

HALL (D.E.C.)

M.A., 1936.

MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN LANGUAGES,  
French.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS: "ALBERT SAMAIN".

The study submitted under the title "Albert Samain" has as its object to give a general account of Samain's published writings, poetry and prose, to assess to the different parts of his work their relative merit, and in so doing to express an opinion upon the literary value of the poet's work. The study is divided into three sections, dealing respectively with the poems ("Au Jardin de l'Infante", "Aux Flancs du Vase", "Le Chariot d'Or"; *Poèmes Inachevés*); the "Contes"; and the two-act tragedy in verse, "Polyphème". A much more detailed examination has been made of the "Contes" than of the other parts of Samain's work, because they are relatively unknown, because little has been written about them, and because it seems to me that they constitute one of the finest parts of Samain's work. The section dealing with the poems is subdivided into a number of parts, in which Samain's various poetic styles are discussed (e.g., symbolist poems, elegiac love-poems, pseudo-Greek idylls) and in which some space is devoted to Samain's undoubted imitation of other writers; and the relative value of these poems written in various styles is indicated. The sections dealing with the "Contes" and "Polyphème" are subdivided alike under the headings: Sources; Style; Psychology; Underlying Philosophy; and an effort has been made to show that in the two works the treatment

of the subjects is essentially the same. In the course of the examination of the "Contes" I have endeavoured to justify my preference for them by concrete proofs of their beauties. In the short conclusion to the thesis, some judgment has been attempted upon the merits and the limitations of Samain's work considered as a whole.

ALBERT SAMAIN

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## INTRODUCTION

The literary output of Albert Samain is by no means considerable, and his complete works, including posthumous publications, fill only three volumes - about eight hundred pages in all of prose and verse. These works comprise three collections of poems - "Au Jardin de l'Infante" (1894), "Aux Flancs du Vase" (1898) and "Le Chariot d'Or" (posthumous); a two act tragedy in verse, "Polyphème"; and four Tales in prose, the latter works both posthumous. His premature death, and the lack of leisure for literary composition from which he suffered all his life<sup>(1)</sup>, explain the smallness of his production.

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(1) We have given here no detailed account of Samain's life, which has already been fully studied in other works of criticism (see especially Amy Lowell, "Six French Poets"; and Léon Bocquet, "Albert Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre"). The few facts which are necessary for the understanding of the present essay are as follows:

Albert Samain was born at Lille in 1858, the eldest son of a lower middle-class family. The death of his father obliged him to leave school at the age of fourteen, to enter first a banker's office, and then a firm of sugar-brokers

In consequence of his limited literary production, various critics have already studied with no small degree of thoroughness, in the thirty-five years which have elapsed since his death, the outstanding and characteristic aspects of Samain's writings. Nevertheless, an equal amount of attention has not been devoted to all parts of his work. Of Samain's poetry and prose, it is the former which has always chiefly occupied the critic's attention, both before and after the poet's death; and it is certainly by his verse (his volumes of poems and

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at Lille, and finally another office in Paris. For years he had scarcely any free time to study or to write, being engaged in a constant struggle against poverty in the effort to support himself and his widowed mother; nor had he any friends with whom to share his intellectual interests. Amy Lowell quotes from his letters the following account of this period of his life: "At twenty-five years old, without the slightest exaggeration, I had not a single literary friend or acquaintance. My only relations were with young men belonging to the business world." Not until he was about thirty, and had obtained an administrative post which gave him more leisure, was he able to make friends in the literary world, and to indulge his own ambition to write. He did not marry, and died of consumption at Magny-les-Hameaux in 1900, at the age of forty-two.

"Polyphème") that Samain is best known to the general reading public. M. Léon Bocquet has devoted a few pages in "Albert Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre" (1905) to Samain's four "Contes", and has studied them further in a later work, "Autour d'Albert Samain" (1933); but otherwise the critics are strangely silent about them, and they are certainly unknown to many students of literature. We ourselves see in these little stories a charm and a delicacy of inspiration which seems to call for a deeper and more detailed study than has yet been devoted to them.

In the following pages we intend to give a general review of all Samain's published works, poetry and prose alike; making no claim to rigorous completeness in any case, but aiming only at indicating the main aspects of his work, and attempting to show what, in our opinion, are the best parts of Samain's literary production. We would like to make it clear, however, that we consider the section on the Tales as the most important part of our work, because this is relatively new ground where criticisms of Samain's writings are concerned, and because the Tales seem to us to possess beauties which at least equal, and perhaps surpass, those of Samain's poetry; and the sections on the verse are intended to exist rather as an introduction and accompaniment to the study of the Tales



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than as a tribute to the intrinsic value of Samain's poetry.

I. THE POEMS.

In accordance with these intentions, our first task will be to attempt a survey of Samain's three volumes of poems, "Au Jardin de l'Infante", "Le Chariot d'Or", and "Aux Flancs du Vase". We shall endeavour to make this as brief as possible, since, as we have said, a number of works of criticism have already been published on this subject; and we shall go into detail only when dealing with questions upon which other critics have scarcely touched, and to which we consider we are bringing a contribution of our own, very small in all cases, but perhaps not altogether useless. In each case we have indicated in the text where our opinions differ from those held by previous critics.

Nevertheless, however brief one would desire to make a study of Samain's poetry, it is impossible to define its main characteristics in a few phrases; for Samain has not one "manière"<sup>(1)</sup>, but several, and in summarising his poems we are obliged to divide his work into five or six groups before we can define it satisfactorily.

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(1) We have used throughout the French word "manière", which, as a term of literary criticism, seems to us better to express our meaning than the English "style".

(a) Samain's Nature-Poetry. First of these is the group of poems which may be described as Samain's nature-poetry. The poet has written a number of lyrics, in "Au Jardin de l'Infante" and in his later verse-collections, in which he celebrates one of the most fertile of lyrical themes, nature. Some of these poems (Paysages, Soir sur la Plaine, La Maison du Matin) are pure descriptions of the beauty of the countryside; others (Amphise et Melitta, Xanthis in "Aux Flancs du Vase") are pastoral idylls in a setting which at first sight appears Greek, and is reminiscent of André Chénier's "Eclogues", but which in actual fact has no definite situation in time or space; others are elegiac love-poems set against a natural background, the twilight atmosphere of which harmonises with the subject of the poems.

In manuals of literature, indeed, and in the individual studies of his work made by various critics, Samain is usually described as the poet of twilight, of evening and of autumn - an artist whose love for nature is limited to its dying aspects, which harmonise with the gentle and melancholy qualities of his own soul. François Coppée, to whose kindly patronage Samain owed the success of his first volume of poems, wrote, in his review of "Au Jardin de l'Infante": "Samain est un poète d'automne, de crépuscule et de morbide langueur", indicating thereby the connection

between the poet's own personality and his choice and treatment of material, and also the somewhat unhealthy quality of his inspiration at times. (Samain, whose premature death was due to consumption, had all his life to fight against attacks of neurasthenia; and, as we shall see, much of his poetry is spoilt by the morbid sensuality which it reveals, and which was undoubtedly due to the effect of this disease on the poet's temperament). M. Georges Bonneau, writing further on the subjective quality of Samain's nature-poetry, points out that the poet's choice of material lends itself exceptionally well to a personal treatment of the nature-theme - his reproduction of the misty half-tones of evening are indeed far removed from the clear-cut, scientifically precise and hence more readily objective landscapes of the Parnassian school - and "sa nature, faible et estompée à ce point, reste sans peine un accord d'âme".(1)

Samain is certainly an incomparable artist where his reproductions of autumn and of evening are concerned. In these pictures, the poet's own personality, tender,

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(1) G. Bonneau, "Albert Samain, poète symboliste", "Soc. Merc. France", 1925, p.64.

languid and ultra-sensitive, blends exquisitely with the scenes which he describes, or perhaps, more exactly, with the backgrounds which he indicates - for in many cases his nature descriptions are scarcely anything more than faint and shadowy outlines. Their evocatory power, however, is great. This extremely subjective treatment of the nature-theme is especially apparent in Samain's "Elégies", in which the poet's feeling for nature blends with the love-sentiment until the two are well-nigh inseparable:

"Les soirs fuyants et fins aux ciels inconsistants  
Où défaille et s'en va la lumière vaincue,  
Je n'en sens la douceur tout entière vécue  
Que si ton nom chanté sur un rite obsesseur  
Coule en tièdes frissons de ma bouche à mon coeur."

Elégies, Vol. II, p. 91.

What atmosphere too, what delicacy and what melancholy, in these pictures of autumn!

"Et ce silence, et ce grand charme langoureux  
Que verse en nous l'automne exquis et douloureux."

Elégies, Vol. II, p.89.

"Et ce grand air d'adieu qui flotte aux branches nues  
Vers l'étang solitaire, où meurt le son du cor."

"Forêts", Vol. II, p 217.

Samain's art, in his descriptions of autumn and

of evening, is to have caught exactly the indefinable atmosphere of these manifestations of nature's decline. No poet has given a more sensitive expression to this aspect of nature than Samain, and his reputation as the poet of autumn and evening is, from this point of view, well-justified. But the critics seem to us over-inclined to consider his nature-poetry as limited to the study of these aspects of nature. To do this is to consider only half the question, and thus lose sight of the true significance of Samain's feeling for nature. In reality Samain is as much a poet of morning as of evening, of spring as of autumn. Examples of morning-scenes are as frequent in his work as those of evening, and the same is true of his pictures of spring compared with those of autumn. These early morning scenes, while they are brighter and fresher than the evening ones, obeying a healthier inspiration, have not lost the mistiness and delicate colouring of the latter:

"Aux pentes des coteaux flottent des vapeurs blanches."

"Axilis au Ruisseau", Vol. II, p. 239.

"Le soleil, par degrés, de la brume émergeant,  
Dore la vieille tour et le haut des mâtûres;  
Et, jetant son filet sur les vagues obscures,  
Fait scintiller la mer dans ses mailles d'argent."

"Matin sur le Port", Vol. II, p. 39.

Samain frequently chooses as the subject for his nature-pictures dawn over the sea; the sea-scapes which he paints for us are charming by their light and colouring, and they express also the whole atmosphere of morning, its freshness and its coolness, and the whole quivering life of a reawakening world. Samain's masterpiece in this style is one of the last poems in "Aux Flancs du Vase" - "La Maison du Matin", which we quote in full:

"La maison du matin rit au bord de la mer,  
La maison blanche au toit de tuiles rose clair.  
Derrière un pâle écran de frêle mousseline  
Le soleil luit voilé comme une perle fine;  
Et, du haut des rochers redoutés du marin,  
Tout l'espace frissonne au vent frais du matin.  
Lyda, debout au seuil que la vigne décore,  
Un enfant sur ses bras, sourit, grave, à l'aurore,  
Et laisse, en regardant au large, le vent fou  
Dénouer ses cheveux mal fixés sur son cou.  
Par l'escalier du ciel l'enfantine journée  
Descend, légère et blanche, et de fleurs couronnée,  
Et, pour mieux l'accueillir, la mer au sein changeant  
Scintille à l'horizon, toute vive d'argent...  
Mais déjà les enfants s'échappent; vers la plage  
Ils courent, mi-vêtus, chercher le coquillage.

En vain Lyda les gronde: enivrés du ciel clair,  
Leur rire de cristal s'éparpille dans l'air...  
La maison du matin rit au bord de la mer."

Vol. II, pp. 279-80.

The whole of this poem quivers with life and freshness, and just as the atmosphere of evening is caught in its entirety in such lines as:

"Le ciel enténébré rejoint la plaine immense",

"Soir sur la Plaine", Vol. II, p. 49.

so the whole spirit of dawn is in this line:

"Tout l'espace frissonne au vent frais du matin."

Pictures of spring, though rarer than those of morning in Samain's work, just as, in the twilight aspects of nature, evening is given more place than autumn, are not infrequent, and are characterised by the same feeling on the part of the poet for the freshness of the world's re-awakening:

"Forêts d'avril; chansons des pinsons et des merles;  
Frissons d'ailes, frissons de feuilles, souffle pur;  
Lumière d'argent clair, d'émeraude et d'azur;  
Avril!...Pluie et soleil sur la forêt en perles!"

"Forêts", Vol. II, p. 218.

We see then that in Samain's descriptive work the aspects of nature most frequently described are morning and evening, spring and autumn. What significance as regards



the poet's general attitude to nature is contained in this deliberate study of certain aspects of nature, certain of her times and seasons, to the exclusion of others? The answer is, that what appeals to Samain in nature is her changes. His feeling for the life and movement in nature is very intense. For the poet, her beauty does not repose in broad daylight, but in the passage from day to night, from night to day; it does not repose in midsummer nor in the depths of winter, but in the passage from summer to winter, from winter to summer. There is movement in evening; and there is even more intense movement in morning. That Samain has felt this movement, and felt it intensely, with all his senses, is obvious from his many descriptions of the fresh breeze of morning, his frequent use of the word "frisson", his insistence upon the songs and the flight of the birds:

"L'oiseau vole; le vent souffle; la feuille tremble."

"Axilis au Ruisseau", Vol. II,  
p. 240.

"Eaux courantes, bois verts, feuillage frémissant."

Ibid.

Samain's nature-poetry, with the intensity and delicacy of the feeling it expresses, and the beauty of its descriptions, constitutes in our opinion one of the

poet's chief claims to fame and it has indeed been acclaimed by the critics as one of the finest parts of the poet's work.

(b) Pseudo-Greek Interiors. Apart from his nature-idylls, the best of Samain's poetry is, we think - and here again the concensus of critical opinion is with us - contained in the finely drawn interiors and homely scenes of "Aux Flancs du Vase". In these, under an appearance of antiquity (supplied chiefly by the Greek names which the poet gives to his characters, and which, while they harmonise with the classical restraint of the expression, deceive few of his readers), he paints the most charming pictures of everyday, and especially of family, life - pictures full of colour, movement, feeling, realism and beauty. The popularity of these poems may be gauged by the frequency with which, in preference to all other of Samain's poems, even his delicate nature-idylls, they appear in the various collections of "Morceaux Choisis" of French poetry which multiply from year to year. The best known of these poems in "Aux Flancs du Vase" are "Le Repas Préparé" which we quote below, "La Bulle", "Le Bonheur", "Le Marché", "Le Petit Palémon". The poems are already foreshadowed in "Le Chariot d'Or" by one or two pieces of the same type - "La Cuisine", "Le Berceau" - also among the better known of Samain's poems.

"Le Repas Préparé."

"Ma fille, laisse là ton aiguille et ta laine;  
Le maître va rentrer; sur la table de chêne  
Avec la nappe neuve aux plis étincelants  
Mets la faïence claire et les verres brillants.  
Dans la coupe arrondie à l'anse en col de cygne  
Pose les fruits choisis sur des feuilles de vigne;  
Les pêches que recouvre un velours vierge encor,  
Et les lourds raisins bleus mêlés aux raisins d'or.  
Que le pain bien coupé remplisse les corbeilles,  
Et puis ferme la porte et chasse les abeilles.  
Dehors le soleil brûle, et la muraille cuit.  
Rapprochons les volets, faisons presque la nuit,  
Afin qu'ainsi la salle, aux ténèbres plongée,  
S'embaume toute aux fruits dont la table est chargée.  
Maintenant, va puiser l'eau fraîche dans la cour;  
Et veille que surtout la crûche, à ton retour,  
Garde longtemps, glacée et lentement fondue,  
Une vapeur légère à ses flancs suspendue."

Vol. II, pp. 235-6.

(c) The Symbolist Style. Unfortunately the nature-lyrics  
and the pseudo-Greek interiors  
are practically the only verse-writings of real merit  
(apart from "Polyphème", which we shall discuss presently)

that Samain has produced. A large proportion of the poems in "Au Jardin de l'Infante" and "Le Chariot d'Or" are written in the symbolist style, and with regard to many of these we heartily endorse M. de Bersaucourt's remark: "Malheureusement pour lui et pour nous, Samain a subi également la détestable influence du symbolisme"<sup>(1)</sup>. Before illustrating the results of this "detestable influence" on Samain's work, however, it is perhaps necessary to give some definition of the rather vague literary term, "symbolism".

According to the symbolist theory, the essential is not to reproduce in poetry the various aspects of life and of the universe, but to transfigure them, presenting them by mere suggestion. This conception is a direct reaction against the theory of "l'art pour l'art". The objects which would have been faithfully reproduced in Parnassian poetry for their intrinsic value, only find a place in symbolist poetry in so far as they make an impression upon the poet; they only exist incorporated with his soul, which they express and so exteriorise. Their value in poetry is thus no longer intrinsic, but psychological. The poet's personality vibrates in his poetry, in spite of the fact that the latter is poles apart from the

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(1) A. de Bersaucourt, "Albert Samain", p. 10.

naïvely emotional work of the Romantics; the symbolist, more spontaneous than the Parnassian, may yet be considered as reserved, in that he expresses his personality subtly, indirectly, by means of the relation which he creates between his inner being and the exterior aspects of life.

This symbolist poetry, being individualist, though of a half-hidden individualism, is naturally conceived by different writers in a variety of ways. As examples, we may quote the symbolism of Verlaine's poetry, which is so subtle as to be almost indefinable - the creation, around the world and the life he describes, of a personal atmosphere, intensified by the gentle rhythm of his verse, by the avoidance of clear-cut forms or well-defined colourings, a subtle mingling of "précis" and "indécis"; the style is clear, the vocabulary and syntax simple, but behind this appearance of simplicity there is a world of suggestion which the reader's own intuition must translate into reality. Mallarmé and Valéry, in their attempt to convey the inexpressible mystery of the subconscious - the inner reality which lurks behind the outward appearance - have created, each according to his own inspiration, a new vocabulary and a new syntax, which, not being the usual vehicles of expression, are by that very fact more truly expressive, because their suggestive power is thereby the greater. Behind the obscurity of their

language they hide an immense clarity of thought; these two poets illustrate better than any others the essentially intellectual quality of symbolism.

Before the symbolists, the image or the picture was frequently introduced into poetry for its own sake, by both Romantics and Parnassians; in symbolist poetry it only exists incorporated with an idea. Verlaine, Mallarmé and Valéry are all symbolists in a very wide sense of the word - by the suggestive and evocatory power of the form of their verse; the actual symbol, if we understand by symbol a definite concrete image expressing and translating an abstract fact or idea, is rare in their work; but in reality, in each case the poet's attitude to life stands in the relation of the idea to the image, and his whole poetry is moreover the symbol of his personality. Other poets - greatest among them Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verhaeren - make a more direct use of the symbol. The theory of correspondences which Baudelaire expresses in the lines -

"Les parfums, les couleurs, et les sons se répondent",  
and:

"Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfant,  
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies" -  
is exactly applied in "La Chevelure", in which the poet expresses the suggestive and evocatory quality of his

mistress' hair; and in "L'Albatros" we see the intellectual transposition of this theory, the pure use of the concrete symbol to express the central idea of the poem. Rimbaud's "Bateau Ivre" is, in this respect, a poem of the same type as "L'Albatros"; and in Verhaeren's poetry all the elements of nature - snow, wind, rain, and even the fog of London - are symbols, they have a moral or psychological significance, they are the images of ideas. Here again, the intellectual character of symbolism is apparent.

The theory of symbolism thus conceived brought to French poetry a much-needed revivification. It destroyed the coldness and austerity latent in an extreme application of the Parnassian doctrine. Two ideals of the latter - impassiveness and minute exactitude (which latter ideal, given the historical and mythological subjects which the Parnassian poets frequently chose, demanded a vast amount of erudition, and consequently contained a great risk of pedantry) - had, driven to the extreme, resulted in a lack - real or apparent - of human feeling in the poetry of this school. Certain characters of symbolism revealed a tendency in the direction of revived feeling: the personal element always latent in the work of this school, its spontaneous lyricism, the intense sense of life which vibrates in symbolist poetry.

On the other hand, a reproach which is frequently made against symbolist art - precisely that it lacks life - can be justified. M. Edouard Maynial states the limitations of symbolism very clearly when he says: "Si le symbolisme, lui aussi, n'a été qu'une école, comme le Parnasse auquel il succède sans d'ailleurs en avoir aboli la discipline, c'est qu'il n'apportait avec lui qu'une esthétique et se plaçait dédaigneusement en dehors de la vie".<sup>(1)</sup> The Parnasse, already, addressed its poetry to an intellectual and artistic élite, for the Parnassians' philosophy, and their intense appreciation of plastic beauty, were not accessible to everyone. Their chief fault is their lack of universal appeal - and it is this part of their artistic theory which the symbolists, in applying to it a different method, in adopting a different attitude towards life, have not abolished but intensified; for their aesthetic ideal and their philosophy are still more refined, being spiritualised to the point of a metaphysical attitude. We repeat about the symbolists in general what we have already said in connection with Mallarmé; they have made themselves, not too obscure, but too

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(1) E. Maynial. "Anthologie des Poètes du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle", (Hachette), p. 25.



subtle, for universal appreciation. With the symbolists, French poetry, becoming mystic rather than human, is farther removed than ever from "la foule".

Unfortunately for the prestige of symbolism, moreover, a great number of younger and less gifted poets endeavoured to express themselves in the language of Verlaine and Mallarmé. There are many pitfalls in the symbolist style of writing. Even Mallarmé is at times reproached with expressing his ideas in an almost undecipherable language; but his ideas are worthy of study, we do not draw aside the veil to find nothing behind it, and the poetry of this ideologist is not so much obscure as inconceivably complex in thought. Indeed, Mallarmé's whole genius lies in this apparent obscurity. This fact, however, does not justify young writers, who did not possess genius, in regarding obscurity of expression as a merit in itself, and composing poems in which the neologisms and strange syntactical inventions abound, in which the concordance between image and idea is often exaggerated and inappropriate, and in which the thought, hidden behind this mass of obscurity, is so banal as to be quite unworthy of the effort of interpretation. Here is an example of this style of writing, taken from a sonnet by René Ghil:

"Mais leurs ventres éclats de la nuit des Tonnerres!  
Désuétude d'un grand heurt des primes cieux,  
Une aurore perdant le sens des chants hymnaires  
Attire en souriant la vanité des yeux."

Even the more gifted writers did not always escape from the exaggerations of symbolism, and of the theory of correspondences, as is evidenced by Rimbaud's:

"A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles,  
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes."

This is a deliberate and semi-humorous exaggeration, of course, but the tendency it reveals is dangerous.

