, is "the cloth to wipe my life with" (p. 61)—reflect the limits of anaphora, a technique which in turn seems to underline here a humdrum existence. Yet through this fumbling for words and life emerge certain essential questions, put in terms as straightforward as: "What is it?" (p. 68). But the non-existence of "Gawd" ("bondieu," pp. 60, 71) is taken for granted by the little old man as by Frénaud, in his lay, even anti-clerical republic.

Solemnity is kept at bay, however, even when questions become serious. The little old man acknowledges that the sequence of sounds issuing from his mouth, as in "Cerbère de soi" (Cerberus yourself / Dog eats man; *SF*, p. 64), comes from beyond the bounds of his comprehension and sometimes scares him (p. 72). He also recognises, as in "C'est à valoir" (Credit, *SF*, pp. 67–68), that the future is unfathomable, that it is the realm of "perhaps," but he expresses his

ignorance in his chosen vernacular. Wittily, Frénaud even deflates a moment of pretentiousness when virtue is mentioned: its ramifications are said to get in a twist.

This humour is taken further in the sequence entitled "Excréments, misères et facéties" (which might loosely be translated as "Johns, japes and jests") subtitled "Diary of a Little Old Man" (*SF*, pp. 75–83) and dated 1939–49. It spills over into vulgarity and ribaldry at times, playing on the sounds of words and attacking the Christian God even more openly, as in "Fête-Dieu" (Corpus Christi):

Ce n'est pas pour rigoler que l'on fête Dieu.  
 Il en a besoin pour sa gloire,  
 sous les dais d'or où les dadais bénissent  
 la ribambelle des veuves et des richards au chant des roses  
 et de la réclame J. H. S.  
 La prépondérance de l'encens sur l'odeur de l'essence  
 tout soudainement nous serre de près,  
 nous aussi qui sommes de matériau réfractaire.

Pris comme par la trompette.  
 Il nous aurait toujours?

NON. (*SF*, p. 82)<sup>10</sup>

Everything that a Christian holds sacred is held up to ridicule, and here the little old man gives voice to a Frénaud who wants to stress his determined atheism.

Elsewhere in this sequence, vulgarity comes strikingly to the fore. Certainly compassion redeems the dubious aspects of "Souris de trottoir" (Sidewalk Mouse, p. 78). As Daniel Leuwers has observed, the poem establishes a significant equivalence between the mouse and the smiling mouth (*souris* and *sourire*), under the excremental sign of carnal pleasure and affliction (*Sud*, p. 199). One is led to wonder whether it is really a mouse or another kind of creature. Something female ("une petite") walks the streets and hangs around public conveniences: she prompts the poet's pity, but we are left to imagine the rest.

Vulgarity appears forthrightly in "Tuyau de famille," however, where a dark tale of incest leads to a crude conclusion in impotence:

Ah! la vie est une sacrée belle bitte  
mais une bitte en bois. (*SF*, p. 80)<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that the persona of the little old man allows Frénaud to exaggerate, to extend his usual scale of tones and so achieve a greater linguistic and emotional range than if he always spoke in his own voice. He also broaches subjects that might otherwise be excluded, and to treat them more freely, remaining detached from the text as uttered. The importance of this liberation through distanciation is clear when one considers those long poems that could not exist as they are without an interposed voice. Regrettably, confines of space preclude their close consideration here.

The multiplication of the "I" in Frénaud's poems is part of a more general phenomenon in his work: the pluralisation of the unique. Personae allow the poet to be both self and other at the same time, to reveal more facets of his being both to his reader and to himself, and to observe more objectively the creation of the poem he is writing. But there are aspects of pluralisation that are not primarily dramatic, and in Frénaud it is often a mark of democratisation. However irremediable his feeling of being unacceptable to himself—a characteristic that he recognises he shares with others—it is largely counterbalanced by gestures of fraternity, ranging from taking a drink with friends to adopting a political stance in which people matter. Frénaud's integrity cost him dear when, for example, he signed the Manifesto of August 1960 against France's continued involvement in the Algerian war and was suspended from his job as a civil servant. He is keen to pursue in his work a constant dialogue with the idea of Revolution, while allowing sympathy and compassion to temper his Jacobin ardour.

The unique event which Frénaud has most often made plural, however, is the story of Christ, and especially the visitation, birth and resurrection. Without ever "running the risk of falling to his knees" (*NIF*, p. 50), Frénaud acknowledges the privileged role of Christianity in his upbringing. If we take the case of the visitation, we see that the Christian element is reduced by pluralisation and laicisation. Reference is never made to the biblical episode (Luke 1. 39–56) in which Mary visits Elisabeth, who, although long sterile and now old, is expecting the child who will be John the Baptist. It is almost as if Frénaud is thinking rather of the annunciation, since no reference is

made to the Magnificat that Mary pronounces on her visit, but instead to a "mysterious event" (*IPP*, p. 237), analogous to the advent of a poem.