Again, we sometimes find, even in the works of the great symbolist poets, a minute application of the symbol, no longer to the single theme of the poem, but to each of the individual ideas which compose this theme; and thus we get, not the development of one image throughout the poem, (which would give strength and unity to the whole) but a piling up of images, which, all being formed on the same model (the concrete image incorporating the abstract idea), soon appear exaggerated, artificial and monotonous. Moreás writes, for instance, in "Le Pèlerin Passionné":

"Un troupeau gracieux de jeunes courtisanes  
S'ébat et rit dans la forêt de mon âme.  
Un bûcheron taciturne et fou frappe  
De sa cognée dans la forêt de mon âme."

"Le Bocage."

Verlaine writes:

"Eaiser! rose trémière au jardin des caresses!  
Vif accompagnement sur le clavier des dents  
Des doux refrains qu'Amour chante en les coeurs ardents  
Avec sa voix d'archange aux langueurs charmeresses."

"Il Bacio."

The best proof of the danger of obscurity latent in the symbolist style of writing, and of the too-ample scope which it gives for exaggeration and artificiality is the defection of a number of poets - Henri de Régnier, Charles Guérin, Jean Moréas, Samain himself - in each case in the direction of hellenism or of the classic style - that is to say, in the direction of clarity and sobriety. They recognised the perils of symbolism.

Albert Samain may be considered as a symbolist poet from several points of view. Much of his poetry contains the suggestive rhythm and the misty, indefinite colourings of Verlaine's verse; as we have seen in connection with the nature-poems, Samain knows how to create an atmosphere by the very imprecision of his painting. Indeed, many of his nature-lyrics and his love-poems (which we have preferred to discuss separately as such, not grouping them for the time being under any poetic school) are symbolist not merely by

the atmosphere they evoke, but by the exteriorisation of the poet's personality in these natural scenes - the fusion of the poet's soul with the object he describes being, as we have seen, the outstanding feature of the symbolist "ars poetica", and the one which gives it its name. It is easy to understand that Samain adopted with enthusiasm a mode of expression which respected his inherent timidity, while it permitted him at the same time to satisfy the need for expansion which hid itself beneath his reserve. F. Gohin points out that Samain, who is a "poète frémissant",<sup>(1)</sup> could only undergo the impassive Parnassian influence for a limited time, as a kind of artistic and technical discipline, and that his work was bound to evolve in the direction of symbolism, with whose doctrine he was, by his very nature, in far greater sympathy. In addition to the poetry which is merely symbolist by its suggestive quality, Samain has, in certain poems, followed in the footsteps of the authors of "L'Albatros" and "Le Bateau Ivre", and has given a concrete representation of an idea, thus proclaiming his adherence to the intellectual principle of symbolism. Here is an

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(1) F. Gohin, "L'Œuvre poétique d'Albert Samain", pp. 13-14.

example:

"Remonte, lent rameur, le cours de tes années,  
Et les yeux clos, suspends ta rame par endroits...  
La brise qui s'élève aux jardins d'autrefois  
Courbe suavement les âmes inclinées.  
"Cherche en ton coeur, loin des grand'routes calcinées,  
L'enclos plein d'herbe épaisse et verte où sont les croix.  
Ecoutes-y l'air triste où reviennent les voix,  
Et baise au coeur tes petites mortes fanées."

Vol. II, p. 83.

Unfortunately the poem just quoted is rather an exception in Samain's symbolist work. He has not the force and richness of inspiration which are necessary to sustain such a complex type of poetry; and if he rarely falls into the error of other lesser symbolist poets - that of obscurity - his symbolist poems are often characterised by the banality of the ideas, and by a lack of human feeling, which, as we have seen, is one of the dangers of symbolism. Moreover, he frequently makes abuse of the symbolist "procédé" of the translation of the idea by means of a concrete image, piling up the symbols to an exaggerated extent; often, too, his choice of symbols is faulty, for they do not correspond sufficiently closely to the theme to appear natural. Here

is an example taken from Samain's unfinished poems, in which the abuse of the image is carried to the extreme:

"Dans la salle aux tiédeurs féminines d'église  
Cù le Mourir des fleurs lentes se subtilise,  
De larges fleurs berçant dans l'air triste du soir  
Leurs coupes de velours lourdes de nonchaloir,  
Eparses dans le sombre en blancheurs indécises  
Des femmes aux grands airs indolents sont assises,  
Qu'on dirait d'un pays et d'un temps très lointains,  
Des femmes pâles dans des vagues de satins.

"Et ces Dames ce sont mes intimes Pensées  
En silence par les fleurs larges encensées,  
Et qui, de leurs beaux yeux qu'éclaire à son reflet  
Le rêve intérieur sous leurs longs cils voilé,  
Regardent sur le parc au faste séculaire  
S'effeuiller en lys bleus l'heure crépusculaire.  
.....

"Or de ces Dames, l'une a nom Mélancolie,  
L'autre Amertume, l'autre Espérance-Abolie,  
Puis encor Souvenir, Exil, Renoncement,  
Volupté, Lassitude et Découragement."

Vol. III, pp. 237-8.

Even the image in the famous -

"Mon âme est une infante en robe de parade" -  
seems a trifle forced.

It seems an unfortunate coincidence, too, that the morbid and unhealthy quality which characterises Samain's inspiration at times seems frequently to be allied in his poetry to the symbolist mode of expression. The opening lines of the passage from the unfinished poems already create a rather heady, sensual atmosphere, and the whole conception is neurasthenic, as the poet's enumeration of his "intimes pensées" shows. In a number of poems, of which we quote extracts, the inspiration is really erotic and macabre:

"Et le roi sent, frisson d'or en ses chairs funèbres,  
La vipère Luxure enlacer ses vertèbres."

"Hérode", Vol. II, p.190.

"Musique - encens - parfums, ...poisons, ...littérature!...

Les fleurs vibrent dans les jardins effervescents;  
Et l'Androgyne aux grands yeux verts phosphorescents  
Fleurit au charnier d'or d'un monde en pourriture.

"Aux apostats du Sexe, elle apporte en pâture,  
Sous sa robe d'or vert aux joyaux bruissants,  
Sa chair de vierge acide et ses spasmes grincants  
Et sa volupté maigre aiguillée en torture."

Vo. II, p. 187.

The quotations are taken from "Le Chariot d'Or", the collection of Samain's posthumous poems. In his early work, "Au Jardin de l'Infante", the examples of this type of writing are even more numerous, as an enumeration of the titles will show: "Des Soirs Fiévreux et Forts comme une Venaison", "Le Siècle d'Or se Gâte ainsi qu'un Fruit Meurtri", "Le Bouc Noir passe au Fond des Ténèbres Malsaines".

M. de Bersaucourt is presumably referring to these exaggerations of the symbolist style - over-richness of both imagery and atmosphere, when he speaks of the detestable influence of symbolism; and although it must be insisted that the subtle type of symbolism is in entire harmony with Samain's delicate and impressionable temperament, this very impressionability was, on the other hand, a source of peril for the poet, in so far as the influence exerted on him was that of a poetic doctrine based on the cult of life, considered in its sensual and artistic aspects; for such a doctrine easily degenerates into a search for ultra-refinement of sensation, especially in a temperament whose innate sensuality has been nourished and intensified by solitude, as was the case with Samain. He did not undergo this influence with impunity, and only in "Aux Flancs du Vase" did he at last liberate his poetry from the corruption of taste which



resulted from it.

(d) The "Elégies". The fourth of Samain's poetic styles is found in his love-poetry. This consists of a cycle of poems in "Le Chariot d'Or", entitled "Elégies"; and to these we join, by reason of the unity of subject and form which they reveal, several other poems scattered through "Au Jardin de l'Infante" and "Le Chariot d'Or" - Elégie, "Au Jardin de l'Infante" p. 39, and "Ton souvenir est comme un livre bien-aimé", p. 51; Elégie, "Le Chariot d'Or", p. 37, and "Devant la mer, un soir...", p. 63. At first sight, these poems give an impression of sincere and original inspiration. Several critics, indeed, give credence to the originality of the inspiration, and acclaim the elegiac poems as one of the best parts of Samain's work. M. F. Gohin, in appraising the value of "Le Chariot d'Or", calls the "Elégies", "les plus belles pièces de ce recueil"<sup>(1)</sup>; M. de Bersaucourt says, "Il atteint presque la perfection dans ses 'Elégies' du 'Chariot d'Or', parce qu'il s'est enfin décidé à l'aveu franc, direct et dépouillé qui est le

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(1) F. Gohin, "L'oeuvre poétique d'Albert Samain", Garnier, 1919, p. 55.

propre du véritable lyrisme"(1); and M. L. Bocquet calls Samain's "Elégies" - "Le meilleur et le plus individuel de son talent"(2).

It is true that the directness of expression which characterises these poems comes as a refreshing change after the overloaded imagery of Samain's symbolist verse, and certain passages seem, by their very simplicity, to express the universality and sublimity of love:

"Oh! j'ai le coeur si plein de toi, si tu savais!"

Vol. II, p. 97.

There are certain very beautiful lines in the "Elégies" - these, for instance, in which the lover's longing for his absent mistress blends almost mystically with his consciousness of the silence and immensity of night:

"Pour moi, je veille, l'âme éparse dans la nuit,  
Je veille, coeur tendu vers des lèvres absentes,  
Parmi la solitude aux brises caressantes,

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(1) A. de Bersaucourt, "Albert Samain", pp. 21-2.

(2) L. Bocquet, "Albert Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre",  
"Soc. Merc. France, 1905", p. 134.

Et la lune à travers les arbres me conduit.  
.....

"Le silence est profond, comme mystérieux.  
La nuit porte l'amour endormi sous sa mante  
Et je n'entends plus rien dans la cité dormante  
Que ton haleine frêle et douce, ô mon amante,  
Qui fait trembler mon coeur large ouvert sous les cieux."

Vol. II, p. 96.

Samain has expressed with feeling, if in somewhat prosaic language, the ineffable and elusive quality of love -

"À peine une dernière fois  
T'ai-je envoyé mon coeur suprême au bout des doigts,  
En me retrouvant seul sur le pavé sonore  
Dans la rue où là-bas ta vitre brille encore,  
Je sens parmi le vent nocturne s'exhaler  
Tout ce que j'avais pris de toi pour m'en aller...  
Et de tout son trésor mon coeur triste se vide,  
Car ton subtil amour, ô femme, est plus fluide  
Que l'eau vive, qu'on puise aux sources dans les bois  
Et qu'on sent, malgré tout, fuir au travers des doigts."

Vol. II, p. 108.

The last three lines only just suffice to save the poem from

complete prosaism, but the rendering of the feeling is sympathetic and apparently sincere.

Unfortunately it is impossible to believe that the whole inspiration of the "Elégies" is equally sincere. Their resemblance to François Coppée's "Intimités" is too striking to be a mere coincidence - especially as we know that Samain was Coppée's disciple and protégé. Like the "Elégies", the "Intimités", published in 1868 (when Samain was a youth of twenty) are a cycle of love-poems addressed to an unnamed woman. In each case the expression of the thought is simple, direct and even familiar, and both groups of poems are characterised by the same languor of atmosphere, the same cult of silence and of melancholy, the same subtle mingling of sentimentality and gentle voluptuousness; in both the love-theme is frequently presented against a background of evening or of autumn - the decadent aspects of nature.

These similarities, marked as they are, would perhaps be insufficient to prove the lack of original inspiration in Samain's "Elégies", were it not for numerous passages throughout these love-poems which have definite counterparts in Coppée's "Intimités". Here are one or two examples - and others might be quoted - which illustrate

how much Samain owes to the "Intimités":

Coppée: "Je m'en vais devant moi, distrait. Le Souvenir  
Me fait monter au coeur ses effluves heureuses;  
Et de mes vêtements, et de mes mains fiévreuses  
Se dégage un arôme exquis et capiteux,"

Samain: "Je t'aime, et malgré moi, je m'en vais par les rues  
Où flotte un souvenir des choses disparues,  
Où je sens, pénétré d'amère volupté,  
Qu'encore un peu de Toi dans l'air tendre est resté."

Vol. II, pp. 103-4.

Coppée: "Paris pousse à mes pieds son soupir éternel.  
Le sombre azur du ciel s'épaissit. Je commence  
À distinguer des bruits dans ce murmure immense...  
Le sifflet douloureux des machines stridentes,  
Ou l'aboïement d'un chien ou le cri d'un enfant."  
"Et j'écoutais rouler les fiacres dans la rue."

Samain: "Paris est recueilli comme une basilique;  
À peine un roulement de fiacre par moment.  
Un chien perdu qui pleure, ou le long sifflement  
D'une locomotive - au loin - mélancolique."

Vol. II, p. 96.

Coppée: " "L'atmosphère  
Languissante s'empreint de parfums assoupis."

Samain: "Tout l'espace languit de fièvres."

Vol. II, p. 94.

In short, Samain's "Elégies" are almost entirely devoid of original poetic inspiration; his verse is a pastiche of Coppée's, and - a danger which imitators of this poet are apt to run - it relapses frequently into a language which is almost that of prose:

"Toi, câline et d'amour amollie,  
Tu regardais, bercée au coeur de ton amant,  
Le ciel qui s'allumait d'astres splendidement."

Vol. II, p. 68.

Thus with a singular lack of judgment, Samain has carried a step farther the simplicity of expression which is Coppée's strength, and so made of it his own weakness.

There are still other criticisms of the "Elégies" to be made. Throughout the "Elégies" we meet with an exaggerated and morbid sensuality, reminiscent of the unhealthy inspiration of much of Samain's symbolist poetry - "Peau de Bête", "Bacchante", "Le Bouc Noir". At times the "Elégies" even exhibit definite faults of taste:

"Ta robe, fourreau mince et tiède de ta chair,  
Dont le seul souvenir, effleurant ma narine,  
Fait couler un ruisseau d'amour dans ma poitrine."

Vol. II, p. 98.

Moreover, the "Elégies" are not merely a pastiche of the "Intimités". Samain has obviously sought inspiration

also in Baudelaire's love-poetry, its artificial misogyny included, and he has grafted this second inspiration on to the first. Compare with this passage from Baudelaire's "Hymne à la Beauté" -

"Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe,  
O Beauté! monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu!  
Si ton oeil, ton souris, ton pied m'ouvrent la porte  
D'un infini que j'aime et n'ai jamais connu?

"De Satan ou de Dieu, qu'importe? Ange ou sirène,  
Qu'importe, si tu rends, - fée aux yeux de velours,  
Rythme, parfum, lueur, ô mon unique reine!

L'univers moins hideux et les instants moins lourds?" -  
one of Samain's "Elégies", which has points in common with it as regards the idea expressed, but which lacks the vigour both of inspiration and expression which characterise Baudelaire's poetry:

"O Femme, lac profond qui garde qui s'y plonge,  
Leurre ou piège, qu'importe? O chair tissée en songe  
Qui jamais, qui jamais connaîtra sous les cieux  
D'ou vient cet éternel sanglot délicieux  
Qui roule du profond de l'homme vers Tes Yeux!"

Vol. II, p. 92.

We must however point out, in justice to Samain, that the passage just quoted does not reveal a purely servile

imitation of Baudelaire; in these lines, Samain has expressed something which is definitely his, and which pierces the revolt and the hard mistrust of womankind which he has copied from Baudelaire - a docile adoration of woman's mystery, with all that this carries with it of sweetness and of gentleness.

(e) Poems inspired by various writers

I. Baudelaire. Samain's worst fault throughout his poetry is certainly his lack of original inspiration. He has undergone the influence, not of one or two writers, but of many. The influence of Coppée, which we have just seen, appears to be confined to the "Elégies". The influence of Baudelaire on Samain's early work appears to have been one of the strongest, and has had both good and bad effects. It has had a good effect, as regards the form of Samain's poetry. M. de Bersaucourt remarks: "Baudelaire l'a détourné du symbolisme vers l'art traditionnel des Parnassiens."<sup>(1)</sup> (For Baudelaire, in spite of the spirituality and the suggestive quality of his work, has, by the form of his verse, its fullness and solidity and

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(1) A. de Bersaucourt, "Albert Samain", p. 16.



its strong harmony, more affinities with the Parnassians than with the school of symbolists descended from Verlaine.) But, as regards inspiration of theme, Baudelaire's influence has been bad, for Samain has copied the worst of his poetry - and thus we find in Samain's work, for instance, a poorer version of "Les Litanies de Satan" ("Luxure"),<sup>(1)</sup> and a poorer version of the poems in which Baudelaire expresses his hatred of "la femme mauvaise" ("Une" ,<sup>(2)</sup> and this passage from the sonnet "Émeraude":<sup>(3)</sup>

"Et mauvais rêve aussi de la femme mauvaise  
Dont le lourd regard vert, brûlant comme la braise,  
Au coeur ensorcelé distille le poison.")

The falsity of this attitude is all the more evident if we remember that Baudelaire himself, when he expresses this conception of woman as the enemy of man, is probably largely inventing and exaggerating his sentiments in order to disconcert and astonish, as he loved to do, by his adoption of this melodramatic and satanic attitude.

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(1) Vol. I, p. 181.

(2) Vol. I, p. 99.

(3) Vol. II, p. 178.

II. Verlaine and Watteau. Verlaine's poetry also appears to have had a considerable influence on Samain's work, an influence which greatly affects the form of the younger poet's verse. We find the same musicality, and the suggestive power contained in the melody of the verse, in the work of the two poets. Compare too, with Verlaine's famous dictum:

"Où l'indécis au précis se joint",  
Samain's declaration, "J'adore l'indécis", but notice also the subtle difference between the two professions of faith, - Samain going a step further in his cult of the indefinite and the suggestive, and, in our opinion, allowing his conception of art to be tainted by the hint of weakness, of lack of concentration, and even of lack of courage contained in this poetic creed. Samain would also appear to owe much to the author of "Les Fêtes Galantes", insofar as the inspiration of the subject-matter is concerned, and many poems both in "Au Jardin de l'Infante" ("Heures d'Eté", "Musique sur l'Eau", "L'Ile Fortunée", "Nocturne", "L'Indifférent", "Invitation") and in "Le Chariot d'Or" ("Versailles", "Watteau") recall irresistibly the numerous passages in

"Les Fêtes Galantes" in which Verlaine has himself been inspired by Watteau and by the life of his time.

This sonnet, one of the group entitled "Versailles", is a characteristic example of Samain's eighteenth-century "manière":

"Grand air. Urbanité des façons anciennes.  
Haut cérémonial. Révérences sans fin.  
Créqui, Fronsac, beaux noms chatoyants de satin.  
Mains ducales dans les vieilles valenciennes,  
"Mains royales sur les épinettes. Antiennes  
Des évêques devant Monseigneur le Dauphin.  
Gestes de menuet et coeurs de biscuit fin;  
Et ces grâces que l'on disait Autrichiennes...  
"Princesses de sang bleu, dont l'âme d'apparat,  
Des siècles, au plus pur des castes macéra.  
Grands seigneurs pailletés d'esprit. Marquis de  
sèvres.  
"Tout un monde galant, vif, brave, exquis et fou,  
Avec sa fine épée en verrouil, et surtout  
Ce mépris de la mort, comme une fleur, aux lèvres!"

Vol. II, pp.11-12

It is always dangerous, however, to attribute too much to actual imitation; Rémy de Gourmont says in this connection, "Il doit moins à l'auteur des

"Fêtes Galantes" qu'on ne pourrait croire", (1) and M. Bocquet indeed combats strenuously the claim that Samain found his inspiration in Verlaine's poetry. He says, "La compassion troublante et anxieuse, morbide un peu, subtilement savante dans son émotion, qui manifeste ces états de sentiment, ou, si l'on préfère, de sentimentalité, apparaît à plusieurs comme l'essence même de la poésie verlainienne. Cette similitude, et certain ressouvenir des 'Fêtes Galantes' que beaucoup s'obstinent à trouver présent dans une partie d'«Au Jardin de l'Infante», ont été causes qu'on s'est plu à considérer A. Samain comme un disciple fervent et conscient de Paul Verlaine. C'est se tromper que d'insister, et de faire une influence d'une admiration commune à deux poètes pour une époque d'art et des oeuvres qui les trouvèrent semblablement sensibles. La fréquentation du génie de Watteau, et un égal amour de notre dix-huitième siècle d'élégance légère et de volupté mièvre jusqu'à la tristesse, accentuent entre eux des ressemblances difficilement niables. Ils avaient été, l'un et l'autre, attirés par la viejoliment raffinée, ornée

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(1) Remy de Gourmont, "Le Livre des Masques", Article on Samain.

de coquetterie et de séduction paresseuse, de grâce et de langueur dépeinte aux tableaux de l'artiste que les Goncourt ont nommé 'le plus grand poète du dix-huitième siècle'. Le charme fin et la sensualité distinguée du décors Watteau engageaient la féminité de Verlaine et de Samain à attarder leur imagination aux rêveries délicieuses qu'ils suggéraient. Une prédisposition fraternelle de tempérament aidait encore davantage Samain à s'approcher de la compréhension et de l'âme du peintre, à revivre son songe de beauté. Faut-il rappeler qu'il fut comme son compatriote, nerveux, mélancolique et poitrinaire? Par delà Verlaine, c'est à Watteau qu'il convient de remonter, pour expliquer, d'après l'artiste, une tendance du poète aux chimériques voyages, 'vers des îles d'amour sur des lacs bleus écloses', aux départs fantaisistes sur des 'nacelles roses'. Les titres de cette partie du recueil désignent aussi bien clairement des toiles de Watteau, et les poèmes sont des paraphrases des tableaux".<sup>(1)</sup>

We have quoted M. Bocquet at length, not merely because he indicates so clearly just to what extent Samain may

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(1) L. Bocquet, "Albert Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre", pp. 117-9.

be said to have undergone the influence of Verlaine, but also because he defines so admirably Samain's "Watteau-poetry".

III. The Parnasse. There exists one outstanding example of Samain's imitation of other writers, and here we must really call it imitation, and not merely a vague influence undergone; this is the imitation of the Parnassian school, and the imitation is all the more patent because it is chiefly concerned with the form, the mode of expression, not with the ideas; and thus the poems which Samain writes in the Parnassian style appear as pure pastiches of the verse of Leconte de Lisle and Hérédia. We must admit, however, that as pastiches they are remarkably successful; such a sonnet as "Le Sphinx" might well be taken for a poem of Leconte de Lisle:

"Seul, sur l'horizon bleu vibrant d'incandescence,  
L'antique Sphinx s'allonge, énorme et féminin.  
Dix mille ans ont passé; fidèle à son destin,  
Sa lèvre aux coins serrés garde l'énigme immense.  
"De tout ce qui vivait au jour de sa naissance,  
Rien ne reste que lui. Dans le passé lointain,  
Son âge fait trembler le songeur incertain,  
Et l'ombre de l'histoire à son ombre commence.

"Accroupi sur l'amas des siècles révolus,  
Immobile au soleil, dardant ses seins aigus,  
Sans jamais abaisser sa rigide paupière,  
"Il songe, et semble attendre avec sérénité  
L'ordre de se lever sur ses pattes de pierre,  
Pour rentrer à pas lents dans son éternité."

Vol. II, pp. 165-6.

Another sonnet, "L'Hécatombe", of which we quote the first verse, resembles the poetry of Leconte de Lisle by the impression of burning summer heat, and by the powerful and solid strokes with which the animals are drawn:

"Dans la splendeur dorée et cruelle du soir  
Les Taureaux, fronts crépus et sanglantes paupières,  
Se hâtant lourdement sous les sombres lanières,  
Mélancoliquement s'en vont à l'abattoir."

Vol. II, p. 169.

Certain other of Samain's sonnets recall those of Hérédia, notably the two sonnets, "Cléopâtre", (1) which is reminiscent of "Antoine et Cléopâtre" as much by the form as by the subject; but which, with less of

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(1) Vol. I, pp. 109-11.

classical restraint in their tone than the sonnets in "Les Trophées", are spoiled by the somewhat vulgar sensuality from which Samain escapes only in "Aux Flancs de Vase". The same criticism may be made of "Hélène", which, if less morbid, would possess a very Herédian character:

"L'âcre vapeur d'un soir de bataille surnage.

L'Argienne aux bras blancs a franchi les remparts,  
Et vers le fleuve rouge, où les morts sont épars,  
Solitaire, s'avance à travers le carnage.

"Là-bas, les feux des Grecs brillent sur le rivage;  
Les chevaux immortels hennissent près des chars...  
Lente, elle va parmi les cadavres hagards,  
Et passe avec horreur sa main sur son visage.

"Qu'elle apparaît divine aux lueurs du couchant!...  
Des longs voiles secrets, qu'elle écarte en marchant,  
Monte une odeur d'amour irrésistible et sombre;

"Et déjà les mourants, saignants et mutilés,  
Rampant vers ses pieds nus sur leurs coudes dans  
l'ombre,  
Touchent ses cheveux d'or et meurent consolés."

Vol. I, p. 209-10.

We are inclined to be shocked at such obvious imitation as is present in these Parnassian sonnets of Samain;



but we must not omit to say that the Parnassian influence did much good to Samain's work, and was instrumental in finally bringing him to a point of craftsmanship where he discovered the existence of his real and original talent. Samain's early verse is inclined to be, as M. Bonneau expresses it, "flou, mièvre et mourant".(1) Gentle and diffident by nature, what he needed was force of inspiration and of expression. He found in Baudelaire a power of form and of thought, on which he endeavoured to model his own poetry, not with entire success, as we have seen; but he learnt from Baudelaire to seek a more solid and a fuller form of verse, with more sonority in its music, and from Baudelaire he went on to the Parnassians, in whom he found the same strength and fullness of expression. Then, too, he copied at first in too servile a fashion, - but through this imitation he discovered where his talent lay, and in his interiors of "Aux Flancs du Vase" we discover a new and original Samain, who, while he can be,

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(1) G. Bonneau, "A. Samain, poète symboliste", p. 130.

As Rémy de Gourmont says, "un violent coloriste ou un vigoureux tailleur de marbre"<sup>(1)</sup> has not lost the best quality of his early poetry, its softness and its fluidity.

We have dwelt at some length on the space which imitation of other writers occupies in Samain's poetry, because this lack of originality is a very grave fault in his work. We have already pointed out, however, how dangerous it is to attribute too much in Samain's poetry to outside influence. Where Coppée, Baudelaire and the Parnassians are concerned, we cannot deny definite imitation, but in the case of Verlaine there is no real imitation, but only community of vision and sympathy of thought. M. Bocquet probably defines Samain's practice rightly in these words: "Surajouter à l'inspiration d'autrui son émotion personnelle"<sup>(2)</sup> - which implies at least partial originality of inspiration, and, in addition, true sincerity of feeling. M. de Bersaucourt says, when discussing the literary influences which Samain has undergone: "Avant de découvrir son originalité propre l'auteur du Chariot d'Or a subi les influences les plus diverses et les plus contradictoires".<sup>(3)</sup> This sentence summarises

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(1) R. de Gourmont, "Le Livre des Masques."

(2) L. Bocquet, "Albert Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre", p. 14

(3) A. de Bersaucourt, "Albert Samain", p. 5.

well the evolution of Samain's talent. He needed models in order to discover where his real gift of poetry lay; and because, especially in his years of poetic apprenticeship, his taste was unformed, in following these models he unfortunately produced much that is unworthy of his talent. But, by experimenting with these various methods of expression, he finally came to create a work which owed everything to his own inspiration - the colourful and sympathetic pictures of "Aux Flancs du Vase"; and, during this slow evolution, he produced some nature-idylls of rare beauty and feeling.

Samain's poetry has received various criticisms and appreciations. F. Gohin, while rendering tribute to his "art subtil", bestows upon him a restrained praise only, when he describes his poetry as "une poésie aristocratique, fastueuse et raffinée, 'en robe de parade'";<sup>(1)</sup> but his final summing-up of the poet is very favourable - "Ce magnifique talent".<sup>(2)</sup> Some opinions are more exaggeratedly appreciative - Amy Lowell describes Samain as "A genius, graceful, timid,

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(1) F. Gohin, "L'oeuvre poétique d'Albert Samain", p. 3.

(2) F. Gohin, "L'oeuvre poétique d'Albert Samain",  
Préface, p. iii.

proud, passionate and reserved".<sup>(1)</sup> But most critics recognise his limitations. Lalou praises enthusiastically the "mystère inexpliqué de ses évocations",<sup>(2)</sup> and the "impressions fugitives" which characterise much of his verse; but he points out that Samain has not attained great heights of poetry, although he showed promise which his early death did not allow him to fulfil. "Il n'a pas donné toute sa mesure". M. de Bersaucourt speaks of the poet's "oeuvres de qualité très inégale",<sup>(3)</sup> and his final conclusion is that Samain is not a great poet, having undergone too many influences, and being neither forerunner nor reformer. M. G. Bonneau's praise is very moderate: "Albert Samain est un faible. Sa faiblesse l'a muré dans une vie étroite...mais, par une singulière compensation, cette même faiblesse qui diminuait l'homme a exalté l'artiste. Par elle, Samain s'est affranchi de toutes les écoles".<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) Amy Lowell, "Six French Poets", New York, 1915.

(2) Lalou, "Littérature Française Contemporaine", v. pp. 251-6 for review of Samain's work.

(3) A. de Bersaucourt, "Albert Samain", p. 5.

(4) G. Bonneau, "Albert Samain, poète symboliste", pp. 247-8.

The variety of the opinions given above in itself points to Samain being a poet of the second rank only, since a genius, if he is only occasionally proclaimed such during his life-time, is generally universally recognised when the passage of time has allowed his works to be studied thoroughly and impartially. Samain is certainly neither a genius nor a great poet; but he is in the front rank of poetic talent, and probably Gohin's description of him as "ce magnifique talent" is the fairest tribute which has been bestowed upon Samain, the poet.

## II. THE TALES.

Samain's Tales, his only prose-work (with the exception of a number of articles of literary criticism contributed to periodicals, and his "Pensées", which still remain in manuscript) were published posthumously in 1903. Each of these four Tales is a love-story, and each presents an entirely different aspect of love. The love-element has been defined by M. Léon Bocquet as happily as it may be defined in a single sentence. "L'amour", he says, "est épidermique, instinctif et vénal dans 'Xanthis', farouche, chaste et chrétien dans 'Divine Bontemps', sentimental, exclusif et doux dans 'Hyalis', romanesque, cérébral et maniaque dans 'Rovère et Angisèle'".<sup>(1)</sup> The theme of love gives a definite unity to the four Tales, which is unimpaired by their diversity of subject and setting.

(a) The Subjects. The first Tale, "Xanthis, ou la Vitrine Sentimentale", is a fantastic story of happenings on the shelves of a glass-fronted cabinet. The exhibits in the cabinet furnish the

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(1) L. Bocquet, "A. Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre", p. 223.

characters for the little drama which is enacted on this dusty but picturesque stage, and the chief part is played by a statuette of a Greek dancer, Xanthis. Her exquisite prettiness and the gracefulness of her dancing win her a circle of admirers among her companions in the cabinet, and chief among these admirers is an eighteenth-century marquis of Dresden porcelain, who, though no longer young, and chipped, broken, and re-stuck after a life of adventure, retains the charm of elegance. His gallant and refined attentions please the little dancer. He introduces her to the gay social life of his time, and with him she spends her days in merry-making. One day the marquis presents to her the bust of a musician, and Xanthis reads in his eyes a deeper, more passionate message than that conveyed by the conventional gallantries of the marquis. The possibilities of life are doubled for her, and if the marquis' delicate refinement still corresponds to something of the same kind in her own nature, the music which her new friend plays to her every evening arouses in her new and deeper emotions. She has gallantry; she has emotion; she is soon to know the sensual side of love. A bronze faun appears in the cabinet. Although his arrival is unwelcome to the

other inhabitants, Xanthis overlooks his essential vulgarity in her satisfaction at his obvious admiration of her grace and delicacy. She has now everything that love has to offer, she is perfectly happy, and lovelier than ever. But although she seeks nothing more, another temptation comes and she does not resist it. In the cabinet is an ugly old gargoyle. One night, the faun, impatient at an unkept tryst, goes to seek the faithless dancer, and discovers her seated on the gargoyle's knee, flirting shamelessly. The faun is more animal than human, and a creature of impulse. With one blow he has struck Xanthis to the ground, and she lies there, shattered into a thousand pieces. The despair in the cabinet is general, but the damage is irreparable. The marquis is overwhelmed with grief, his head comes unstuck, and he expires. The musician falls off his stand, and cracks his skull - and there he is, ruined for life. As for the faun, a still worse fate awaits him. The owner of the curiosities discovers the state of the shelves, sees guilt written plainly on the faun's face, and gets rid of him for a few pence. Henceforward he is hawked from one bazaar to another, and expiates his crime by a life of humiliations.

Thus, as in a well-constructed drama, we learn



the fate of all the principal characters before the action ends. As for the moral of the story, the author leaves us to find one for ourselves, if we wish. "Pour moi", he says, "Je préfère me recueillir et murmurer du fond de l'âme une lente prière aux Pitiés tristes et voilées."<sup>(1)</sup> And the Tale ends on a note of tender regret for the fate of the pretty but thoughtless little Greek dancer.

"Divine Bontemps" is a complete contrast to "Xanthis". An unchangingly serious tone replaces the delicately ironical style of the first story. "Xanthis" is written on a note of gentle sadness, which is in harmony with the fantasy of the conception, and the absence of deep seriousness in the issue. But the plot of "Divine Bontemps" is intensely serious; it is a story of a life of sacrifices and of mental agony. The setting and events described are those of everyday life, although no definite details of time or place are given; but the unusual character of the heroine is quite sufficient to save the Tale from any charge of banality. Divine is

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(1) Vol. III, p. 38.

by nature exceedingly reserved. Her shyness and her repugnance at betraying any deep feeling are already apparent in early childhood, and as she grows up this reserve only becomes more pronounced. Then she meets again a former playfellow, Maurice, and falls in love with him; but at the first hint of love from the young man she flees, terrified, and henceforward she hides herself from his sight. Maurice goes away, and when he returns, some years later, he has forgotten his past feelings for her. But Divine, although she knows she will never have the courage to reveal her love, has not forgotten, and she continues to hope until finally he marries another woman. Then life ceases to have a meaning for her, and she goes on existing mechanically, growing more and more taciturn, and every day paler and thinner. Suddenly Maurice's wife falls ill and dies, after five years of married life, leaving behind her a small son. Divine comforts Maurice in his affliction, and eighteen months later he marries her. Thus she enters his home, not, as she had dreamed, to be his first bride, but to take the place of the wife he has lost, to mother his son, and to create peace and affection where the passion of love is dead. For a moment her sacrifice seems to be about to meet with its reward, when she discovers that

she is going to have a child of her own; her husband looks at her with a new light in his eyes, and she sees there the dawn of real love. But her little step-son falls ill, and in spite of her condition, she insists upon nursing him. She saves his life, but her own child dies shortly after birth. She accepts this trial with resignation, and although her only desire now is to enter a convent, she makes a further sacrifice, and remains with her husband. Some years later he is killed, and Divine lives on with his son, whose life she has saved, and who is to her almost like her own child. Finally he leaves her, at her own insistence, to seek his fortune abroad; and so she remains, an old widow, living alone on the outskirts of the town, occupied solely with her memories and her prayers. She lives on, waiting for death to come to her. And yet, in spite of her loneliness, and her indifference to life, she cannot overcome her reserve even in her prayers, and "toujours pareille à elle-même, Divine n'osait pas demander à Dieu de mourir".(1) With these words, which give a final insight into Divine's character, the Tale ends.

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(1) Vol. III, p. 66.

"Hyalis" is perhaps the most exquisite piece of work that Samain ever produced. The author has here taken us back again to the realms of fancy, but we are not entirely removed from real life, for the little blue-eyed faun, Hyalis, is born of a mortal mother, and his human origin does not fail to declare itself. He is a most lovable creature, gentle, naif, eager and impulsive: an unconscious idealist. Even as a child, his games are different from those of his fellows, and he flees their vulgarity and stupidity. As he grows up, the sensuality which is a heritage from his goat-footed father develops, and he plays in the woods with the nymphs and dryads. But he inherits from his mother a subconscious desire for a higher kind of love, and after a while the sport of the woods sickens him. He feels irresistibly drawn towards the dwellings of men. One day in the garden of Apollo's priest Kylaos, he sees the priest's daughter Myza, and at the sight of her beauty the world seems changed. In the days which follow he returns frequently to the garden, unseen, to watch the maiden, until one night Myza wanders down to the bottom of the garden, and sees in the moonlight the shadow of Hyalis' horns on the grass. With a shriek of terror, she flees, and Hyalis suddenly realises

the hopelessness of his love, for he is not of her world. In his despair, he begs the witch Ydragone to give him death, and, in order that she may grant his boon, he sacrifices to her his pet lamb, the only creature that he has to comfort him. The poisons she uses are violent, and cause agonies of pain, for Hyalis is in reality immortal, and cannot easily escape from life; but he endures the pain, and goes on his way, comforted by the thought that in a month the poison will take its effect, and he will die. At the end of the month he returns to Kyza's garden, enters the house and discovers her chamber. For a long time he gazes in adoration upon the sleeping maiden, and his soul seems to be united with hers; the supreme moment of his life has come, his lips touch hers for an instant, and he sinks down dead beside her, perfection finally attained. "Ainsi mourut d'amour Hyalis de Mycalèze, le petit faune aux yeux bleus". (1)

"Rovere et Angisèle", the last of the four Tales, and, after "Hyalis" the most beautiful, was not intended by the author for publication in the form in which we have it; it is nevertheless complete, and seems

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(1) Vol. III, p. 108.

so lovely and finished a work that we can only be amazed at Semain's artistic scruples, which still saw in it elements to be perfected. The Tale relates the love of a great Italian noble, Rovère of Spoleto, and of the maiden Angisèle, daughter of a grey and barren country, the situation of which is left mysteriously vague. Rovère is a voluptuary, and a worshipper of beauty; his gorgeous palace is filled with exquisite works of art, and the most famous beauties of Italy are his mistresses. His favourite is the lovely Viola Madori, for whose sake he murders a jealous husband. The portrait of Rovère which is given in the opening pages of the Tale is not unsympathetic; he is an idealist, and an artist in voluptuousness; nevertheless, steeped in sensual pleasures, he considers the world in existence for his enjoyment, and, absolute authority as he is on all forms of material beauty, he has not the slightest notion of the higher moral beauty of selflessness. His life might have continued thus, but for the death of Viola Madori. At first inconsolable, Rovère is soon amazed at the rapidity with which his grief passes; nevertheless, in an endeavour to escape from his memories, he embarks on a long sea-voyage. He is ship-wrecked, and cast up

half dead on the shore of a desolate land. The inhabitants discover him, and the maiden Angisèle takes him to her father's castle and nurses him back to health. Rovère discovers in this new country a life which he had never before suspected. It is a cold, wind-swept land, a land of toil and hardship; death is frequent there, and this constant association with death, joined to the religious fervour of the people, creates an atmosphere of spiritual exaltation and asceticism, very different from the gay and voluptuous scenes to which Rovère is accustomed. Angisèle has suffered greatly; the members of her family have died one after another, and the only one of her sisters who remains alive is mad. She is deeply religious, an angel of purity and charity, and Rovère falls beneath the spell of her serious and noble nature. The mystic soul of the country, penetrating his own soul, brings him into still greater sympathy with Angisèle, and an intensely spiritual love is born in both their hearts. But Angisèle, with her delicate and impressionable nature, cannot endure the new and mysterious emotion which love awakens in her, and under the force of moral turmoil her health declines rapidly. She pines for joy and sunlight, and to gratify her wish Rovère takes her back to Italy with him, away from her own land of

dreariness and sorrow. On the voyage she seems near to complete recovery; her cheeks grow fuller and rosier; she is completely happy in her love. Arrived in Italy, she lives for a while in a state of feverish joy; she feels that her death is near, but this premonition inspires no terror in her. She is resigned to the end, for she has known happiness at last, and her life is complete. And so she dies, and Rovère dies with her - how he dies, the author does not tell us; only that the next morning the lovers are discovered lying side by side in the high-chamber of Rovère's palace. "Et ils étaient nus, et dans leurs mains ils avaient des roses".<sup>(1)</sup>

(b) The Sources. This analysis of the subjects of the Tales would seem to reveal at least one quality - originality of inspiration. The romantic and mysterious passion of Rovère and Angisèle and their strange but beautiful death, the quaintly pathetic love-story of Hyalis, the anguished life of Divine Bontemps, the sad fate of little Xanthis - these conceptions appear very far from banality. Nevertheless, in spite of these appearances of originality, it is advisable to be wary; we have seen

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(1) Vol. III, p. 165.



in our study of Samain's poetry so many examples of his lack of creative power, that we feel obliged to devote some space to an examination of the precise degree of originality of conception which may justifiably be attributed to the Tales.

The question of the sources of Samain's subjects is one which has not been discussed even by those few critics who have mentioned the Tales in their publications on Samain. It is of course one of the most difficult to solve. The frequent imitation of other writers which is patent in Samain's poetry would lead us to suspect that the inspiration of the Tales possibly had its source in the work of some other writer. But on the other hand, we cannot adopt the supposition of lack of originality without some definite textual proof of imitation of other authors. The great problem is, to know in what authors this proof should be sought. An examination of the poetry has shown us that the writers whom Samain imitates are the great poets among his contemporaries or immediate predecessors - Coppée, Leconte de Lisle, Faudelaire, and perhaps Verlaine; and were it not for this internal evidence in Samain's poetry, testimonies exist of his admiration and his assiduous study of the master-poets of his century. It is then in their works, and also in the publications of

contemporary "conteurs" - for we must not forget the literary "genre" with which we are dealing - that we shall seek to discover whether or not the Tales are the product of Samain's own original inspiration.

As regards "Xanthis", the Watteau-inspiration, the picture of the social life of the eighteenth century, of which we have already seen examples in Samain's poetry, is of course obvious. But here, as in the poetry, no charge can be brought against Samain of plagiarising either Watteau or Verlaine; it is a question of inspiration, not imitation. It is in connection with this Tale, however, that we have made our most important discovery as regards Samain's sources. As far as we know, the actual subject of "Xanthis" is the poet's own invention; we have found no proof that the story of the little dancer's intrigues and of her sad end is not his, and that the creation of the characters is not his also. But the idea of bringing to life the objets d'art in a glass case, and imagining the life they lead together, is almost certainly taken from Anatole France's "Petit Soldat de Plomb" in "L'Etui de Nacre". This collection of Contes was published in 1892, and there is as far as we know no evidence that Samain's Tales were written before this year. "Xanthis", the first of the Tales to be published, appeared

in the "Revue Hebdomadaire" of December 17th, 1892 - that is, the same year as "L'Etui de Nacre". The similarity between the opening pages of the two tales is too striking to be a coincidence, and it is inadmissible that France copied Samain, since a great writer does not usually copy a relatively obscure one, and in any case Samain's Tales were not published until the very end of this year. Here are the two passages which have attracted our attention:

"J'entendis très distinctement trois coups frappés sur la glace d'une vitrine qui est à côté de mon lit et dans laquelle vivent pêle-mêle des figurines en porcelaine de Saxe ou en biscuit de Sèvres, des statuettes en terre cuite de Tanagra ou de Myrina, des petits bronzes de la Renaissance, des ivoires japonais, des verres de Venise, des tasses de Chine, des boîtes en vernis Martin, des plateaux de laque, des coffrets d'émail; enfin, mille riens que je vénère par fétichisme et qu'anime pour moi le souvenir des heures riantes ou mélancoliques".

A. France, "Le Petit Soldat de Plomb."

"Chaque fois que je me suis attaché à regarder des étagères ou des vitrines, ces petits asiles de bois précieux et de cristal, ou s'évaporent des parfums

surannés, où flotte une attendrissante poussière d'autrefois, ou l'âme noble et mélancolique du Luxe vibre dans un silence de pensée, j'ai toujours cru qu'une vie particulière devait s'y vivre à l'abri des grands rideaux profonds, loin des promiscuités et des banalités du réel....Ce genre de sollicitude m'a valu les relations les plus intéressantes, et, entre autres, celles que j'entretiens avec une vieille tabatière d'argent, où l'on voit, ciselé tout au long, le triomphe d'Alexandre le Grand sur Porus, roi des Indes. Or, un de ces derniers soirs, dans l'intimité d'un pénétrant crépuscule, cette aimable aïeule m'a conté une histoire si touchante, si dramatique et d'une si instructive moralité, que je ne puis résister au désir de la transcrire ici à l'adresse de ceux qui, complaisants au rêve, veulent bien croire encore que c'est arrivé.

"Il y avait donc, dans une vitrine du temps de Louis XV, une petite statuette de Tanagra, irréprochablement jolie."

Samain, "Xanthis", Vol. III, pp.9-10.

There are several points of comparison to be indicated. The first is the mention in each passage of objets d'art, and especially statuettes of Tanagra and bronzes (a bronze faun appears later in "Xanthis"), which subsequently

prove to be endowed with life; the second that the story in "Le Petit Soldat de Plomb" is told by the little lead-soldier, and in "Xanthis" by the snuff-box - both in reality inanimate objects; the third is the similarity of style, which persists throughout the two Tales - a subtly bantering tone, and an extreme simplicity of expression; the fourth is the fact that in each case we are concerned with what is to all intents and purposes a fairy-story - a short tale with the most fantastic plot and set of characters imaginable.