On working days, Frénaud walked from his Paris apartment to his work at the Ministry of Public Works past a short cul-de-sac, the Passage de la Visitation. It ends in a handsome private house and grounds hidden by high walls, allowing the stroller to glimpse a secret world beyond. Yet there is an irony in the fact that a street called the Passage of the Visitation should be a blind alley: it reverses the values generally attributed to the Christian tale. From such paradoxes and contradictions is Frénaud's poetry made, relishing the workings of dialectic while conceding their powerlessness to resolve the conflicting forces at work. Visitation, stripped of its Christian connotations and uniqueness, thus becomes Frénaud's word for poetic inspiration, and in a poem entitled "Passage de la visitation" (*IPP*, p. 97) this is presented as a "chemin d'une plénitude" (a way towards a kind of plenitude), but immediately qualified by the doubt and uncertainty of "peut-être" (perhaps). In reply to an enquiry, Frénaud also refers to his concept of visitation to underline the continuity of the process from perception to poetic creation: "In the process of making a poem, what I metaphorically call *the visitation* occurs. In other words, a relaxing of our hold, a dispossession, of our awareness of reality and the advent of a discourse in which contraries confront each other and, as it were, blend into one another."<sup>12</sup>

The idea of passage is central to Frénaud's poetics and shows especially in his poems in the form of an unending ontological quest. Around this theme cluster several major metaphors: journey and halt (stable, castle, clearing or poem); death and childhood or (re)birth; revolution and order; reason and unreason. These contrasting pairs oscillate, emphasising one another in turn, in a dialectic in which no third, synthesising term is present or seen as desirable, since it would stop the search. The result of the dialectic lies rather in the poetry itself and in the precarious balance achieved between various tensions along the difficult path. As Frénaud writes in his important "Note on the Poetic Experience" (which begins "Passage de la visitation" as a reminder of the importance of this metaphor), "according to circumstances and chance, each poem constitutes its own language as best it can. Consequently, all tones are possible, all rhythms and all forms: *all means are valid*" (*IPP*, p. 237).

The visitation is thus multiple as well as unpredictable; inspiration prejudices neither form nor tone. Frénaud does not of course abandon himself to poetic frenzy but welcomes the mysterious triggering function as a prelude to the shaping of his "useless machines" (*IPP*, p. 85). Interestingly, in the "Note," visitation is seen as a negative force, creating a void into which the poem then rushes. Having cleansed the doors of perception and voided preconceptions, it generates the momentum and energy for language to surprise itself and us. The analogies with Rimbaud's famous "Lettre du Voyant" are manifold, and Frénaud refers to it directly more than once. Beneath the diversity of expression lies a unified and coherent poetics entirely informed with the modern spirit.

In basic import too there is unity. As Frénaud remarks: "Through all the diversity of accent and position, I am always saying the same thing" (*IPP*, p. 245). Yet the variety of form is enormous. In some writers, this might be seen as a sign of weakness, but in Frénaud as in many other modern poets, it represents another kind of quest, that of total appropriateness of form to content, so that the two are indissociable. Each poem must therefore be considered individually, by the reader as much as by the poet, as "a wholly new start" even if, as Eliot continues in "East Coker," each one represents "a different kind of failure." In a letter to Léon-Gabriel Gros in (or before) 1945, Frénaud suggested that each poem imposed its own rhythm on him; thirty-six years later, his position had not changed:

In fact, I have no preconceptions as regards prosody (metre, rhyme and other rules). I have never followed any rules. As I compose a poem, I try to give it a rhythm or more precisely to give it the rhythm which I somehow sense the poem being written to be suggesting to me. The composition of the unit of sound which the poem is, with its echoes and contrasts, its continuity and disruptions, I have in each case, listening carefully to what is happening, to re-invent it.<sup>13</sup>

Frénaud then proceeds to make an astonishing analogy: "The alexandrine has had an influence on me similar to the one religion has had in other respects." Absolute freedom brings with it the no less absolute constraint to renew on every occasion.

The range of forms adopted by Frénaud is therefore con-

siderable, and while each might in retrospect appear inevitable, the poet's view, facing the blank page, is that of a searcher after appropriateness. Frénaud rarely uses pictographic or ideographic forms, but there are some examples in his works. The inscription on a tomb in "Tombal" (*DTD*, p. 131) is centered on the page as it would be on the stone. "La Vie comme elle tourne et par exemple" (Life as It Turns and For Example) (*NNS*, p. 97), similarly centered, first suggests a top spinning and then a funeral urn, thus reflecting semantic features of the text. "Les Episodes" (*SF*, p. 79) has lines spaced further and further apart for reasons which the reader has to fathom. The last poem of Frénaud's latest collection, "Comme un serpent remonte les rivières" (*NNS*, pp. 121-27), composed entirely of quotations from his earlier poems, is a pictogram insofar as the text winds across the pages and an ideogram in that these fragments represent a provisional reckoning of the intimate forces which go towards structuring Frénaud's poetry. An aspiration towards unity gathers the sinuous articulations in a quest for both poetry and being. The repetition of the first line as the last symbolises the circularity of the mythological snake biting its tail, so that poem, self and world-view are brought together in another symbol of unity beyond diversity.