This passage in "Le Petit Soldat de Plomb" is the only indication we have found that Samain obtained the material for the Tales anywhere but in his own imagination. "Divine Bontemps" vaguely resembles Flaubert's "Un Coeur Simple", insofar as both tales are psychological studies written in the realist style. "Rovère et Angisèle" recalls, equally vaguely, Sir Walter Scott's novels, the poetry of Byron and other creators of the Don Juan type of hero, perhaps something of Keats, and something of the English Pre-Raphaelites, both in their painting and their poetry, whom his writings inspired - Swinburne, Rossetti, Hughes, Morris - all the writers, more or less attached to the Romantic movement, who resuscitated the Middle

Ages for the nineteenth century. Angisèle is the typical Romantic heroine, pure, ethereal and tender-hearted, marked out by fate for mental suffering, and consumptive into the bargain. In one of the poems of "Le Chariot d'Or", (1) Samain recalls the thrill with which, as an adolescent, he devoured Scott, Lamartine and Byron, and a good deal of the mentality of French and English Romanticism has passed into "Rovère et Angisèle." But there is nothing in the tale which seems precisely comparable to a definite work of another author.

The problem of the source of inspiration of "Hyalis" opens up the whole vexed question of the origin and nature of Samain's hellenism. This is one of the most important questions to be discussed in connection with Samain's work, a considerable proportion of which ("Aux Flancs du Vase", "Polyphème", "Hyalis", "Xanthis", and various poems in the other collections) is to a greater or less extent Greek in inspiration.

Hellenism has gone through various phases in France, but it has never for long been entirely absent from French literature, in one form or another; and

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(1) "En printemps, quand le blond vitrier Ariel...",

after its perversion in the hands of eighteenth-century writers, whose inspiration from the Greeks was second-hand, since they took it from the classic writers of the seventeenth century, it took on new life about the time of the Revolution, and this renewal of interest may be said to have continued right through the nineteenth century to our own times. There were several reasons for this revival, which originated no doubt in the first place as a reaction against the coldness of the eighteenth-century classic writers; in the second place, a more fortuitous circumstance contributed to its extension - the fact that there was writing in France, at the end of the eighteenth century, a young poet, André Chénier, who was not merely intimately acquainted with the Greek poets, but who had Greek blood in his veins, and knew the country which he describes in his "Eclogues". The atmosphere of truth - local colour in the best sense - which thus enveloped hellenist inspiration was further aided by the great spread of archaeological and topographical research in Greece in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries both in France and in other countries, and by the attempts made at this period to spread the knowledge of Greek art. From the time of the Renaissance onwards the interest in Greek and Roman antiquities had been steadily growing. In

the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries various expeditions were undertaken, collections of medals and vases made, and commentaries on archaeological discoveries published; but no attempt was made at this period to group the material available, or to show the historical significance of the discoveries. It was not until the eighteenth century that the material was methodically examined and presented. Caylus' "Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, grecques et romaines" (1752-67), which incorporated his own research on ancient painting, was the first work which attempted to trace the development of art in the ancient world, and to relate this development to the contemporary social and political background. Barthélemy, whose novel "Le Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis" dates from the same period (it was begun in 1757 and published in 1787) has to his credit, in addition to this description of life in Ancient Greece, a great number of archaeological works of a very solid erudition. A third, and even more distinguished archaeologist of this century was Winckelmann, whose "Histoire de l'art des anciens", published in 1764, applies and develops the scientific method instituted by Caylus, by which the art of the ancients is studied in connection with the



society which produced it. Practical research continued in the eighteenth century at the same time as commentary and discussion. Frequent expeditions to ancient sites spread the knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquities. The excavations at Herculaneum, started in 1709 and renewed in 1750, contributed greatly to this effort at vulgarisation. From this period onwards expeditions and excavations continued without interruption. In 1816 Lord Elgin brought to England the famous marbles from the Parthenon. In 1829 a valuable contribution to ceramics was made by Lucien Bonaparte's discovery of painted vases on the site of Vulci. In 1831 excavations were begun at Olympia. The increase in archaeological research in the early years of the nineteenth century enabled Otfried Müller to publish in 1830 an inventory of antiquities<sup>(1)</sup> far superior to that of Winckelmann by the increased wealth and precision of the facts presented.

The circumstances described above provided nineteenth-century writers with fresh material for hellenist inspiration.

The atmosphere of truth - local colour in the

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(1) "Manuel de l'archéologie de l'art".

best sense - which thus came to envelop hellenist inspiration was further aided by the great spread, in the early years of the nineteenth century, of archaeological and topographical research in Greece, and by the attempts made at this period to increase the public's knowledge of Greek sculpture and architecture. The latter circumstances provided nineteenth-century writers with fresh material for hellenist inspiration; the poets of the seventeenth century drew marvellous profit from the material they possessed, but their knowledge of the Greeks was practically limited to their philosophy and literature; the beauties of the Greek countryside were scarcely known to them except through the works of the ancient Greek poets, and the Venus de Milo still lay buried. The nineteenth-century writers travelled - Chateaubriand's Greek landscapes and Renan's famous prayer on the Acropolis witness to the first-hand acquaintance with the Attic lands possessed by the authors of this period - and a new source of inspiration - that of plastic beauty, in nature and in art - was revealed to them. Not merely was the material at their disposal more extensive, but the scientific spirit which pervaded the literature of the whole of the nineteenth century, even in the least positivist of its writers, and

of which one aspect is seen in the development of archaeological research mentioned above, demanded exactitude of detail, and from this attitude to art grew up an ideal of extreme sincerity.

As a general rule, it would seem that the greatest among the hellenists of the nineteenth century - perhaps with the instinctive discovery of the "inédit" which is one of the most frequent marks of genius - turned their attention to these newer sources of inspiration. Thus we see in the writings of Anatole France, literally saturated in Greek thought, and possessing moreover the general hellenist culture which the documentary wealth of his age permitted, an intellectual ideal; what he admires in the ancients is the measure and the harmony of their thought, and his hellenism is of such intensity that for him it replaces a religion. The hellenism of Leconte de Lisle, Taine, Renan, also takes the form of this worship of Greek reason and care for truth, and they all resemble France by their erudition and by the consequent sincerity with which they treat the hellenist themes. Leconte de Lisle's peculiarity is to give more importance to the Greek ideal of beauty, considered especially in its material, plastic aspect. The miracle of the ancient civilisation is for him the realisation of this ideal of

beauty. He adores the Greek marbles - the Venus de Milo, the Nicobe - for the purity and the harmonious beauty of their form, the secret of which has, to his great grief, been lost to the world:

"L'impure laideur est la reine du monde,  
Et nous avons perdu le chemin de Paros."

"Hypatie"

Certain nineteenth-century poets find a somewhat different source of inspiration in Greek nature, and in the polytheistic cult of the ancients, according to which Greece was long ago the home of the mythical creatures of nature, fauns, satyrs, nymphs, which peopled the woods and waters. In the nineteenth century we find a revival of the paganism of Ronsard, who, steeped in the poetry of the ancients, whimsically accepts the Greek tradition of an earth inhabited by strange mythical beings, half-gods, half-beasts, which incarnate the different elements of nature - the Fanes, Aegipans, Satyrs and Fauns being creatures of the woods, the Nymphs and Dryads creatures of the streams.

"Je n'avais pas douze ans, qu'au profond des vallées,  
Dans les hautes forêts des hommes reculées,  
Dans les antres secrets de frayeur tout couverts,  
Sans avoir soin de rien je composais des vers:

Echo me répondait; et les simples Dryades,  
Faunes, Satyres, Pans, Népées, Oréades,  
Egipans qui portaient des cornes sur le front  
Et qui, ballant, sautaient comme les chèvres font,  
Et le gentil troupeau des fantastiques fées,  
Autour de moi dansaient à cottes agrafées."

Jean Moréas' "Sylves" are frequently very Ronsardian in tone, recalling the sixteenth-century poet not only by the quality of the mythological inspiration, but by the very technique of the poems - vocabulary, syntax, rhythm. Henri de Régnier's "Jeux rustiques et divins" strike too individual a note to make any real comparison with other hellenist poets possible; sometimes calm and pastoral, after the manner of A. Chénier's "Éclogues", sometimes more pagan and sensual, this poetry, wholly Greek in inspiration, peopled with fauns, centaurs, and sirens, reveals the symbolist influence by the tender and haunting melody of the verse. The poet's personality, discreet and melancholy, pervades this work, which, by its extremely personal quality, by the absence of clear-cut forms, by its acceptance of the Greek naturalist tradition, is infinitely removed from the hellenism of the Parnasse.

On the whole, Samain's attitude to Greece has

most affinities with the paganism of those writers who find their inspiration in Greek nature, and much less with the conception of beauty and reason which is present in the work of the great idealists of the century - France, Renan, Leconte de Lisle. It is true that Samain, referring to "Aux Flancs du Vase" has written: "L'antiquité que je sens n'est point barbare, sinistre et hérissée comme celle de 'Salammbô', par exemple, ou de Leconte de Lisle." (The latter judgment is rather curious!) "Elle est plutôt mesurée, humaine et souriante, comme celle des homériques"(1). This seems to imply the same ideal as L. du Lisle and France of attic measure and harmony. It is very comprehensible that Samain, whose idol was, in all sincerity, and throughout his life, Beauty, should be attracted by the Greek aesthetic ideal, which knew such success in the nineteenth century; and throughout the Tales, "Polyphème" and "Aux Flancs du Vase", the effort to realise this ideal in his style is patent - the language of the Tales, and notably of "Myalis", with its care for harmony, its deliberate simplicity, the

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(1) Letter to M. Paul Morisse, 16 Dec., 1896.

beauty and colour of the natural descriptions, recalls irresistibly the style of A. France. But this sort of hellenism is necessarily with Samain somewhat superficial, for he lacks the great culture of A. France or of L. de Lisle, which makes their feeling for Greece something ingrained; and if the beauty of the Greek landscape seemed to him a fertile theme, as he shows in many poems ("Je rê<sup>^</sup>ve d'une île ancienne", (1) for instance), he was hindered from a really true rendering by his inability to travel, and to obtain first-hand knowledge of the scenes he describes. It is perhaps because he realises his incapacity to reproduce the true Attic atmosphere that Samain never attempts any real local colour in "Aux Flancs du Vase", but contents himself with a veneer of antiquity provided by the style of the poems, the names of the characters and occasionally something in the colouring of the landscapes(2). The interiors, the observation, the feeling are all modern. What appears at first sight a feeling for a specific ideal of beauty,

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(1) Vol. III, p. 251

(2) "Cortège d'Amphitrite", "Mnacyle", "Axilis au Ruisseau".

that of the Greeks, is in Samain's poetry only a general ideal - as he indicates himself: "Au reste, ce n'est point l'antiquité, ce n'est que l'esprit de la beauté harmonieuse et simple." (1)

The idylls of "Aux Flancs du Vase", so pure in form, are frequently pervaded by a sensuality which, if it is free from the "macabre" atmosphere of the earlier collections, nevertheless takes the form of a heavy languor, the erotic character of which is scarcely veiled ("Les Vierges au Crépuscule", "Myrtil et Palémone", "Rhodante"). The Alexandrian atmosphere thus created is in entire contrast with the virile Dorian hellenism of Leconte de Lisle, although both attitudes are based on an ideal of material beauty. For Samain's sensuality, rich and over-burdened as it may appear in these poems, is idealist. We quote in this connection a remark made by M. Léon Bocquet on Samain's pencil-sketches. He says: "Mais Samain ne s'écarte pas, même dans ses compositions les plus osées, de la tradition païenne des poètes gréco-latins pour qui la volupté est une religion" (2). Nevertheless, the great merit of "Polyphème"

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(1) Letter to M. Paul Morisse, Dec. 16, 1896.

(2) L. Bocquet, "Autour d'Albert Samain".



and "Hyalis" is to have escaped from this ultra-sensual phase to a hellenist conception which, if still closely associated with the sensual aspects of life, translates itself in a more sober and spiritual manner. It is in these two latter works that Samain's true hellenism must be studied.

What Samain really felt in the Greek tradition was that part of the paganism of the ancients which translated itself into a cult of nature as the source of all life, for this cult responded to the needs of his own sensuality. The nymphs, fauns and centaurs of "Polyphème", of "Hyalis", and of some of the poems in "Le Chariot d'Or" and "Aux Flancs du Vase" are of course only a poetic device - essentially artificial and unoriginal, if still rather charming in spite of the continued exploitation of the theme by various poets - to translate this kind of paganism. But behind the fantasy lies something real - a feeling for nature in her most living aspect - a conception which the Greeks concretised in the figure of the great god Pan, the spirit of fertility, source of love and of procreation. We have already seen, in connection with the nature-lyrics, that Samain's attitude towards nature is concerned with her mutability, her eternal changes and the life of which she is the symbol;

his paganism shows the same attitude transported to the nature of ancient Greece.

Samain's choice of a faun as the hero of "Hyalis" was no doubt influenced by those writings of his contemporaries in which the demi-gods of paganism also figure. Maurice de Guérin's "Centaure" and "Bacchante", in which, in the form of a poetic meditation in prose, this writer gives an exceptionally realist conception to the pagan conception of the life in nature, dates from the early years of the nineteenth century; and in the poetry of the latter half of the same century, the references to centaurs, nymphs, fauns and satyrs are exceedingly frequent; they are to be found, as we have already said, in the works of J. Moréas and H. de Régnier, for whom, as for Samain, the naturalist attitude to antiquity was the outstanding character of their hellenism, and formed the whole atmosphere of many of their poems. Even in some of A. France's Tales ("Amycus et Célestin", "La Légende des Saintes Oliverie et Libérette", both from the "Etui de Macre") we find occasional references to fauns, and this creature is also the subject of the poem "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune" by Mallarmé, whose work as a whole is anything but Greek, and whose "Après-Midi" was perhaps the starting-

point of the faun's popularity as a literary theme, since the success of this poem at the time of its publication was exceedingly great, and served to make its author famous. It became indeed, a real fashion to write about aegipans and centaurs, and this fashion was at its height when Samain was producing the bulk of his work<sup>(1)</sup>; it is not astonishing that this poet, so prone to follow where others led, should have allowed himself to be influenced by this fashion. Besides this general influence which very probably made itself felt, there are certain indications that Samain owes a debt to Maurice de Guérin. "Le Centaure" and "La Bacchante" are not prose-tales, for the style is not narrative, but meditative; their author, however, calls them poems, and these prose-pocms may have influenced Samain in his choice of the form and language of his Tales - for, as we shall see, the style of the

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(1) Samain's period of literary production was roughly between 1886 (date of composition of "Evocations" in "Symphonie Héroïque") and 1900. "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune" was published in 1877, "L'Etui de Macre" in 1892. H. de Régnier was publishing his poetry between 1886 and 1900, J. Moréas from 1884 onwards.

Tales is essentially poetic. Moreover, certain passages in "Hyalis" recall Guérin's poems. We find in Guérin's "Centaure":

"Mais le vieil Océan, père de toutes choses,"

and in Samain:

"L'océan, père des choses,"

Vol. III, p. 78.

The reference also to the nymphs' upbringing of Hyalis, who is the child of a god and of a mortal, is reminiscent of this passage from "La Bacchante":

"Les dieux confient aux fleuves qui tournent leurs cours vers les plus grands déserts, ou aux nymphes qui habitent les quartiers des forêts les moins accessibles, la nourriture des enfants issus de leur mélange avec les filles des éléments ou des mortels."

We do not consider ourselves justified, however, in making anything more than comparisons or vague suppositions with regard to the sources of "Hyalis". It would seem that Samain got the original idea for his creation from the allusions to fauns in contemporary literature. He may owe a little to Maurice de Guérin, and perhaps Mallarmé's "Après-Midi" inspired him to a humanised characterisation of a faun. But, as far as we can see, the real conception of Hyalis, as a creature

only half a faun, and so much gentler and more refined than other creatures of his race, and the tale of his love for Lyza, are Samain's own creation.

This then is the extent of direct inspiration from other writers - one short passage in "Kanthis", two in "Hyalis". Apart from these, certain vague similarities with other works can be perceived, but there is certainly no evidence of real imitation. As far as we can see, Samain shows a far greater measure of originality in his Tales than in his poems. He may possibly have found the initial idea for his subjects in the works of other authors (the faun, and the Romantic heroine Angisèle) but it is in the development and treatment of the idea that an artist's originality is revealed, and in the Tales it would seem that this originality is present.

III. The Literary Value of the Tales. In spite of the fact that as regards originality of inspiration the Tales already reveal themselves as superior to practically the whole of Samain's poetry, the critics who up to the present have discussed his work have not shown themselves conscious either of this superiority of inspiration or of the other beauties of the Tales, which it is our purpose to demonstrate in this section of our work. There is

real need of a sympathetic and appreciative study of Samain's prose-tales. M. Léon Bocquet, in his latest contribution to the study of Samain ("Autour d'Albert Samain", 1933) remarks with gratification upon the increasing number of books and articles written in appreciation of Samain's work. It is true that, where his poetry is concerned, the number of admiring critics grows from year to year. Yet, to say that these same critics are less appreciative where his prose-writings are concerned would be an under-statement; the majority do not even think the Tales worthy of consideration. It is true that M. A. de Bersaucourt, in a study of thirty pages, has devoted half a page to the Tales<sup>(1)</sup>; but, while he recognises that the essential elements of Samain's poetry, good and bad, are to be found in the Tales, his general judgment of them is condemnatory. He blames their "forme laborieuse", the unreality of their characters (both these charges we hope to quash in the course of our study), and comes to the conclusion that "Les Contes n'ajoutent rien à la réputation de Samain"<sup>(1)</sup>. It has been left to M. Bocquet to indicate to us at least

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(1) A. de Bersaucourt, "Albert Samain", p. 30.

the principal characteristics of the Tales<sup>(1)</sup>. While M. de Bersaucourt dismisses their form with the single epithet "laborieuse", M. Bocquet pays tribute to the Attic purity of the style and its "beauté ténue", and recognises the poetic quality of the language, the prose "harmonieuse et mesurée" in which the Tales are written. As regards the subject-matter, M. Bocquet has discovered in the Tales the eternal trilogy of love, suffering and death, and the "grandeur attristée" which the theme of death gives to the whole work. His opinion of Samsain's powers of character-delineation is less favourable. For him, the characters are merely "des types, des idées pures". We hope to discuss in some detail/in this study the question of psychological portraiture, and to express our own opinion, which differs somewhat from M. Bocquet's on this point, as to the degree of realism present in these characters. Before we pass on to this question, however, let us examine the Tales from the point of view of style and language.

A. The Forms. It will have been noticed that while M. Bocquet and M. de Bersaucourt are

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(1) L. Bocquet, "A. Samsain, sa vie, son oeuvre", pp. 213-23.

in agreement as to the insufficiency of the characterisation, they differ as to the aesthetic value of the Tales. That M. Bocquet alone has been struck by it is all the more astonishing since the critics, almost without exception, pay tribute to the beauty of form in Samain's poetry. After Samain's delicate sensibility, his artistry, that is to say his technique and his care of expression, is one of the outstanding features of his poetry, as one critic after another has enthusiastically acknowledged. M. Bonneau may speak of Samain's verse as "flou, mièvre et mourant", but the qualities by which he proves Samain's poetry to be essentially symbolist are precisely those of form - the musicality of the verse, and the pictorial quality of the expression. M. de Bersaucourt speaks of the "art rigoureux" (1) of Samain's poetry, M. Bocquet of its "beauté harmonieuse et simple". In the preceding section, in which we endeavoured to outline the various adverse criticisms of Samain's work which had been made, and to add some of our own, we could only find fault with the actual inspiration, the choice and treatment of the themes, never with the form, or material presentation of these themes. Now, if

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(1) A. de Bersaucourt, "Gilbert Samain", p. 17.



the critics mentioned above are capable of appreciating the beauty of Samain's poetic style, why have they not seen in the Tales at least the beauty of their form? For the stylistic beauty of the Tales is of the same quality as that of the poetry. As M. Bocquet says, "Les Contes sont d'un poète par la pensée et l'écriture" (1). He continues, "Samain n'était pas foncièrement créateur. Il a refait en prose, dans maintes pages de ses Contes, les motifs de ses poèmes, et inversement en poésie, des thèmes esquissés en prose. Chacun de ses contes correspond à une de ses manières poétiques."

It is important to distinguish the different points in this judgment of the form of the Tales. M. Bocquet makes two statements: firstly, that Samain's prose is a poetic prose; secondly, that the style of his prose is that of his poetry, and that the themes and the "manières" of his prose and poetic works are essentially the same. We shall examine these points in turn.

M. Bocquet's first point is that Samain's prose is poetic. In making this point he has not only defined the quality of Samain's prose-style; he has also given

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(1) L. Bocquet, "Autour d'Albert Samain", "Soc. Merc. France", 1933.

the true explanation of its great beauty. All poetry has two essential qualities, harmony and imagery; these qualities, or at any rate that of harmony, are present in the best prose, but they are less characteristic of prose than of poetry, and it is for this reason that the language of the greatest poetry is more beautiful than that of the greatest prose. Although an essentially prose-language can have a beauty of its own, it follows that, the more harmonious and colourful a prose-style is, the nearer it approaches the highest ideal of beauty of language, which is that of poetry. Now Samain's prose is characterised by these two qualities of harmony and imagery.

Here is a phrase from "Hyalis", which is typical of Samain's style, for it illustrates the essential qualities of its musicality:

"Et il souffrait ainsi mystérieusement, car ses lèvres étaient solitaires."

Vol. III, p. 76.

The music of Samain's phrase is rarely that of the trumpet; it recalls the harp, and perhaps also the organ, but the deep, low notes of the organ rather than the rich triumphant harmonics which characterise Shelley's odes or De Quincey's "Ecstasies". A phonetic examination

of the sentence just quoted reveals a predominance of labials, liquids and sibilants; the harder-sounding consonants, the palatals and dentals, are much less numerous. Other quotations illustrate this same point:

"Sa voix, plus sonore dans la solitude, semblait multiplier son désespoir, et cette illusion dans sa détresse n'était pas sans charme."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 92.

"Lentement, sur son front, où la sueur avait collé les cheveux, sur ses yeux éteints, sur ses lèvres, elle passa un linge fin imprégné d'essence, et la charité de ses gestes était suave."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 127.

These passages, chosen at random to illustrate the characteristic softness and musicality of Samain's prose, illustrate other points of style as well. A striking feature of Samain's prose-style is its classic purity and restraint. The softness of the sound is only one aspect of this restraint. Another is the moderation of the conception; the emotion expressed in the two passages from "Hyalis" is very deep, but it is not violent and uncontrolled. A third aspect of the purity of Samain's prose style is the simplicity of the sentence-construction and the balance of the phrases.

Samain's prose is remarkable for the general brevity of the sentences; to the complex sentence, with its numerous dependent clauses, characteristic of the rhetorical style, he prefers the compound sentence, formed from two simple clauses joined by a coordinate conjunction. "Et il souffrait ainsi mystérieusement, car ses lèvres étaient solitaires", "Sa voix...semblait multiplier son désespoir, et cette illusion n'était pas sans charme". If this mode of sentence-construction has the virtue of simplicity not possessed by the complex sentence, it runs the risk, on the other hand, of monotony and of clumsiness. But the sober simplicity and the balance of Samain's language are such that he escapes both dangers. Consider these passages, which illustrate the same simplicity of language and of sentence construction, and the general harmony of the style:

"Ses cheveux blonds étaient couronnés de violettes; elle avait aux oreilles des anneaux d'orichalque; des colliers de pierres changeantes lui descendaient sur la poitrine, et elle était enveloppée de la tête aux pieds d'un grand voile aux mille plis, sous lequel son jeune corps, fin et souple, aperçu et dérobé tour à tour, semblait se diluer dans un mystère de nudités fluides."

"Nanthis", Vol. III, p. 11.

"Rovere silencieux contemplait ce spectacle; ses yeux étaient pleins de lumière, et, comme ses lèvres remuaient sous de vagues paroles, on eût dit qu'il priait; lentement il tendit vers la mer sa coupe où le vin étincela; ses amis l'imitèrent, et d'une voix grave - comme on chante un hymne, - ils répétèrent: 'Salut à Dionysos, salut à la Beauté!'"

"Rovere et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 121.

There is an essential simplicity of expression in all these passages, and yet the sentences are so well-balanced that there is not a hint of brusqueness in the style; each phrase follows the one before, naturally and harmoniously.

There is another outstanding demonstration of the essentially poetic quality of Samain's prose, besides that of its harmony; this is its great beauty of imagery. The style of the Tales is very largely pictorial, as is that of the poems. We have seen, with regard to the latter, how successful Samain can be in the plastic style of writing which he imitates from Leconte de Lisle, and how many of his poems are inspired from Watteau's canvases. The best of his verse is his nature-poetry (whose beauty lies in the description and the colouring) and the poems in "Aux Flancs du Vase", which, while retaining the delicate grace and freshness of the figures

on a Greek vase, recall at the same time the realist interior-painting of the Dutch school. M. Bocquet, in "Autour d'Albert Samain", gives an account of research conducted by him into the question of Samain's interest in the plastic arts, and he shows that the poet was not without artistic abilities. He mentions Samain's own aptitude for sketching, and describes the development of this talent under the influence of artistic colleagues in his office in Paris; and he illustrates his book by reproductions of some of Samain's sketches. This artistic aptitude, this sense of line and colour and of composition which is indispensable to the painter, is as apparent in Samain's prose-style as in his poetry.

The pictorial quality of Samain's prose is especially evident in "Hyalis", where we find, in addition to the many very beautiful nature-pictures, a number of exquisite vignettes, and among them several miniatures of the maiden Hyza:

"Hyza était vêtue d'une longue tunique safran pâle qui, soulevée à peine au double renflement de ses jeunes seins, tombait à plis droits sur ses pieds chaussés de sandales bleues. Ses cheveux blonds comme l'avoine mûrissante, pressés sur son front d'une bandelette d'argent, coulaient en ondes égales au long de ses joues

minces et se relevaient par derrière en un chignon haut dressé. Tout en elle était svelte et mélodieux. Sa tête petite se balançait sur un long col flexible. Une grâce légère et subtile comme un parfum était répandue dans tous ses mouvements; dans sa façon d'abaisser lentement les paupières, il y avait une pudeur sacrée, et son sourire était suave comme une rose."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 84.

"Hyalis, fasciné, contemplait la vierge. Un rayon bleu descendait sur elle, et suivait son profil d'une ligne lumineuse; ses bras et son cou semblaient de marbre; dans son visage immobile ses lèvres seules frémissaient; et ses yeux, levés au ciel, nageaient comme dans une extase d'argent."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 90.

The plastic beauty of these descriptions, with their purity of line and colour, recalls the poetry of Leconte de Lisle or of Théophile Gautier, and certain of Samain's own poems in the Parnassian style - the sonnet on the Sphinx, for instance.

The following description, taken from "Rovère et Angisèle", of dawn breaking over the sea and the port, illustrates as well as the pictures of Lyza the essentially pictorial quality of Samain's prose-style:

"A l'horizon, une lueur vermeille montait, grandissant de minute en minute et déployant de gigantesques rayons en éventail. Des nuages s'étagaient, dorés sur leurs bords; sur les flots sombres une longue traînée d'argent clair scintillait et le haut des palais se teintait de rose. L'agitation du port commençait; des hommes chargeaient des bateaux, empilaient des fruits, vidaient des paniers de poissons, allumaient des feux sur la grève. Un bruit confus venait de la cité, et, là-bas, la proue haute et cambrée, les voiles frissonnant, un grand vaisseau s'en allait tout doré dans le soleil levant."

"Rovere et Angisèle", Vol. III, p.120.

We have here, combined with the light and freshness and the delicate colouring of this scene, a considerable amount of realism in the picture of the awakening port, with its loading of ships and its lighting of fires.

The same realism is apparent in Sannin's descriptions of nature. Notice, in this description of a wet spring evening from "Divine Bontemps", the apt introduction of the odour of camp dust - that peculiar smell which we all know and which characteristically follows a rain-storm:



"C'était au printemps. Il avait fait un orage dans la soirée, des flaques d'eau luisaient encore çà et là dans les dépressions du pavé; d'en bas montait une odeur pénétrante de poussière mouillée et de verdure rafraîchies; et par moments des brises passaient, douces à fermer les yeux."

"Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 54.

It is true that the nature-pictures in "Myalis" may appear idealised to those who have never visited the Aegean lands; but the Greek countryside really has, according to those who know it, a peculiar freshness in the air and a delicacy of colouring which is unrivalled by the most famous beauty-spots of Western and Central Europe. Again, the natural background of "Rovère et Angisèle", with its dreary and barren moors, its wind-swept pines and its grey skies, may well seem etherealised through its association with the mysticism of Angisèle and her people, and through the shadow of death which is ever hanging over it. But this shadow of death is a very real element in the atmosphere of the land, and the barrenness and unhealthiness of the country explain realistically enough why this element exists. An examination of the nature-pictures in "Myalis" and "Rovère et Angisèle" will show that there is nothing essentially unreal in them:

"La nuit était auguste sur les hauteurs. Tout autour de lui la voûte sombre du firmament s'arrondissait; en bas, sur la plage sablonneuse, la mer amenait et ramenait ses vagues avec un murmure puissant et monotone; au-dessus de sa tête les étoiles innombrables scintillaient, suspendues et comme prêtes à tomber dans ses yeux."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 82.

The background to the last conversation of Rovère and Angisèle before their death is written in much the same style:

"L'ombre immense était bleue autour d'eux. Des astres brillèrent comme des diamants. Des jardins de la côte venaient des senteurs violentes d'orangers, de jasmins et d'acacias. La mer était noire et silencieuse; au loin, le falot d'une barque de pêcheurs propageait de vague en vague son reflet rouge..."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 163.

It must be noticed that these two passages, and the one a little further back from "Divine Bontemps", are not merely general descriptions of night, arbitrarily introduced into the text for their intrinsic beauty. By his choice of adjectives to describe the night ("auguste", "immense") and by the introduction of colour, scent and sound into the pictures, Samain implies the impressions

and sensations which the mystery and majesty of night are awakening in his characters. His natural backgrounds, indeed, rarely exist except in relation to the psychology of his characters; the following passage illustrates this point well:

"Ces landes immenses, cette mer sauvage, ce ciel pensif et tourmenté, ces routes solitaires, ce peuple maigre et taciturne ne formaient qu'une seule âme forte et mélancolique; et Rovère se prit à aimer cette âme."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III,  
pp. 142-3.

We are reminded of Amiel's famous phrase, "Un paysage est un état d'âme." This conception of nature is amply illustrated by Samain's poetry; we have seen how admirably the poet has expressed, in the "Elégies", the mysterious union which takes place in the silence of night between nature and the human soul. It is important to notice that such a conception is essentially human and realist. We have all felt, in the silence and solitude of night, transports which are entirely strange to us in the practical, rational hours of day, and we all know how our mood may change according as the sky is blue or grey above us. In the natural descriptions of the Tales, we are face to face, not with poetic idealism, but with reality.

Samain's subtle interweaving of the natural background of the stories with the psychology of his characters has more than one important consequence as regards the form of the Tales. Firstly, as we have just seen, it creates realism. Secondly, it creates balance; for, since there is almost invariably a practical or psychological reason for the existence of these descriptions, they are never out of place, and moreover, although frequent, they are not overlong; thus they do not interfere with the course of the narrative, but rather aid it. Thirdly, this conception of the relationship existing between the soul of nature and the soul of man makes for unity in the treatment of the subject; since the natural background rarely exists except in its relation to the characters, there is harmony between the descriptions on one hand and the psychological and narrative elements of the Tales on the other.

While the pictorial quality of Samain's prose style is an essential feature of the Tales, actual poetic imagery, in the strict sense of the word, is rare. In the style of "Rovere et Angisèle" however, there is a certain amount of pure symbolism. It is a generally accepted view that the symbolist style readily lends itself to obscurity, and can easily appear unnatural;

one false note, one slight hint of exaggeration, and the whole effect of the image is spoilt. On the other hand, in spite of the evident pitfalls which the symbolist "manière" offers, this style of writing gives the only possible expression to certain "états d'âme", and it is an undoubted fact that true symbolist images, appropriate to the thought to which they give expression, and limited in number, give beauty rather than exaggeration to the style. The symbolism in "Rovère et Angisèle" is of this order. The images are admirably suited to the subject-matter, since they express by religious symbols various aspects of the religious psychology of the characters. It has often been remarked that there was symbolism in literature long before the rise of the so-called Symbolist School of French poetry; and in this connection the names of Shakespeare, Hugo and Vigny are quoted; all personification and concretisation of abstract ideas is in reality symbolism. It is possible to go still further, and to point out that the symbolist method of expression existed long before Shakespeare or any of our modern European poets; that the Old Testament, which is essentially poetic, is frequently symbolist in style; that Christ's parables are symbols, and that the Christian Church, in its doctrines and its ceremonies, has always made use of symbols.

Traditionally, therefore, no apter use of the symbolist style could be made than to express religious mysticism. This is Samain's method of expressing the slow birth in Rovère's soul of the conception of suffering and sacrifice:

"Sur les eaux vierges de son âme se projetait  
l'ombre immense d'une croix;"

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 137

and, a little later on, on much the same theme - the awakening of Rovère's religious sensibility, we find:

"Il lui semblait descendre dans les cryptes mêmes de  
sa conscience."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p.147

Here is yet another passage, which realises admirably the symbolist ideal - that the image should be beautiful in itself, quite apart from any beauty of the idea which it expresses; it describes the mysticism of Angisèle's people:

"L'éternelle soif du soleil, qui mène toute créature  
dans le monde, avait, chez eux, dans le dénûment d'une  
nature deshéritée, pris une énergie tout intérieure et  
concentrée, pour rejaillir sous les formes passionnés  
du rêve religieux, et c'était un soleil plus beau encore  
que l'autre qu'ils voyaient se lever au fond de leurs  
coeurs sur les eaux éblouissantes de la Sainte-Eucharistie.

La Foi avait grandi sur leur sol ingrat comme un chêne géant, qui couvrait des siècles de son ombre et baignait son âme toujours verdoyante dans les brises du paradis."

"Rovere et Angisèle", Vol. III, p.145.

Besides their aptitude and their beauty, these symbolist images possess the virtue of infrequency. Since there are only three or four in the whole Tale, they do not overburden the style, but rather accentuate its usual sober simplicity by the occasional touch of richer beauty which they add to it.

In addition to its musicality and its pictorial beauty, the style of the Tales approaches the language of poetry in yet another way. Samain makes occasional use in his prose of certain essentially poetic "procédés". The first of these is the introduction of terms frequent in poetry, but rarely found in a prose vocabulary. In one of the descriptions of Myza already quoted, "col" is used in preference to the more prosaic "cou"; similarly, Samain prefers "abaïsser (les paupières)"<sup>(1)</sup> to the more usual "baïsser". Xanthis has ear-rings of "orichalque", and her birth-place Crissa is described as being "ceinte

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(1) "Myalis", Vol. III, p. 84.

par la mer retentissante." (1) This phrase is not only noteworthy for the uniquely poetic quality of "ceinte". By his use of this word (usually employed in archaic style in the description of persons) in reference to an island, Somain approaches the style of ancient Greek poetry, which frequently personified different aspects of nature. Compare this passage from "Hyalis", in which the writer, in order to create a Greek atmosphere (the setting of the Tale is wholly Greek) is deliberately modeling his style upon that of the poets of antiquity:

"Le vieillard disait la naissance d'Apollon dans Délos la pierreuse; les larcins plaisants du fils de Maïa; la descente d'Aristée chez les Océanides dans les grottes merveilleuses de corail et d'émeraude; les courses d'Io à travers l'Asie; Cypris couronnée de violettes et portée sur une écume d'or, et les grands Dioscures, à qui l'on sacrifie des agneaux blancs du haut de la poupe, Castor, dompteur de coursiers, et l'irréprochable Pollux, et leur soeur, la divine Hélène.

"Il disait aussi la terre généreuse, dispensatrice des douces richesses, l'Océan, père des choses, le retour

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(1) "Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 11



des saisons, les arbres féconds en fruits, les champs, les moissons, les troupeaux, les travaux du fer et du bois, et les belles cités qu'emplit le murmure des hommes."

"Myalis", Vol. III, pp. 77-8.

There are several points to be noticed in this passage: firstly, the turn of phrase, reminiscent of Greek idiom - "Délos la pierreuse", "le vieillard disait la naissance d'Apollon"; secondly, the mythological personification - "la terre généreuse, dispensatrice de douces richesses", "l'Océan, père des choses"; thirdly, the use of proper names - "Délos", "Maïa", "Océanides", "Io". The introduction of proper names, chosen for their beauty and their harmony, is characteristic of Samain's prose - for example "Angisèle", "Tanagra", "Mycalèse", "Myalis". In addition to increasing the musical element of the style, these names enhance its beauty by their associations with the legends of ancient Greece, which, after thousands of years, still retain their loveliness and the exquisite charm of their semi-unreality.

As a final demonstration of the essentially poetic quality of Samain's prose-style, let us remind our readers of M. Bocquet's observation, that every "manière" in the Tales has a counterpart in Samain's poetry. We

have already seen the resemblance between certain of the descriptions in "Eyalis" and the plastic style of the sonnet on the Sphinx. A few quotations will show that this is only one of many similarities in Semain's prose and verse styles. Symbolist images are not characteristic of the style of the Tales, but, as we have seen, Semain does occasionally introduce them into his work. The generally direct style of "Rovère et Angisèle", with its restrained use of symbolist imagery, recalls some of the more perfect of Semain's poems, in which the symbolism is rare but apt. Compare the vague religious associations of this symbol, which is combined with a more direct and realist style in the lines which follow, with some of the passages from "Rovère et Angisèle" already quoted:

"Mais je préfère une âme a l'ombre agenouillée,  
Les grands bois à l'automne et leur odeur mouillée,  
La route où tinte, au soir, un grelot de chevaux."

Vol. II, p. 44.

Or this, in somewhat more richly symbolist style, but comparable to "Rovère et Angisèle" by the similarity of the imagery:

"Et sa voix dont l'accent fatidique m'étonne  
Semble du plus profond de mon âme venir.  
Elle a le timbre ému des heures abolies,

Et sonne l'angélus de mes mélancolies  
Dans la vallée au vieux clocher du souvenir."

"Hyacinthe", Vol. II, p. 116.

Many of the natural descriptions in the Tales resemble very much those of "Le Chariot d'Or". Take, for instance, the passage from "Rovère et Angisèle" quoted on page 91, describing dawn over the sea and the port, and compare with it the following sonnet from "Le Chariot d'Or":

"Le soleil, par degrés, de la brume émergeant,  
Dore la vieille tour et le haut des mâtures;  
Et, jetant son filet sur les vagues obscures,  
Fait scintiller la mer dans ses mailles d'argent.

"Voici surgir, touchés par un rayon lointain,  
Des portiques de marbre et des architectures;  
Et le vent épicé fait rêver d'aventures  
Dans la clarté limpide et fine du matin.

"L'étendard déployé sur l'Arsenal palpite;  
Et de petits enfants, qu'un jeu frivole excite,  
Font sonner en courant les anneaux du vieux mur.

"Pendant qu'un beau vaisseau, peint de pourpre et d'azur,  
Bondissant et léger sur l'écume sonore,  
S'en va, tout frissonnant de voiles, dans l'aurore."

"Matin sur le Port", Vol. II, p. 39.

In each picture, we have the same essential elements - the light of dawn colouring the buildings and turning the sea to silver; the freshness of the morning breeze; and the stately beauty of the ship. There are two points to be noticed with regard to this comparison: firstly, that for beauty of language and description, there is nothing to choose between the two pictures - the prose-passage is as lovely as the sonnet; secondly, although the initial conception of the two pictures is the same - that is to say, the subject, - and although there are very precise details which reappear in the two passages (compare "flots sombres" with "vagues obscures", "les voiles frissonnant" with "tout frissonnant de voiles"), nevertheless there are many elements in each passage which make of it an entirely original composition, and not merely a reproduction of the other in slightly different form - in the sonnet, for instance, the picture of the children who "font sonner en courant les anneaux du vieux mur", and in the prose-picture the realist account of the activities of the port. There are other stylistic comparisons to be drawn between Samain's poetry and his prose. The poems in "Aux Flancs du Vase" are, as the title implies, a series of miniatures which recall by their beauty of form and colour the vignettes from "Hyalis" already quoted, and many lines in "Le

Chariot d'Or" have the same pictorial and evocatory qualities.

Here are some examples:

"La vache au bord de l'eau toute rose d'aurore."

Vol. II, p. 43.

"Parfois une charrue, oubliée aux labours,  
Sort, comme un bras levé, des sillons solitaires."

"Soir sur la Plaine", Vol. II, p. 48.

"Tes marais, tes prés verts ou rouissent les lins,  
Tes bateaux, ton ciel gris où tournent les moulins,  
Et cette veuve en noir avec ses orphelins."

Vol. II, p. 134.

These last three lines, a description of the North of France where Samain was born, are very interesting to study.

Pictures of clouded skies and melancholy vistas are as rare in Samain's poetry as scenes of brilliant sunshine; he prefers "l'intimité d'un pénétrant crépuscule", (1) the silent splendour of midnight, or the freshness and light of morning; but the marshes and moors and grey skies which form the background of the greater part of "Rovère et Angisèle" find their counterpart here, and may no doubt be justifiably regarded as an elaboration and etherealisation

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(1) "Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 10.

of this typically Northern landscape, with which Samain was so familiar. (We must however point out, in passing, that Samain seems purposely to have left the setting of this Tale quite vague. The name which he gives to Angisèle's country, "Courlande", belongs in reality to a Russian province situated on the south side of the Gulf of Riga; but we should beware of too much topographical precision - Samain's Courlande might be any barren, wind-swept region close to the sea - the North of France or Brittany probably resemble it just as much as the real Courlande. The author did not mean to represent actual Russians, nor even Slavs, when he described Angisèle and her people, or presumably he would have said so. There is something Russian in the quality of their religious mysticism; but the same fatalism and the same fervour characterise the religion of the Breton peasant or fisherman - a coincidence which serves to illustrate the truth of Samain's psychological portraiture, but which is far from indicating that he was intending to give to the characters of "Rovère et Angisèle" any definite nationality, or to place them against a background existing in reality, when he described "Courlande" and its people.) There is yet another "manière" in the Tales which corresponds to a

similar style in some of the poems - those we have called Samain's "Watteau poems". We meet again in "Xanthis" the delicacy and grace, the polite refinement and the superficiality of eighteenth-century French society, which Samain expresses in these poems, and parts of the Tale evoke with great charm the atmosphere of the eighteenth century, "époque qui eut pour fonction d'être jolie".<sup>(1)</sup> Samain has sympathetically rendered the ultra-refined social life of this period, with its "galanteries exquisés", and also its somewhat light, superficial spirit - "les vanités de la journée, le scintillement fatigant des madrigaux et des épigrammes."<sup>(2)</sup> The style of "Xanthis" is characterised by a lack of deep emotion, even in the narration of events which in any ordinary story would be of a very serious nature; consider the lightness of the tone in this account of the death of the marquis:

"Toute la nuit, il roula ainsi les pensées les plus affligeantes; les larmes qu'il essayait en vain de retenir inondaient son visage; peu à peu il sentit ses anciennes blessures se rouvrir; ses rhumatismes affreux

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(1) Vol. III, p. 13.

(2) Vol. III, p. 18.

tirailaient son pied gauche, et, vers le matin, sa tête, sa fine tête poudrée, brusquement se décolla..."

"Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 35.

This style is in keeping with the spirit of the period, which is tender and sentimental rather than passionate; it is also characterised by its delicate restraint; this restraint is essentially that of the eighteenth century, of a polite and cultured modern society, distinct from the Attic purity of "Hyalis", which is the realisation of a higher aesthetic ideal than that of mere politeness. The eighteenth-century atmosphere is further conveyed by the tone of delicate irony which penetrates from time to time, as in this description of the lovers' quarrel:

"Le fâcheux phénomène se produisit donc, et fut accompagné, suivant la marche ordinaire, de véhémentes apostrophes, de reproches grondants, de cris, de sanglots et d'une abondante pluie de larmes."

"Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 27.

These comparisons of Samain's prose- and verse-styles do no harm to his reputation. There is enough originality in the subjects of the Tales, and in the conception of the characters, to free them from the charge of being mere reproductions in prose of parts of



"Le Chariot d'Or" and "Aux Flancs du Vase". Moreover, as we saw in the comparison of the two pictures of dawn rising over the sea, although the resemblances between certain passages are great, each picture in composition and in conception is an entirely individual creation. The comparisons, indeed, rather increase Samain's reputation as a prose-writer; for, not only do they give striking testimony to the unity of the whole work, poetry and prose, but they illustrate once more the characteristically poetic quality of the Tales, and so, the great beauty of their form.