In the present study, it is not possible to do more than mention Frénaud's long poems, but they are a striking feature of his output. Poe's denial of the very existence of the long poem at the opening of his essay on "The Poetic Principle" and his strictures against its capacity to sustain what he understood as poetry had a profound influence on French writers. Frénaud implicitly challenges Poe's view (perhaps not knowing that Whitman approved of it) by setting considerable store by his long poems. Chronologically, they occur throughout his *oeuvre*; stylistically, they are very varied; structurally, they either rely heavily on narrative, discourse and rumination or juxtapose sequences to produce effects of ellipsis familiar in shorter modes.

Brevity is most noticeable when pushed to an extreme, and Frénaud offers examples of poems of only one or two lines, especially in his later collections. There is even a case where, provocatively, the title is longer than the text that follows it (*H*, p. 151). Between the extremes, however, is a striking variety of forms. Some fondness is shown for the couplet, often with short lines, as in "Chevaux accotés" (*RM*, p. 95), the brief notations of which powerfully evoke a sense of war:

Chevaux accotés  
au bord de la dérouté.

Soldats pris de joie,  
embrumés de vin.

La touffe est en liesse  
qui sort de la bouche.

Le pissenlit raille  
la terre tombale.<sup>14</sup>

Almost all the poems in the section called “La Secrète Machine” in *La Sainte Face* are so constructed, with lines of variable length but often short. The form lends itself to dialogue, as in Verlaine’s “Colloque sentimental,” and several times Frénaud, alert to the possibilities of typography, sets roman and italic side by side to suggest this effect (see *SF*, pp. 193–202). The couplets of “Litanies adverses” may hark back to those of Baudelaire’s “Litanies de Satan.” At the opening of the section “Le Matin venu” (*SF*, pp. 163–68), short lines are grouped in quatrains or continuously, the length of verses, like that of lines, being determined by subject, mood and phonological sequence. This last feature, exploited in serious and humorous poems alike, seems to be used to replace rhyme, which Frénaud scarcely ever uses. A rare exception occurs in the weak rhymes of “Vision d’un petit vieux”; otherwise rhyme happens only as if by chance. Assonances figure slightly more often; they frame the first quatrain of “Sans amour” (*RM*, p. 147). The technique of anaphora creates repetitions at the beginning rather than the end of lines and is more frequent. Apart from the effect of a list being drawn up, it produces stark juxtapositions which do not allow the individual lines to blend into one another until, as with a post-impressionist painting, the reader/spectator stands far enough back and allows his imagination to work.

Prose poems also feature in Frénaud’s *oeuvre*, although absent from *Les Rois Mages* and *Depuis toujours déjà*. The need to compensate for what is lost in eschewing verse leads to some fine passages, as in “Autour de Grasse” (*IPP*, p. 90), where the density of phonetic texture modulates insistently around a relatively limited group of sounds (*m, n, p, b, l, r*):

Le lièvre des chênes parsème son souffle roux à travers la poudre hésitante des oliviers. Dans leur emmêlement innombrable la ligne des hauteurs élève en tremblant la beauté évidente. . . . La modestie des montagnes se réjouit par mille lèvres qui échangent leurs nuances dans une tendresse qui n'en finit pas, de murette à murette, de longs mouvements roses à des triangles d'ombre pépiés par le soleil, sur tout le parcours des grands pans incurvés. Peau riante, tu m'inclines à te rendre de la lumière, promesse d'une paix heureuse.<sup>15</sup>

A plethora of *p*'s punctuate another poem in the same group, "L'Abord fluvial" (By the River, *IPP*, p. 95). But perhaps one of the most successful prose poems, and certainly the most akin to Rimbaud's inspirational *Illuminations*, is "Des bandes dans le pays" (Gangs in the Land, *SF*, p. 33). There, the unusual (not to say the impossible) becomes the self-evident: the illogical sequence challenges the reader's imagination, and uncertainty reigns to underline the fear generated by such fragments of narrative as can readily be apprehended.