B. Fantasy of Conception. It is not however by their form alone that Samain's prose-tales are closely allied to poetry. Samain is enough of a true poet to realise that the essence of poetry lies in the spirit of a composition rather than in its form. It is a principle generally admitted by students of literature, that poetry permits a greater exercise of fancy in the choice of a subject than prose. Poetry is the domain of the dreamer, prose deals with sober reality, its reproduction or at least its imitation. In his choice of the themes of his Tales, Samain has obviously been guided by imagination rather than by experience, and thus he has evoked the spirit of poetry.

The first Tale, "Xanthis", is a pure fairy-story, as the author admits; he addresses himself only to those readers who are "complaisants au rê<sup>^</sup>ve".(1) The setting and the dramatis personae are equally fanciful - the scene of the story is a glass-fronted cabinet and the author whimsically pictures to himself a hidden life existing among the objects which usually occupy such cabinets; and the world with which Samain peoples his window is as fantastic as his conception of the dream-life which is lived there. What a medley of creatures provide the characters for his story! They are of all shapes and sizes, drawn from various spheres, and all at different degrees of proximity to real life. There is the heroine of the Tale, the pretty little statue of a Greek dancer; the Dresden marquis of eighteenth-century France, the gargoyle, the bust of the musician, the bronze model of the faun. We have already remarked that the idea of making inanimate objects, and especially objets-d'art representing living creatures, talk and walk and act like human beings, is not a new one in the art of the teller of tales. But Samain's treatment of his theme is as imaginative as the theme itself, and by his delicate and sympa-

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(1) "Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 10.

thetic representation of the dainty little dancer, and the nicety with which he has seized the different shades of feeling which she experiences, he has added beauty to fantasy, and so endowed his work with the spirit of poetry. For fantasy alone will not create a poetic atmosphere. Various elements, of which fantasy is one, may aid in the creation of such an atmosphere. But the first character of poetry is beauty, and without beauty poetry cannot exist. Depth of feeling, a sincere representation of the primary and ordinary passions of man, is fit matter for poetry only when these passions are of the nobler and not of the baser sort - that is, when beauty and passion meet, as they meet, for instance, in love. Likewise, fantasy only creates a poetic atmosphere when the writer's dreams are beautiful, as we shall see that Samain's are.

Although "Xanthis" charms us by its delicate fantasy and its exquisite prettiness - and art certainly has a place for this type of creation - we find in "Hyalis" and in "Rovère et Angisèle" a greater force of imagination and a nobler beauty in the choice and treatment of the themes. To understand the poetry of "Hyalis" we must try to evoke within ourselves the spirit of ancient Greece, which peopled the woods with creatures of its own fancy, and thus gave a soul to Nature more naïvely conceived than

that imagined for her by our nineteenth-century pantheists; but also more definite, because expressed by the ancients in concrete form. The conception of the embodied spirits of Nature, the immortal denizens of wood and stream, is bound up with the very religion of the Greeks, whose gods and goddesses themselves represented, among other aspects of life, the various phenomena of nature - sun, moon and stars, spring and summer. The beauty of the Greek conception of Nature has always been recognised by students of antiquity. It is this beauty, combined with the atmosphere of half-mystery which clothes all ideas which have descended to us through long ages, which gives poetry to the theme of "Hyalis". And upon the imaginative beauty of the mythological background Samain has superimposed a fantastically beautiful love-story of his own creation. Not only is Hyalis a faun, the nursling of nymphs and the play-fellow of centaurs and dryads in the wind-swept woods of Mycalèse; he is - here the author's own imagination is at work - half human, born of a mortal mother, and so endowed with human idealism and human passions, and fated to love as mortals love, <sup>and</sup> (as his father before him) to love a mortal. Our pity is roused by the pathetic story of his hopeless love for the priest's daughter Myza, and of his death for her sake, and our own idealism is excited

by the purity and nobility of soul of the little blue-eyed faun.

The story of Rovère and Angisèle, although in reality it might be one of everyday life, is so presented that it has all the appearance of a dream-fantasy. Details of time and place are left purposely vague. An other-world atmosphere, an impression of unreality, is conveyed alike by the portrayal of the heroine, who is represented as being of such an intensely spiritual nature that she seems "comme incorporelle" (1), and by the setting of the Tale - the description of the country of Courlande, of which Angisèle is princess, with its arid coast, its barren soil, its bare and sombre castle. The silence of the land is broken only by the tolling of bells or the melancholy sounding of the horn. The author implies indeed the presence of some supernatural element in the land. "L'Esprit de la Solitude flôttaît sur ces roseaux, sur ces forêts et sur ces pierres" (2), he says, and again, in reference to the first meeting of Rovère and Angisèle, "L'Esprit de la Solitude mêla leurs destinées". (3) If, in an excessively rational mood, we examine the implication of this expression,

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(3) Vol. III, p. 129.

(2) Vol. III, p. 126.

(1) Vol. III, p. 131.

"l'Esprit de la Solitude", we shall find nothing truly supernatural in it. In the same way, the mystical nature of Angisèle and her people is in reality nothing more than a combination of religious ardour with a constant preoccupation in death - a real and inevitable consequence of the struggle for existence in these barren and fever-stricken regions. But, although in actual fact we never lose touch with reality, the author, by laying stress on the spiritual aspect of life in Courlande, clothes with an atmosphere of weirdness what might easily be a true story, as Poe does in "The Fall of the House of Usher". In spite of this possible reality of "Rovère et Angisèle", the choice and especially the treatment of the subject are both as imaginative as in "Hyalis"; and the underlying theme, which is that of love born of suffering, and of perfect happiness attained before death, is similar to that of "Hyalis" and no less noble. "Hyalis" and "Rovère et Angisèle" contain the true spirit of poetry.

It may have been noticed that little or no mention of "Divine Bontemps" has been made in the examination of the poetic qualities of the Tales. The style, although care has evidently been given to it, is simple, and, so to speak, more self-effacing. The theme, which is

that of sacrifice, is a noble one, worthy of poetry; but the setting is too near reality, and the circumstances of the story too like those of everyday life, to possess the poetic dream-quality. Nevertheless, Samain has brought to the choice and treatment of his subject the same imaginative faculty which he reveals in dealing with the themes of his other tales. The only unusual feature in "Divine Bontemps" is the character of the heroine - but since the tale is nothing less than a pure psychological study, a character-portrait of Divine, this single feature is quite sufficient to fill the whole Tale with the same atmosphere of vague unreality which we find in "Rovère et Angisèle". As we have said, there is in "Divine Bontemps" no weirdness of background to aid the illusion; but the intensely spiritualised nature of the heroine, and the pathological quality of her temperament - her extreme and passionate reserve, the force of which influences her whole life and her whole happiness - makes this story, like "Rovère et Angisèle", a possible but an unusual one.

C. The Psychology. We have just said that "Divine

Bontemps" is essentially a psychological study. The same statement is true of every one of the Tales. However much care has been taken over the beauty of form of the Tales, the subject-matter, the

psychology of the characters, is perhaps an even more important element in their composition. The critics who have discussed the Tales have not been kind to Samain's powers of character-delineation; they claim that his characters do not live. Such an opinion must of course depend as much upon individual impression as upon concrete demonstration, and is consequently difficult to combat. We ourselves consider the characters of the Tales to be drawn with sympathy, understanding and realism, and, in support of this view, we shall endeavour to show, by an examination of the psychology of the characters, that Samain does possess an acute psychological sense, by which he creates characters which live for us. Indeed, if we are at all to consider the Tales as a work of art - and this was the impression they made upon us at a first reading, before we had made any detailed analysis of their merit, and the impression we believe they must make upon other readers, it is incumbent upon us to establish not only their beauty of form and theme, but also some essential truth in the theme itself and in the author's treatment of it. For art is both truth and beauty. It is firstly a reproduction, or rather an evocation, of life; and secondly



an evocation which by its intrinsic beauty appeals to our aesthetic sense. If, however, art cannot exist except where beauty and truth are both present, it is not necessary for the creation of art that they should be combined in equal proportions. Some authors, to whom the moral aspects of life appear more important than the sensuous ones, present in their writings a great deal of truth, and just enough beauty to make their work a work of art; such are the so-called "realist" novelists - Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert ("Madame Bovary") and most especially Zola; others, who take special delight in the sensuous aspects - the more poetic natures - combine beauty with truth with the advantage of proportion very much on the side of beauty; such a one is Flaubert in "Salammbô" and the "Trois Contes", such a one is Samain, both in his poetry and his prose.

Now we have already seen what fantasy, what unreality, is present in the Tales, in the setting and in the very conception of the themes. This fantasy certainly adds to the beauty of the general atmosphere, but it must be admitted that it detracts from the truth of the composition. It is only in the character-delineation that there remains scope for bringing the Tales near enough to real life, that is to say, to truth, to make of them a

complete and harmonious work of art. The psychology of the characters is developed against a background of unnatural or fantastic conditions, but the psychology itself is realist. In illustration of the manner in which Samain combines fantasy and realism, we have only to recall the description of Hyalis' childhood, where the centaur plays with him and takes him for rides on his back. The faun and the centaur are creatures born of the imagination, mythological beings; but the centaur plays with Hyalis as a grown-up human plays with a small boy. Samain has indeed an excellent precedent for this mingling of psychological realism with fantasy of setting, for this is the principle of art on which Racine works in his "Phèdre", when he presents the heroine, his most intensely human creation, in the magical setting of ancient Greek mythology.

When we speak of the psychological realism of the Tales, the term does not signify that Samain's characters are normal, everyday people. The poet has an intensely imaginative nature, and is happier with dreams than with reality. He accepts the principle that truth is one of the essentials of art, but he reduces the proportion of truth in his work to the minimum, and does not descend to earth more than is absolutely necessary. His characters are exceptional - that is, they are possible, but unusual.

But by their very unusualness they are psychologically real. What we mean by this apparent paradox is, that their unusualness provides a link between reality and fantasy which is necessary to the harmony of the whole composition. Given the fantasy of background, the characters, according to true psychological principles, must be themselves a little removed from the normal; for the background and the characters are not separate entities; the former reacts upon the latter. Samain's characters, then, are exceptional; but, in accordance with the principle of truth, they develop naturally, and the portrayal of their psychological evolution is realist. Indeed, there is a certain inevitability about these characters, and Samain's treatment of their psychology is connected with the conception of destiny and fatality which is present in each Tale, as we shall see when we come to consider the underlying ideas of the themes, and which, as M. Bocquet observes, (1) gives unity to the whole work. "La première loi du monde," says Glaucos, "est la conformité des êtres à leur destinée"; (2) and when we bear in mind the double fact that Hyalis' own father loved a mortal, and that he

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(1) L. Bocquet, "Albert Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre", p. 224.

(2) "Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 77.

has human blood in his veins, we understand by what forces of heredity his soul was bound to develop as it did.

In order to illustrate Samain's power of character-delineation, we intend to examine his characters in turn, and to show the basic traits of each one, and the psychological evolution which takes place in each case, and which is an inevitable consequence of the influence of the ambient circumstances on these basic-traits.

Hyalis. We have already indicated the essential peculiarity of Hyalis' nature. He is faun by his father and human by his mother. Samain's partiality for fauns is, perhaps, a manifestation of the erotic tendency in his character which has already revealed itself in his poetry, for the faun is essentially a creature akin to the brute, and the incarnation of sensual love. References to fauns are frequent throughout Samain's work. Pan, the king of the goat-footed tribe, is mentioned twice in Samain's poetry, once in "Polyphème" and a second time in "Soir Païen". The faun, as a type of the brute creation, appears in "Kanthis", where he is portrayed in some detail, but with a very rudimentary psychology. Samain notes his unintelligence ("Mais le faune avait peine à faire tenir deux raisonnements debout; les faits seuls existaient pour

lui" (1)) and his lack of self-restraint, revealed alike by the impetuosity with which he strikes Xanthis, and by the uncontrolled expression of his grief and remorse afterwards:

"Devant Xanthis en miettes, le faune était resté béant de stupeur. Quand il comprit, il tomba lourdement sur les genoux, et poussant des hurlements terribles, s'abandonna au plus sauvage désespoir."

"Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 36.

It is the brutishness of the faun which is his outstanding feature in the first tale, for he is the very symbol of the sensual element in love. Hyalis is the son of such a creature, but also the son of a mortal mother; he is thus a refinement, a purification of the antique conception of the faun. There is a passage in one of Samain's unfinished poems which seems to foreshadow Hyalis:

"Un petit faune triste, aux yeux de violette,  
Disait sur un roseau son coeur mélancolique."

"Améthyste", Vol. III, p. 256.

There is no mention here of the human element; but the delicacy of feeling, the melancholy quality of the love-sentiment, the whole conception of the small, timid,

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(1) "Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 33.

blue-eyed creature, recall "Hyalis de Mycalèse, le petit faune aux yeux bleus."

The originality of the idea of a human-born faun is equalled by the art with which Samain has developed Hyalis' character. The psychological evolution which he paints for us is very gradual. In the early stages of the character-study Samain shows an understanding of child-psychology. In the child the whole mind, of which reason is the sovereign feature, is undeveloped; and the child is primarily a creature of instincts and sensations, that is, a creature very little removed from the brute. We shall expect Hyalis, whose paternal origin is wholly brutish, to reveal only slight human characteristics at an early age, but slowly to become more and more human as he grows up. Such indeed is the course of Hyalis' psychological development. In his childhood, his life is purely one of sensations. Take, for instance, the description of his ride on the centaur's back:

"Un léger effroi suspendait son coeur, et quand tout à coup la course s'arrêtait, il battait des mains et riait aux éclats, les yeux brillants, les joues éclatantes, tout le sang ivre d'espace et de rapidité...."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 72.

This is not merely a description of Hyalis' character as we should expect it to be, that is, rudimentary, revealing only the primary instincts of animal life; it is also a very realistic piece of child-psychology. The ingenuous delight which Hyalis shows in presence of the wonder and beauty of nature, the "vague sourire" (1) with which he puts a shell to his ear and listens to the sound of the sea within, are similar instances of psychological realism in the portrayal of the childish nature.

The dual character of Hyalis' origin reveals itself throughout his life, although as he grows up the development of a human soul within him becomes more and more apparent. On one side we see his animal nature. It is natural to the human to be a mere creature of instinct in childhood; but Hyalis will retain throughout his life a sensitiveness to impression more pronounced than that possessed by normal humans, who balance all their impressions and emotions with their reasoning faculty. We see the great emotion with which in childhood he beholds the temples:

"Quand...il apercevait...la haute image de l'Immortel..."

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(1) Vol. III, p. 71.

la stupeur frappait ses membres; sa poitrine haletait, et il sentait avec un trouble magnifique descendre dans son âme l'âme supérieure des Grands Dieux."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 80.

Even at his death, after a tremendous moral evolution brought about by love, his sensations are uppermost, and he feels far more than he thinks:

"Une infinie douceur coula dans ses membres; en même temps il lui sembla que son coeur s'élargissait, devenait vaste, splendide et bleu comme le firmament des nuits d'été."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 107.

But the life of sense, represented both by this extreme sensitiveness to impression, and by the carnal lust for the nymphs and dryads which comes with adolescence, is but one side of his nature; on the other side is the higher life of mind and soul, which is the heritage of his mortal mother, and which assumes a greater importance the older the little faun grows. Even in early childhood he flees the vulgarity of his companions' games, and invents for himself a more refined type of play. In adolescence, although he yields to his carnal instincts, we read that "il traînait à travers ces rapides plaisirs une âme



inquiète et mal rassasiée." (1) His psychological evolution is very gradual, and at this stage he is only "vaguement anxieux." (2) He is discontented with the present, but he does not really know to what he aspires. Gradually there comes to him a subconscious desire for love as the humans know it -

"Il implorait une caresse inconnue."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 75.

Mylytta, his former favourite among the nymphs, no longer charms him, and in his discontent with her conduct we see the birth in Hyalis' mind of a nobler conception of love; he is attaining human idealism:

"Rieuse et brûlante, elle s'abandonnait à tous. Hyalis voulut le lui reprocher, mais il sentit aussitôt qu'elle ne le comprenait point, et il cessa de se plaire avec elle."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 75.

In adolescence also the thirst for knowledge, the spirit of enquiry which is natural to man, comes to Hyalis. Sitting at the feet of old Glaucos the swine-herd, he learns many things about the material world in which he lives, and the

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(1) "Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 75.

(2) Ibid.

old man introduces him also to a new world, hitherto unsuspected by him - the world of ideas. Samain never lets us forget, in his portrayal of Hyalis' character, his paternal origin. Although Hyalis possesses a mind, a reasoning faculty, this faculty is only rudimentary. As we read, in the account of Hyalis' talks with Glaucos:

"Hyalis ne comprenait qu'imparfaitement les paroles du vieillard...Mille pensées confuses s'éveillaient dans l'esprit du faune, et une pâle conscience se levait dans son âme."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, pp. 78-9.

Thus, although the mental, and indeed, the whole psychological development of the faun is coincident with the development of his human nature, the author shows us the effect which the brute-blood has upon Hyalis' character in putting a check on this development. It is one of the outstanding qualities of Samain's art in the Tales that he shows us the mobility of the human soul. Psychology for him is not static; nor has it merely a fluctuating mobility. What he shows us is the psychological evolution of his characters; and his sense of reality assists him in making this evolution as gradual as possible. Samain knows that violent changes of character or of outlook are not normal to human nature, and so in "Hyalis", by presenting a

subconscious struggle between two opposite psychological forces, he retards the course of the development in a single direction.

Nevertheless, although this subconscious struggle is ever present in the soul of the faun, his evolution (which is the significant part of his story) is always in the direction of his human nature. The older he grows, the more strongly does this human origin declare itself. He feels an instinctive and inevitable longing for human society:

"Un instinct plus impérieux le poussait vers les habitations humaines."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 79.

In this urge for human society we see the part which destiny plays in his life. Hyalis cannot resist his instinct, which is to seek human company; he is driven to humans, and it is among humans that he will find, in love, the inevitable culmination of his psychological evolution. Every stage in his development prepares him for human love, and brings him a step nearer to it. After his contact with humans he is more discontented than ever with the life of the woods; and he actually flees the lascivious embraces of the nymphs and the dryads. When one of these creatures clutches him, "comme pris de honte, il courait laver à la

fontaine l'empreinte encore brulante de ses doigts sur son bras." (1) Then comes love, the crisis which precipitates his transformation into a human. With love, "une conscience de lui-même lui venait" (2) - a distinctly human trait, for it is doubtful to what extent the animal realises its own existence, and the infant, which psychologically closely resembles the animal, has for some time after birth no clear consciousness of what existence implies.

"The baby, new to earth and sky,  
What time his tender palm is prest  
Against the circle of the breast,  
Has never thought that 'this is I':

"But as he grows he gathers much,  
And learns the use of 'I' and 'me',  
And finds 'I am not what I see,  
And other than the things I touch'.

"So rounds he to a separate mind  
From whence clear memory may begin,  
As thro' the frame that binds him in  
His isolation grows defined."

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(1) "Hyalis", Vol. III, pp. 81-2.

(2) "Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 88.

To this passage from Tennyson let us add one from Buffon, which deals with the question of the animal's consciousness of existence, and contrasts this consciousness with that of man:-

"La conscience de notre existence étant composée non seulement de nos sensations actuelles, mais même de la suite d'idées qu'a fait naître la comparaison de nos sensations et de nos existences passées, il est évident que plus on a d'idées, et plus on est sûr de son existence; que plus on a d'esprit, et plus on existe; qu'enfin c'est par la puissance de réfléchir qu'a notre âme, et par cette seule puissance, que nous sommes certains de nos existences passées et que nous voyons nos existences futures, l'idée de l'avenir n'étant que la comparaison inverse du présent au passé, puisque dans cette vue de l'esprit le présent est passé, et l'avenir est présent. Cette puissance de réfléchir ayant été refusée aux animaux, il est donc certain qu'ils ne peuvent former d'idées, et que par conséquent leur conscience d'existence est moins sûre et moins étendue que la nôtre: car ils ne peuvent avoir aucune idée du temps, aucune connaissance du passé, aucune notion de l'avenir; leur conscience d'existence est simple, elle dépend uniquement des sensations qui les affectent actuellement, et consiste dans le sentiment intérieur que ces

sensations produisent." Hyalis' realisation of his own being is therefore indicative of his increasing humanity.

The realism of the love-psychology which follows strengthens this impression of Hyalis' almost complete transformation into a human. His actions are those of a normal human being under the influence of love. At first he hides his feelings; then the desire to unburden himself, and to talk and talk about his beloved, makes him confide in Glaucos. The greatness of his longing, and a certain unreasoning hope which haunts those who love, forces him to return repeatedly to the garden of Myza. Then comes the climax. Myza sees him, is filled with horror at the sight of this strange creature, and flees screaming. The suddenness with which his hopes are dashed to the ground overwhelms the little faun. In his despair, he only longs for death. Samain has given an excellent expression to this latter situation, which is far more than that of an ordinary love-sick mortal longing for release from his pain. Hyalis is of the immortal order of creatures; and Samain has represented him as conceiving instinctively, by the force of his great suffering, the death which is a stranger to him and his kind, and of which he has only vaguely heard tell in connection with humans. "Oh! écoute, s'écria-t-il,

et, par pitié, explique-moi ce que j'éprouve; c'est comme un désir de ne plus sentir, de ne plus voir, de ne plus penser, de ne plus être moi-même enfin. Réponds, ne serait-ce pas là ce que les hommes appellent la mort?" (1)

Hyalis' conception of death seems to be as of a total annihilation of soul as well as of body. This in itself is a trait of human nature, and so a piece of psychological realism; for many of us, who, in more reasonable moments might question the expediency, the use of death as a delivery from acute mental suffering (since, as Hamlet says, we do not know that we escape our suffering by death) (2) - many of us, in the agony of our grief, think of death as of such a state as Hyalis describes: "ne plus sentir, ne plus voir, ne plus penser" - the wish being father to the thought. This passage shows also Samain's clarity of thought in questions of philosophy. He realises that "Homo duplex est", that there are two elements in human existence, the "substance pensante" or soul and the "substance étendue" or body. But - a fact which some of our modern exponents of positivism and idealism have not realised - although the two elements are present, they are, at least in this

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(1) "Hyalis", Vol. III, pp 93-4.

(2) "To die; to sleep;  
To sleep, perchance to dream..."

life (which is as far as our knowledge extends) inseparably connected with each other. It is significant that, although the subject of "Hyalis" is the evolution of the faun's soul, the final impetus which transforms him into a human is not a moral, but a material one - he becomes human, because mortal, after taking Ydragone's poison; and there is a material sign of the change, since, for the first time in his life, he sheds tears; and, in the relief which this physical action brings to his feelings, he gives voice to the beautiful thought "Les dieux ne connaissent pas la douceur de pleurer",<sup>(1)</sup> and he realises that he has become a human. He realises also that he is no longer merely a denizen of the woods, but that there is more of universality in his human being. "Hyalis, moins étroitement lié à la vie obscure des eaux et des bois, embrassait avec plus d'ampleur l'ordre et les lois du vaste univers."<sup>(2)</sup> His consciousness of himself and of his existence grows. "Il approfondissait chaque jour avec un charme plus nuancé le mystère émouvant de vivre."<sup>(3)</sup> The last days of Hyalis are described by Samain with great sympathy. Hyalis

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(1) "Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 99.

(2) "Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 100.

(3) "Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 101.



is almost happy once he knows that he is to die; not only does he realise that his pain is nearly over, but also he feels that by dying he is making the supreme sacrifice for Nyza. And this partial happiness is the presage of an absolute happiness which comes to Hyalis in the last moments of his life. As he stands before the sleeping Nyza and gazes upon her wonderful beauty, he knows the mystic union of souls which is the ideal of human love. "Il semblait à Hyalis qu'il s'unissait maintenant à elle, qu'il prenait une parcelle de l'âme divine répandue dans son corps, qu'il accordait le rythme de sa propre vie au rythme de la vie adorée." (1)

The realism of this character-study of Hyalis - the ready perception and the true rendering of thoughts and feelings which we have all experienced; the sense of psychological evolution, and the careful study of such an evolution phase by phase, give life to the character of Hyalis, notwithstanding the fact that, both morally and physically, he is a creature whose existence we cannot rationally conceive. Perhaps, too, Samain gives life to his creation because his sympathy for Hyalis is so apparent.

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(1) "Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 106.

The character, living for him, lives for us by that very fact. Samain is obviously attracted by Hyalis, and moved to pity, as he moves to pity his readers, for the timid, anxious creature, who, always dependent upon others, appeals first to Glaucos and then to Ydragone in the extremity of his anguish; whose courage, in seeking a dreadful death, is only the courage of despair. Fear, weakness, egotism, dependence upon others - these are some of the faun's salient characteristics; yet, because, although his moral sense is only very slightly developed, he has no instinct of evil, or cruelty, or malignancy; because he causes no suffering to others by his weakness and helplessness, and suffers so greatly himself; because he is so charming, so pathetic, so sensitive, so affectionate, so tender, so reverential, no one who reads the story of Hyalis would dream of condemning the little faun for any faults of character.

The reasons for the sympathetic portrayal of Hyalis' character are easily explained. His outstanding qualities are gentleness and tenderness, and after that timidity and sensitiveness - in a word, he is a feminine character. Now Samain loves women, and in his moments of sincerity he admits that he loves them just for this very quality of "douceur" which is essentially theirs.

"O Toi que j'élus Douce entre toutes les femmes", (1)  
he says, and again,

"C'est un soir tendre comme un visage de femme." (2)

That Samain has such sympathy for women is explained by his own femininity. He once said, "Il y a des âmes-femmes", and more than one critic has pointed out how well this remark applies to the poet himself. The sweetness and tenderness of his own nature enable him to understand and to sympathise with feminine characters.

Divine Bontemps. We have seen, in "Hyalis", the manner in which Samain treats the psychological aspect of his subject. In "Divine Bontemps" we find exactly the same treatment - a presentation of the gradual psychological development of a character through childhood and adolescence until love comes, and then, with love, a more precipitated development. The setting of "Divine Bontemps", the conditions in which the character develops, are nearer the normal. But the abnormal quality of the character itself removes the subject from sheer actuality, so that the study provides the same realist treatment of

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(1) "Le Chariot d'Or", Vol. II, p. 91.

(2) "Le Chariot d'Or", Vol. II, p. 41.

an exceptional psychology which we have already seen in "Hyalis". Let us make quite sure that our meaning is clear. The reader of Samain's Tales is asked to take certain unusual, improbable, and in some cases impossible, conditions for granted. He is asked to consider them as a matter of actual fact; if he can strain his imagination so far, the author will complete the work, retaining only the essential human truth, and allying with it the dreams of his own fancy; and the reader will find himself easily giving credence to the whole story. In "Hyalis" the psychology of the faun is realistically portrayed, but the psychology in itself is exceptional, being that of a creature half-human, half-faun. Divine's psychology is likewise exceptional, this time because one characteristic is so strongly developed that it dominates and controls all the others. This characteristic is an excessive and painful reserve, which prevents her revealing to others any feeling whatever. "Elle reculait devant la manifestation des sentiments même les plus avouables comme devant un péché... la moindre émotion dévoilée, le moindre sentiment surpris lui causait l'intolérable malaise de la nudité."<sup>(1)</sup> Her reserve is not the deliberate, almost misanthropic

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, pp. 42-3.

reserve which is born of pride and of scorn of others; it is quite involuntary - a force over which she has no control. In childhood, when she is about to rush into her mother's arms, she stops, hesitates, and finally goes away. Later, when she is in love (and remember that love generally begets a desire to reveal one's personality) she cannot bring herself to give the man she loves the slightest hint of her feelings, even when he has shown his own interest in her. "Elle voyait...qu'elle mourrait plutôt que de desserrer les levres." (1) The greatness of her reserve is by no means indicative of shallowness of character; the depth of passion of which she is capable equals the force of instinct which drives her to hide this passion. In childhood, "elle s'adressait avec des gestes passionnés à des êtres imaginaires dont elle peuplait son coin de retraite." (2) When in love she suffers so intensely that the mere sight of Maurice in the company of his betrothed suffices to make her faint away. Divine combines with her intense power of feeling and with her reserve a depth of tenderness, which is exalted almost to a passion;

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 53.

(2) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, pp. 42-3.

indeed, in a nature such as hers, we should expect every quality to take a passionate form, even though the passion remains hidden. Divine is "douée d'une énergie de tendresse presque excessive, d'une bonté qui se donnait sans réserve aux êtres et aux choses." (1)

Reserve, passion, tenderness - these are the three basic traits of character from which the psychological life of Divine develops. Samain reveals his sense of psychological realism by the careful study which he makes of the interaction of the three primary characteristics upon each other - the passion in Divine's tenderness, for instance, and also by his presentation of her psychological development. It must be noticed that the development of her character in a certain direction - that of sacrifice - is inevitable. As in "Hyalis", the motive-power of love works upon the initial psychological conditions, and the character continues to develop naturally in the same direction in which it began. There is a great consistency, in Samain's portrayal of his characters, in the manner in which they seem to advance steadily as though towards a goal - the advance being gradual, but accelerating when love comes into play. Love, itself,

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 42.

in Divine's character, is only a concentration of the "vagues tendresses" which she feels in early girlhood. Her life of sacrifice is a desire to serve others, born of the tenderness which is also a part of her nature; and perhaps she gives herself<sup>so</sup>/entirely to her life of sacrifice because, in sacrifice, she finds a means of expressing her passionate nature, which she is incapable of expressing in any more direct fashion. Samain gives another explanation; more ingenious, but not psychologically inconceivable, of the development of a spirit of self-sacrifice from excessive reserve. "Une telle répugnance à livrer le secret de ses sentiments lui faisait peu à peu contracter l'habitude du renoncement."<sup>(1)</sup> Moreover, the spirit of self-sacrifice is with Divine almost an instinct, and she shows very early signs of "un goût passionné et presque barbare du sacrifice."<sup>(2)</sup> The sacrifices which Divine makes mark the stages in her psychological evolution. Her first sacrifice is her marriage to the man whom she loves, and who she knows does not love her. "Quelque chose en elle de sacrifié et d'extatique apparut si visiblement à l'église que les spectateurs les

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 44.

moins avertis...en furent frappés." (1) Her second sacrifice is the abandonment of her own hopes of motherhood in her effort to save the life of her husband's child. The third is the renunciation of a religious vocation in response to the secular call of wifely duty. Finally, she sends her stepson away to live his own life, rather than interfere with his career by keeping him beside her to comfort her in her widowhood and old age. Samain does not explain what actuates her in these sacrifices, but our previous knowledge of her character leads us to suppose that it is tenderness and pity, the "douceur" which he loves so much, rather than an austere sense of duty. Through sacrifice Divine comes to live for others, literally. "Nulle joie directe ne l'affectait plus; elle ne semblait plus vivre pour son compte, mais s'alimenter exclusivement du bonheur des êtres autour d'elle." (2)

Divine's qualities of gentleness and unselfishness make her a very lovable character. Reserved people are usually less attractive than the more spontaneous, expressive sort, because their character is more difficult to fathom; but great moral virtues can render them very charming.

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 58.

(2) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 63.



Samain, in creating the character of Divine Bontemps, has realised this truth. His character-study of Divine is a remarkable one; to create such a character, Samain needed both acute psychological perception and also imagination, for "Divine Bontemps" is the study of a soul which is hidden. He needed especially to know his own character, for although we have no justification for saying that in the creation of Divine Samain has wished to reproduce his own personality, an author frequently puts something of himself into the characters which he creates. Samain was himself of a very reserved nature, and we cannot doubt that his knowledge of himself and of his own reserve helped him in the creation of Divine. He gives as one consequence of her reserve her love of silence and mystery:

"Aussi tout ce qui est fait de demi-jour, de silence, de mystère, l'attirait-il particulièrement."

"Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 43.

Those who know the descriptions of evening in Samain's poetry will appreciate the significance of this trait of Divine's character, and will remember the line:

"Une voix qui voudrait sangloter et qui n'ose."

"Le Chariot d'Or", Vol. II, p. 44.

The poet gives as another consequence of Divine's reserve the development of a vivid imagination - "les êtres dont

la vie résorbée avive l'imagination." (1) We have spoken at length of the imaginative qualities which Samain reveals in his conception of the subjects of his Tales; and his treatment of Divine's psychology provides us with a further instance of the writer's imaginative faculty. Samain could not have created Divine without understanding himself; he could not have created her without an active imagination working on the material which he already possessed - his knowledge of his own nature. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that only Samain could have drawn such a character.

Rovère. In "Rovère et Angisèle" we have a study of the reciprocal evolution of two characters - that is to say, the study of two characters each of which evolves under the influence of the other. Rovère is a kind of Byronic hero, a Don Juan, at once sensualist and idealist, but freed from the Satanic pose of the English poet's creations. He is by nature, and before real love develops the moral side of his character, a voluptuary:

"Il vivait sans d'autre pensée que d'extraire autour

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 57.

de lui de la volupté."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 111.

There is a supreme egotism in this sensuality of his. The women whom he loves he considers merely as "des formes adorables ou superbes dont la seule raison était de lui procurer, chacune en son caractère, des jouissances parfaites et diverses." (1) So far, the portrait is scarcely an attractive one. But Rovère does not indulge in mere animal pleasures. His temperament is deeply serious. Samain describes him as "magnifique et grave." (2) The two sides of his nature, which at first sight appear irreconcilable, his lust for physical pleasure, and his seriousness, combine to produce an exalted idealism; Rovère is a sensualist, but of a high type, an artist in sensuality. His greatest joy is an appreciation, even a veneration of beauty.

"Il voyait l'éclatant triomphe de cette force universelle qui menait la création à la beauté comme à sa fin suprême; et, l'âme envahie d'une stupeur religieuse, silencieusement il l'adorait."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 117.

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 114.

(2) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 111.

His very desire for physical possession is closely connected with his adoration of beauty:

"Il arrivait à une sorte d'état plus subtil où son âme, comme détachée et toute frémissante, vibrait avec la couleur, ondulait avec les lignes, devenait elle-même la couleur et la ligne; et ainsi ses plaisirs d'art ressemblaient à des possessions."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p.112.

Rovère, sensualist though he be, is thus not a mere selfish beast, but a complex personality, and even, by his idealism, a noble nature. In his love for his favourite Viola he shows of what an exalted and unusual character his sensuality is. He loves her for her body alone, but there is nothing careless or superficial about this love; there enters into it "quelque chose de sombre et d'effréné" (1), and, although Viola's soul is nothing to him, his own soul is absorbed with his body by this sensual love, because in his worship of beauty he raises his sensuality to the height of an ideal. When he loses Viola, his suffering is physical; nevertheless, he leaves Italy in order to escape for a time

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 114

from his memories, that is, to give solace to his soul.

Up to the time of Viola's death, Rovère's psychology is more or less in a static condition; there is no moral evolution. With Viola's death comes the turning-point in his psychological history. His character changes when he meets Angisèle, and falls under the influence of her character; but the voyage which he makes after Viola's death prepares his soul for the great change by revealing to him his hidden moral capabilities:

"Averti par la diversité des peuples, des moeurs, des arts, il élargit son horizon de pensée et s'achemina à concevoir des formes moins fixes de sentir."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 122.

The contemplation of night at sea fills him with a consciousness of the immensity and wonder of the human soul. (It is true that his conception of life is still egoistic, as will be seen in the passage which follows. It needs Angisèle's divine pity to reveal to him the beauty of self-sacrifice):

"Grande mer, ciel profond, s'écriait-il, que vous êtes admirables! Mais cette âme qui s'émeut en moi à vous contempler n'est-elle pas plus admirable encore? N'est-ce point vers elle seule que toutes vos splendeurs convergent, puisqu'elle seule peut en témoigner?"

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 123.

Then Rovère is shipwrecked on an unknown shore, and, entering a new country, enters a new life at the same time. There is a very slow development of spirituality in Rovère's soul, partly under the influence of his surroundings: "Un travail s'opérait dans l'âme de Rovère. Cette lumière monotone, ces sombres verdure, cette atmosphère silencieuse et morte, ces cloches dans la brume... toute cette tristesse flottante s'imprégnait en lui." (1) The greatest influence, however, is that which Angisèle's intensely spiritual nature, her purity, her religious mysticism, her selflessness, exert upon his soul. "Angisèle était d'ailleurs l'agent le plus puissant de cette évolution. Tout ce qui flottait épars sur cette terre de souffrance se résumait en elle et sortait comme un conseil intime de ses gestes graves et de ses yeux pâles et profonds. Rovère la sentait au centre de sa vie, et quand, à certaines heures, il prononçait son nom, il lui semblait ouvrir tout à coup au fond de lui-même la porte d'un sanctuaire où, dès le premier pas, il marchait enveloppé d'une atmosphère sur-humaine de pureté." (2) Knowing her, his own soul develops

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 137.

(2) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, pp. 145-6.

to an extraordinary degree. "Son âme...se résorbait, se condensait comme pour emplir au fond de lui-même de mystérieux et profonds réservoirs." (1) This is a spirituality of which he would have been incapable in the first part of the story, and it culminates in pity and in spiritual love. "Jamais nul être à nul moment n'avait ainsi creusé en lui des abîmes de tendresse et, songeant à son cœur d'autrefois uniquement sensible à la gloire des sens, il admirait sans la comprendre cette extraordinaire et divine poésie de la Pitié." (2) And finally, from his original idolisation of material beauty, he arrives at the realisation that only spiritual beauty never tires. "Il y a dans les choses extérieures une limite qui comble qu'atteignent vite nos sens, une sécheresse qui brûle vite notre âme. Les simples plis de ta robe noire" (he is speaking to Angisèle) "m'ont fait sentir et comprendre plus de choses que les plus beaux spectacles de l'univers." (3) Angisèle. As a contrast to the unconverted Rovère, the voluptuary, Samain gives us the portrait of

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 144.

(2) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 150.

(3) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 155.

Angisèle, pure and ethereal, devout and pitiful. The mystic intangibility of her nature is expressed in a number of phrases - "comme incorporelle" (1), "fluide dans sa robe éternellement noire" (2), "un charme inexprimable d'étiolée" (3). She is more of a symbol, of one of M. Bocquet's "idées pures", than the other characters in the Tales, because she scarcely seems of flesh and blood. She does indeed express and represent ideas; that of death (of which she twice has a mysterious foreboding) - "Elle semblait bien l'âme même de ces pierres où la mort seule était présente" (4); that of suffering - "Tout ce qui flottait épars sur cette terre de souffrance se résumait en elle, et sortait comme un conseil intime de ses gestes graves et de ses yeux pâles et profonds" (5); that of gentleness - "Elle était la Douceur" (6). The constant stress laid by the author upon the spirituality

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 131.

(2) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 139.

(3) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 131.

(4) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 139.

(5) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 145.

(6) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 131.



of Angisèle's character serves to accentuate the change in Rovère's nature, for it is her spirituality, and also her gentleness (another moral quality) which attract him. Up till now he has only loved women for their bodies. Now, Angisèle is not beautiful physically, and besides is so ethereal, so pale and slight, that she appears almost incorporeal. Rovère has evolved from a love of physical to a love of moral beauty.

Angisèle is, however, not only there, a static and unreal character, to act as a foil to Rovère. She has a personality of her own, and she possesses an idealism of sacrifice and of purification through sacrifice. "Notre vie", she says, "est comme un anneau vulgaire où doit s'enchasser le diamant de l'épreuve"<sup>(1)</sup>. She is an unusual, even a mysterious character; her constant association with death has influenced and darkened her whole nature, and when love comes to her, it struggles within her heart with the spirit of death: "Alors, brisée et n'en pouvant plus, elle se jeta sur son lit, et, la face écrasée dans les oreillers, sanglota jusqu'au jour sur le mystère inavouable de son coeur; car dans une même minute

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 133.

la mort venait en elle de rencontrer l'amour." (1) Her love for Rovère, in constant combat with the spirit of death which casts a shadow over her soul, is strange, passionate, deep and solemn. The intense spiritual passion which fills the hearts of both Rovère and Angisèle contrasts with Rovère's "amours faciles" at the beginning of the Tale.

"Rovère et Angisèle" is the story of the interaction of two characters one upon the other. For Rovère, under the influence of the mystic character of Angisèle, comes to love the noble soul of this country of death, while the maiden is inspired by him with an ardent desire for the light and joy she has never known, and only lives to visit Italy. The souls of Rovère and Angisèle almost come to change places. Both are satiated, one with pleasure, the other with suffering; each, meeting an exact contrast in character, absorbs a great part of the other's soul; and so it is that two beings originally so dissimilar come to perfect love and comprehension of each other.

Xanthis. . It remains to discuss "Xanthis". Samain is here

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 141.

dealing with a superficial character, and he is moreover not serious in his attitude to his subject, which is not intended to be anything more than a playful creation of the fancy. Nevertheless, the character of the little dancer is carefully and sympathetically drawn. She is a pleasure-loving little creature, who likes admiration and accepts it from everyone - marquis, faun, musician, gargoyle alike. Her extreme adaptability enables her to be entirely at her ease with every type of admirer. "Quoique simple petite danseuse de la mer Egée, vous aviez <sup>su</sup> bien vite vous façonner à de nouvelles exigences" (1). She is thoughtless, it is true, and does not realise that her existence, although well-balanced at the moment, is likely to become precarious if she puts a strain of any sort upon it. The sensations of the dancer are well-painted, and give realism to the portrait. "Violemment, Xanthis eut l'impression qu'une main invisible l'emportait par sa chevelure à travers un monde d'impressions tourbillonnantes."

"Xanthis", Vol. III, pp. 16-17.

Xanthis, although she appears at times empty-headed and

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(1) "Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 31.

frivolous, is not merely a shallow, pleasure-loving girl. Her very beauty gives her a certain depth of character:

"Il se dégageait d'elle une beauté mystérieuse et grave dont le frisson avait quelque chose de sacré."

"Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 12.

The character-study of Xanthis is slight - it does not pretend to be anything else - and the psychology is almost static; there is no actual moral evolution as in the other characters of the Tales. Nevertheless, the character-delineation, as far as it goes, is sympathetic and true to life, and by its very slightness it is in keeping with the trivial nature of the whole subject.

This analysis of the characters of the Tales which has been made in the preceding pages reveals various aspects of Samain's treatment and conception of psychology. These aspects are resumed briefly in the following paragraphs.

The element in Samain's conception of psychology which constitutes the chief originality of the Tales is the placing of characters which are psychologically real against a background of fantastic conditions. It results from this situation that the characters, although real and living, are unusual; for Samain's sense of reality never deserts him, in spite of his poetic dreams, and he knows that a character

is always influenced by its moral and material surroundings; if these are abnormal, the character itself will be rather an exceptional one.

All Samain's characters - Hyalis, Rovère, Angisèle, Divine, Xanthis - are exceptional. But he shows such a keen psychological sense in his portrayal of them that they do become living beings for whom the reader can feel a definite sympathy. Samain's psychological sense reveals itself, in the first place, by his keen perception of facts of general psychology. For instance, when he shows us Hyalis, disappointed in love, clasping in his arms his pet lamb and kissing its curly head, he is reminding us of the very real fact that animals - cats and dogs, chiefly - can console us in our grief, for they provide to a certain extent the sympathy and also the physical proximity which we have sought in vain among humans. Similarly, he states a fact of universal psychology when he explains how Maurice comes instinctively for comfort to the woman who has more sympathy for him than any other. "Guidé par l'égoïste et infallible instinct, il vint se réfugier là où il sentait qu'il pourrait le mieux être consolé" (1). This psychological sense appears a second time in the importance

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 57.

which the author gives from time to time in his character-studies to small details - realising that in the life of the soul small details have a part to play as well as more general and outstanding circumstances. The following passage, describing the thoughts of the dying Hyalis, shows how well Samain understood the workings of the human mind, and appreciated the significance of every situation in which he placed his characters:

"Comme un homme qui part pour un long voyage rassemble ce qu'il doit emporter, Hyalis passa la journée à évoquer dans sa mémoire les heures les plus chères; il se souvenait de ses jeux puérils, des entretiens avec Glaucos, des dryades, des grands bois et de la mer; et des détails insignifiants, remontant brusquement dans sa mémoire, le touchaient plus que tout le reste. Il regarda le dernier soir tomber sur le jardin de Xylaos, sur le verger que bordait un rideau de peupliers à la cime d'argent, sur la vasque écaillée et verdissante où les colombes se posaient pour s'envoler ensuite sur le toit, sur les allées de sable fin où s'imprimaient légèrement les pas légers de Nyza."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, pp. 102-3.

Here is another passage which shows the impression which small and apparently insignificant details can make upon

the mind:

"Hyalis entendait le bruit imperceptible des petits graviers que sa tunique entraînait au passage, et chaque tintement des bracelets qui jouaient à ses poignets résonnait dans son propre coeur."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, pp. 90-91.