Frénaud's exploratory approach to form, manifest in this brief review, is neatly encapsulated in a case entirely typical of him. As a dog worries bones, so he is a worrier of words. The alexandrine couplet which figures in italics within the long text of "Vieux pays" (Old Country, *DTD*, p. 157) re-emerges as three lines in roman as a separate poem in *Haeres* (p. 147):

L'oeuf du clocher, l'horloge,  
est doucement épris de l'immobile été,  
le temps le couve et dort.<sup>16</sup>

Such a transformation underlines Frénaud's awareness of form and the different effects he can produce. From the sheer verticality of "L'Homme" (Man, *H*, p. 249) to the horizontality of the prose poem, from the mass of the long poems to the slightness of brief pieces or others full of gaps on the page, Frénaud shows his mastery of adaptation.

The variety of form is a direct reflection of the variety of content and of the multiplicity of personae in Frénaud's poetry. Each bears witness to the basic Energy of Being which the poet senses and tries to channel through his writing. In his "Note on the Poetic Experience,"

he returns time and again to this dynamic force which informs his vision of the world, of being and of his translation of these into words. In lending it his many voices, "he assures it a new and unpredictable appearance each time and perpetuates this in the object he creates" (*IPP*, p. 238), as he puts it. With such a philosophy of poetry, plurality is the best guarantee of alertness, diversity of appropriateness and multiplicity of an identity that contains its opposite.

## NOTES

1. Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Bibl. de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 221–22.

2. E. M. Cioran, *Exercices d'admiration* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp. 75–76.

3. "In the voices which answer and rediscover one another / we recognise the lost voice, / we recover our speech." Abbreviations used in this study are as follows; unless otherwise noted, all works were published in Paris by Gallimard:

AF: André Frénaud.

DTD: *Depuis toujours déjà*, Coll. Poésie, 1984.

H: *Haeres*, 1982.

IPP: *Il n'y a pas de paradis*, Coll. Poésie, 1967.

NIF: *Notre inhabileté fatale*, 1979.

NNS: *Nul ne s'égare*, 1986.

RM: *Les Rois mages*, 1977.

SF: *La Sainte Face*, Coll. Poésie, 1985.

SR: *La Sorcière de Rome*, Coll. Poésie, 1984.

Sud: *André Frénaud, Sud* [Marseille], 39–40 (1981).

4. *Leaves of Grass II*: "As I lay with my head in your lap camarado."

5. AF, in G.-E. Clancier, *André Frénaud, Poètes d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Seghers, 1963), p. 228.

6. "No shallots, no shoelaces, / no holy water, no almanachs / . . . / The world is empty, there is nothing to sell."

7. "Once a solution emerges, its consequences must be seen through to the end. They must all die; let that be an end to the discussion. . . ."

It ought to be possible to cut out the blood; it's not reasonable to see blood, or their stares. . . . But you have the right to lower their eyelids when their eyes hurt you, and if the application of the plan is difficult, it's your duty to accept your suffering and to sacrifice yourself for the good of your country. . . ."

8. "Now the effort which drew me headlong, screaming wildly, has settled into a delightful headiness.

Life. . . . You always lurch yourself against the wall, and there's no escape other than weakly jerking off with your daydreams."

9. "One day *I acted* and now when I say "agony" real blood flows and it's I who make it flow. . . . Gone the anguish and frustration of being insignificant, almost non-existent, gone the voices of what they call pity. . . . I am focussed in my desire, I am reborn a whole being when I wipe you out. . . . *I am, at last. . . .*"

10. "You don't worship God for a laugh.

He needs it for his image,  
under the golden canopy where gawks bless  
the crocodile of widows and rich men to the chant of roses  
and the I. H. S. ad.  
The incense smelling stronger than gas  
suddenly closes in on us  
who are made of intractable stuff.

Grabbed as if by trumpet blasts.

Has he got us for ever?

NO."

11. "Oh! Life is a bloody fine prick / but a prick made of wood."

12. From a reply to a questionnaire by J.-M. Le Sidaner (copy kindly supplied by AF).

13. See L.-G. Gros, "Le Témoin poétique: André Frénaud," *Cahiers du Sud*, 270 (mars-avril 1945), 232 and the unpublished letter of 6 September 1981 to the present author who is, moreover, responsible for the English translations presented in this study. For prose quotations, the English alone is given, but with a reference to the French; for poetry it is imperative to refer to the original.

14. "Horses leaning / verging on a rout. // Soldiers rejoicing, / befogged with wine. // The tussock is delighted / coming out of a mouth. // The dandelion mocks / the tombstone."

15. "The oak hare scatters his russet breath through the hesitant dust of the olive-trees. Innumerable intermingled, the line of summits tremblingly raises self-evident beauty. . . . The mountains' modesty rejoices on a thousand lips which make endlessly tender exchanges of subtleties, from wall to wall, long pink movements towards triangles of shadow swing into place by the sun, over the whole track of great incurving spaces. Laughing skin, you prompt me to return light to you, the promise of a happy peace."

16. The egg of the bell-tower, the clock, / loves the motionless summer sweetly, / time is hatching it and sleeping."