Samain's sense of psychological realism reveals itself a third time in the consistency with which he works out his character-studies. He always has a clear understanding of the material upon which he is working - that is to say, he appreciates to the full both the basic traits of character which he attributes to his creations, and also the exterior conditions and events which may influence the character under consideration. He creates situations such that the psychology of his characters may, and indeed must, develop in a certain direction, and thus there is a certain idea of inevitability in his conception of psychology. In these situations, and in these psychological developments, love is the chief motive-power, and the principal theme of each of the four Tales, though there may be other motive-powers - for instance, heredity in the case of Hyalis, satiety in the case of Rovere. Samain's conception of psychology is then as of an evolution, but

a very gradual one. For, with his sense of reality, he appreciates the fact that violent changes are not natural to the human mind.

We do not hesitate to affirm that Samain's characters live, and that their reality is due to the very definite sense of psychology which Samain possesses and which he shows in his perception of detail, in his appreciation of various psychological situations, and in his sense of psychological evolution. Let us add that his characters live also by the sympathy with which they are drawn, and that Samain possesses this sympathy for his characters because he gives them characteristics which he himself possesses - idealism, spirituality and especially gentleness. He loves his creations because he understands them, and he understands them because he creates them partly after his own image. And as what is not created after his own image is created from the dreams of the poet's fancy, Samain's characters have for him - and for us who know and love him - a distinctly personal appeal. They live, and they charm.

D. The Underlying Ideas. We have up to the present considered the Tales as a work of art, but their value is not purely aesthetic, and they contain matter for thought as well as for artistic appreciation. This study would not be complete without some mention



being made of the ideas which are to be found in the Tales. Samain is not an ideologist - his temperament is artistic rather than philosophical - but the artistic faculty rarely exists in any temperament without being combined with a certain degree of excellence in the qualities of mind; intellectual and artistic aptitude are virtually inseparable. The Tales, although they do not present us with any sort of philosophical system, contain some interesting ideas, which, whether they represent the author's personal and general attitude to certain aspects of life, or are merely a creation of the moment and have a purely objective value, existing only through their connection with the narration, are undoubtedly the product of an active intelligence.

This intelligence is already apparent in Samain's style, which has frequently a certain suggestive quality, introducing ideas which the reader can, if he wish, develop into a definite train of thought of his own. In some of Samain's remarks a world of notions seems to be contained. The subtlety of his wording makes us sense the presence of hidden depths of thought, of an unexpressed mystery of feelings. Much of the meaning of his phrases is more easily felt than analysed - it may be that we have there the mark of the poet. How subtly and delicately

the personality of Angisèle is conveyed by these words:

"Tout ce qui flottait épars sur cette terre de souffrance se résumait en elle, et sortait comme un conseil intime de ses gestes graves et de ses yeux pâles et profonds."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p.145.

Note how aptly these words are chosen to express the writer's thoughts, and yet how well they lend themselves to the individual reader's appreciation. We have underlined the most suggestive words and phrases, and an examination of their implication will reveal the amount of thought which is contained in each. Samain's imaginativeness reveals itself here, too, for the conception of suffering "floating", "épars", on this earth is not a usual one, and might indeed be regarded as a kind of poetic vision. And this spirit of suffering which pervades, as it were, the atmosphere of the whole world, is summed up in the character of Angisèle, and embodied in her person - a new and imaginative way of expressing a personality which has already been described to us more directly as sad and ethereal. This solemnity and spirituality in Angisèle's nature are expressed again more or less directly by her grave gestures and her pale, deep eyes, but what subtler and altogether unanalysable thought is concealed beneath the simile of the "conseil

intime"? Here is another passage, taken from "Divine Bontemps", which for pregnancy and unusualness of thought is certainly worthy of mention:

"Ainsi, la vie s'acharnait sur elle; et, à voir ses coups redoublés, on pouvait penser que la Destinée voulait parachever son oeuvre, développer jusqu'au bout l'harmonieux martyr d'une créature choisie, et faire exprimer à cette âme, macérée dans la douleur, son parfum le plus suave."

"Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 61.

Here, as in the last passage, there are certain clear conceptions - that of destiny, for instance, which we find reappearing in one phrase after another: "la vie s'acharnait sur elle...la Destinée voulait parachever son oeuvre...créature choisie..."; or that of suffering, which is vigorously expressed by the words, "macérée dans la douleur." There are other ideas in this passage more subtly conceived and expressed, which it is impossible to analyse - we feel his phrases, "l'harmonieux martyr d'une créature choisie", "son parfum le plus suave", with our knowledge of the subject we realise their aptitude, and yet we sense a fuller meaning in the mind of the writer than we are able to grasp.

Some of the ideas which are to be found in the Tales are merely of an incidental order - suggested to the writer by the particular part of the subject with which he is dealing, but not concerned with the theme as a whole. Such is the notion of a hidden life existing among the ornaments in a glass cabinet, which acts as an introduction to "Xanthis":

"Chaque fois que je me suis attardé à regarder des étagères ou des vitrines, ces petits asiles de bois précieux et de cristal, où s'évaporent des parfums surannés, où flotte une attendrissante poussière d'autrefois, où l'âme noble et mélancolique du Luxe vibre dans un silence de pensée, j'ai toujours cru qu'une vie particulière devait s'y vivre à l'abri des grands rideaux profonds, loin des promiscuités et des banalités du réel."

"Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 9.

Of the same incidental nature are certain ideas on beauty which Samain expresses in the course of the Tales. We shall shortly see that in "Rovère et Angisèle" Samain works out a more definite conception of beauty, and one with a more universal significance. But there are in the Tales one or two other ideas on this subject which are not intimately enough connected with the main conception to be incorporated with it in an examination of Samain's

philosophy (we use the word in a wide sense) of beauty; which nevertheless as ideas are not without value. Here, for instance, is a reflexion upon the undoubted physiological fact that the state of the mind influences that of the body, which prospers only when the mind is calm. Angisèle, when she at last finds happiness, seems to radiate a physical loveliness which she never possessed before:

"Comme si la Beauté, dans l'ordre mystérieux de l'univers, n'était que la fixation matérielle du bonheur."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 161.

Notice how Samain generalises from a particular fact, and extends his reflexion to the whole universe, considered in all its different aspects of beauty. Another idea suggested by the immediate subject is the beauty of tears. When Hyalis, becoming mortal, weeps for the first time, he exclaims:

"Les dieux ne connaissent pas la douceur de pleurer".

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 99.

These examples of reflexions scattered through the Tales should suffice to show that the style in which they are written is not merely narrative and descriptive, but that there is a definite thought-element present. Quite apart from these merely incidental reflexions, there are several ideas which reappear frequently throughout the Tales, and which constitute so many themes, representing

different aspects of Samain's attitude to his subject. These themes, it will be seen, are finally linked together in the closing pages of "Rovère et Angisèle" (1), which seem to sum up all the thoughts contained in the Tales. "Xanthis" is always to be separated from the other stories because of its lack of depth, and it does indeed contain little serious thought; but, putting "Xanthis" aside, the most striking observation which issues from an examination of the themes of the Tales is the unity and even the evolution of thought in "Divine Bontemps", "Hyalis", and "Rovère et Angisèle."

A definite conception of life runs through these three Tales. There is, let us repeat, nothing approaching a philosophical system here. But we do find the expression of an intelligent man's attitude towards certain aspects - the higher aspects - of life, and towards certain of life's problems. The first theme that is common to the three Tales is that of idealism. We might even say that this is the theme of the Tales, and that all the others which are treated by Samain - beauty, love, sacrifice, joy and sorrow, death - are only different facets of this one theme. M. Bocquet considers that the characters of the Tales are "des idées pures". Although we claim for them a psychological

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(1) See further, pp. 166-9.

life, we do not deny that they have, at the same time, a symbolical value, and serve to express certain ideas. A moment's consideration will show that Samain's characters are all idealists - Divine, with her striving for complete self-abnegation; Hyalis, longing for the love of the soul and shrinking from that of the body; Rovère, who raises his very sensuality to the height of an art, who is a worshipper of all beauty, at first of physical beauty only, and later of the higher moral kind; Angisèle, like Divine with her ideal of self-sacrifice and trial, and like Rovère with her aspirations towards beauty and joy; even in "Xanthis", we find the bust wearing himself out in "des efforts épuisants pour arriver à la Beauté"(1) - a trace of the same idealism which is an outstanding feature of the characters of the later tales. This idealism, being common to all the characters in the last three Tales, is a theme which links the stories together, and thus the abstract idea emanates from the characters, and lives as it were beside them; in this sense, the characters may be said to be ideas.

Numerous passages throughout the Tales show that Samain regarded beauty in its different forms with an

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(1) "Xanthis", Vol. III, pp. 20-21.

almost mystic reverence. He says of Xanthis, in one of the more serious passages of the first Tale:

"Il se dégageait d'elle une beauté mystérieuse et grave, dont le frisson avait quelque chose de sacré."

"Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 12.

Two quotations from "Rovère et Angisèle" elaborate this conception of beauty. Rovère saw in feminine loveliness, "l'éclatant triomphe de cette force universelle qui menait la création à la beauté comme à sa fin suprême" (1).

In the hymn of praise to Dionysos we find the words:

"De ta poitrine...jaillit le flot intarissable et sacré de la vie, et la vie est la beauté, et la beauté est la fleur du monde."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 119-20.

It is clear then, that for Samain the ideal, the "fin suprême" of life, is beauty.

In these passages Samain is using the word "beauty" in the sense of material or plastic beauty; it will be seen, however, that in the main he recognises two kinds of beauty the physical and the moral. Men of thought throughout the ages have contended that moral beauty is superior to physical

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 117.



beauty, and represents a higher ideal; that this is Samain's attitude also is clearly seen in "Rovère et Angisèle", where he shows how Rovère evolves from an adoration of the lower, plastic type of beauty, to the higher type of beauty which is nobility of character; in the same way Hyalis, soon satisfied with carnal love, aspires to a higher love, that of the soul. Samain chooses a single form of moral beauty as the underlying theme of the three Tales, and it is a form which may be considered as one of the highest types of the ideal, since it requires for its realisation a tremendous amount of effort and determination, of strength and elevation of character. This theme is sacrifice. In "Divine Bontemps", indeed, sacrifice is even more than the underlying theme - it is the very tissue of the tale. Divine's "gôût passionné et presque barbare du sacrifice"<sup>(1)</sup> has a parallel in the psychology of the characters of the other stories. Does not Hyalis die gladly because he knows that he is giving up his life for Nyza? -

"La pensée...qu'il faisait ainsi le don même de son être illuminait en lui des profondeurs."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 101.

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(1) "Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 44.

Angisèle, too, before the coming of Rovère, has but one thought - that of serving others. And Rovère, seeing this unselfish service, discovers in sacrifice a higher ideal than the ideal of material beauty which was his before.

Sacrifice seems to be, in Samain's eyes, the first form of moral beauty; and all that is inseparable from sacrifice is by that fact beautiful too. Death itself, considered as the supreme sacrifice (see the description of Hyalis' end) is a lovely thing, for it is the realisation of an ideal. Sadness is beautiful; as Rovère says to Angisèle:

"Ne dis point de mal de ton pays...c'est à lui, c'est à sa tristesse que ton âme doit son incomparable beauté."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol.III, p.154.

Even actual suffering is beautiful at times - when begotten by love, for instance; for love, according to Samain, is deepest, and therefore contains most moral beauty, when it gives and does not take, when it suffers and does not enjoy - when, in fact, it is sacrificial.

"L'amour le plus profond n'est pas celui qui jouit, mais celui qui souffre." (1)

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol.III, p.155

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(1) Compare with this idea the Romantic conception of the beauty of grief. Baudelaire, "Sois belle et sois triste" and Musset, "Les chants désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux."

Suffering is an integral part of beauty, for only through suffering can we hope to approach the ideal which is absolute beauty. Samain sees the creative power of suffering; only by effort, by self-denial, by actual anguish, can the things which are worth while be produced, can the ideal be obtained:

"Tout tend vers la Beauté, tout lutte, tout s'efforce, tout s'épuise pour la réaliser; mais, comme elle est infinie, ceux-là seuls s'en approchent le plus qui doivent le plus à la Douleur. C'est dans la douleur que tout se crée dans le monde."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 155.

This idealistic conception of sacrifice as the highest type of moral beauty, is developed throughout the Tales. But in the last tale there seems to be a certain change in Samain's attitude towards his theme. It is as though he had studied the question more deeply, and the idealist in him, whose spirit has been exalted in the preceding tales by the idea of wonderful self-denial, is in "Rovère et Angisèle", whilst retaining his enthusiasm for the moral beauty of sacrifice, revolted at the thought of the suffering which that sacrifice implies. It is true that at times he still sees the beauty in this sacrifice; but the other side of the question now strikes

him as well, and in this last tale there is a deep and even sometimes an anguished note of doubt. In "Hyalis" and "Divine Bontemps" sacrifice is unconditionally exalted. In "Rovère et Angisèle" a problem appears - to whom is one's first duty in life - to oneself or to others? For to live for others implies moral perfection, but it also implies suffering; to live for oneself implies happiness, but, in a sense, a less ideal existence. Should personal happiness be preferred to moral perfection, or not? This is the problem which issues from Rovère and Angisèle's discussions. Rovère sees the beauty of sacrifice and suffering more clearly than Angisèle, because he contrasts it with his own egotism, and because he has not endured the suffering which she has endured. Angisèle, on the other hand, is weary of living for others, and weary of the sadness of her present life; through bitter experience she knows that "les larmes aussi brûlent à la fin".<sup>(1)</sup> The answer to the problem seems to be contained in the last pages, when Angisèle speaks, no longer of her suffering, but of the happiness which is hers at last. This is probably the most significant passage in the Tales:

"Ecoute, ami, dit Angisèle, en forçant doucement

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 156.

Rovère à se rasseoir près d'elle, ne t'ai-je point confié autrefois ce que je souhaitais le plus au monde; ici, j'ai réalisé mon rêve, ne me plains donc pas; j'ai connu le bonheur, et quelque chose de supérieur et d'irrésistible proclame en moi que c'est là le but de toute vie; mais cette même voix m'affirme aussi que c'en est le terme. Toute chose l'ayant atteint s'en détache doucement, sa destinée accomplie, et c'est ainsi que je ferai à mon tour, car mon âme a compris la loi, plus claire ici que dans notre triste pays de deuil et de misère, où la pensée de la mort est si cruelle, parce qu'on attend toujours la vie."

"Rovère et Angisèle", Vol.III, p.163.

Rovère and Angisèle, having attained happiness, die in peace; it must not be forgotten that, while Hyalis' death is rather the suicide of despair than the harmonious close of a life in which happiness has been attained, he does in his last moments know the perfection of love, for his soul seems to unite with that of Myza as he gazes upon her wonderful beauty. In this respect the end of "Hyalis" seems to foreshadow the conclusion at which Samain arrives in "Rovère et Angisèle" - that if sacrifice is one aspect of the ideal of moral beauty, happiness is another; that

we have the right and even the duty to live, and not merely to exist. If we have lived, and realised the ideal of happiness death will not be bitter, but will seem the natural fulfilment of our destiny.

Before concluding this study of the ideas contained in Samain's Tales, we must devote some space to the discussion of another theme which we have just mentioned - that of destiny. This theme reappears in each of the four tales. Even in "Xanthis", Samain speaks of "l'inexorable Destin"<sup>(1)</sup>. In "Divine Bontemps" we find the passage already quoted in another connection:

"A voir ses coups redoublés, on pouvait penser que la Destinée voulait parachever son oeuvre, et développer jusqu'au bout l'harmonieux martyre d'une créature choisie."

"Divine Bontemps", Vol. III, p. 61.

In "Hyalis" the fatalist conception of a life in which everything is planned for us in advance is further developed, and is interwoven with the whole tissue of the tale. It is here that direct expression is given to the conception:

"La première loi du monde est la conformité des êtres à leur destin,"

"Hyalis", Vol. III, pp. 76-7

and again, in the words of the swineherd to Hyalis:

"Il faut que ta destinée s'accomplisse; tu as vu

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(1) "Xanthis", Vol. III, p. 54.

la fille de Xylaos, et c'est par l'amour que tu monteras à la douleur."

"Hyalis", Vol. III, p. 87-8.

Finally, in "Rovère et Angisèle", in addition to the last summing-up of the reflexions on life's purpose, we find other passages which convey the impression of Fate working in men's lives. When Rovère and Angisèle met for the first time, we read that "l'esprit de la Solitude mêla leurs destinées" (1). Rovère "nourrissait en lui l'obscur désir de s'essayer contre la destinée" (2). Nevertheless, although the theme of destiny gives a certain unity of conception to the Tales, it does not seem to be such an integral part of the subject as that of the ideals of beauty, suffering and sacrifice, which form the very theme itself of the last three stories.

The conception of life as a quest for beauty, and especially for beauty attained through love and sacrifice, while logically defensible, contains a degree of idealism, of poetic exaltation, which removes the Tales from the atmosphere of everyday life. It must be

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(1) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 129.

(2) "Rovère et Angisèle", Vol. III, p. 145.

remembered that the Tales, although written in prose, are poetic creations, and the author, in dealing with the underlying ideas connected with his subject, has taken advantage of poetic license as he has done in his treatment of his material, and has combined a measure of fantasy with the initial truth of the conception. There is the reservation to be made, of course, that the fantasy does not outweigh the initial truth; the latter undoubtedly exists in the Tales, for the nobility of self-sacrifice and the sombre beauty of grief are facts of real life; and although it is impossible to judge to what extent the author of an objective, narrative work may be expressing his own philosophy in the mouths of his characters, we can readily believe that Samain had, in the main, faith in the ideas which we have just been discussing. But the theory of the workings of destiny is probably merely an artistic device; the characters are given a symbolic value for poetic reasons; and the whole of the philosophy of the Tales is to a certain extent idealised, exalted, in order that the poetic atmosphere of the work may be retained.

In spite of the importance of the imaginative element throughout the Tales, and of its poetic significance, the fantasy which reveals itself in the imaginative quality of the themes, in the unusual conception of the psychology,



in the idealism of the underlying ideas, is not introduced uniquely for poetic reasons. In treating his material fantastically, Samain is acting in conformity with the tradition of the "conte". "Xanthis" and the companion-stories are not novels or novelettes, that is, narrative-works whose aim is to give a representation, or even as far as possible a reproduction, of real life. The novel, in so far as it is a "genre" of narrative literature, is descended like the modern "conte" from the early tales, myths and legends of popular origin; but it has evolved further than the "conte" and become a more sophisticated, more intellectual literary "genre"; and although its representation of real life is given in narrative form, the interest lies far more often in the representation than in the narrative proper. The tale has kept much more of its primitive origin; its aim is to appeal, not to the intellect and to the emotion, but to the imagination - hence the fantasy which is characteristic of it; its aim is to divert, to amuse - hence its relative shortness, hence the importance of the narrative element. The real difference between the novel and the "conte" would seem to be that the novel puts us in presence of events which we must suppose to be happening now; the "conte" tells us now something which happened in the past, "once upon a time", as the fairy-

stories say, and thus we are immediately a degree further from reality. For this reason, also, then, fantasy is proper to the tale. The latter, in its origins, was addressed to a naïve audience, and found its being in the mass of folk-lore and mythology in which the soul of primitive peoples has revealed itself, with its powerful qualities of imagination and even of mysticism. The fairy-stories of Grimm and Anderson, collected from this stock of folk-lore, show what a role fantasy plays in these earlier tales. Samain's Tales, it will have been seen, have a certain sophistication, dependent upon the careful beauty of the style, and the introduction of psychological realism, totally unknown to the primitive tale; but in the midst of this sophistication he respects the tradition of the "conte" by the (at least) superficial simplicity which characterises his language, by its lyrical quality, and by the certain symbolic value which he gives to his subjects - a modernisation of the moral which is so frequently incorporated in the primitive tale.

Such a literary form as the "conte" is admirably suited to Samain's talent. We saw, in our study of his poetry, that his art consisted to a great extent in his delicacy of touch, in the daintiness and grace which he

brings to the treatment of his subjects; on the other hand, the reproach which is most often made about Samain's work is that he lacks force. We do not believe that Samain could have written a successful novel; he has not the power of inspiration, the capacity to envisage and to handle a broad and complex subject; he is a dreamer, and revery is not in its place in a novel - at any rate, not in large quantities. But in the "conte" force is not needed, for it appeals to the imagination, a far more supple faculty than intellect, or even emotion; what is needed in the "conte" is just the delicacy of touch, the fine sense of beauty, the poetic dream-quality, which already characterise the best of Samain's verse; and these qualities are seen to even better advantage in the Tales.

III. "POLYPHÈME".

It is all the more astonishing that Samain's Tales have passed almost unnoticed since their publication in 1903, as the beauties of "Polyphème", the poet's two-act tragedy in verse, written in the months immediately preceding his death, have been enthusiastically recognised by public and critics alike. In our opinion, the Tales and "Polyphème" are equal in merit, and even present striking similarities in the treatment of the subjects; what is of value in "Polyphème" appears to us to consist just of those aspects of the work which are already found in the Tales - the richness of psychological perception and representation, the poetic beauty of the language, and the nobility of the underlying philosophy. Because this is our sincere opinion, and also because it is our aim in this thesis to illustrate especially the high rank which the Tales should occupy among Samain's works, it is these aspects of "Polyphème" which we propose to study in this chapter. We must first summarise the work already done by various critics on Samain's treatment of his sources, for this provides information which is indispensable to a further study of "Polyphème"; we shall then consider these three aspects of the play - psychology,

style, and underlying philosophy - which are foreshadowed in the Tales, and which, although already studied in other works of criticism, do not seem to us to have yet been given their full importance.

I. The Sources. Previous critics<sup>(1)</sup> have not failed to point out that in "Polyphème", at least, Samain's treatment of his subject is original - for he has not hesitated to deform completely the legend of Polyphemus. In the Homeric epic Polyphemus, the mightiest of the Cyclops, is a hideous and savage monster, who imprisons Ulysses, and whose one eye is put out by the latter when he makes his escape from the clutches of his foe. Later Greek writers represent Polyphemus as the ugly and unwieldy lover of the nymph Galatea, who rejects him and the magnificent presents he brings her, in favour of the young and beautiful shepherd Acis; Polyphemus' unrequited love for Galatea is the theme of the eleventh of Theocritus' "Bucolics".

It is mainly upon this second legend, which, it may be seen, has nothing in common with the first, except

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(1) F. Gohin, "L'oeuvre poétique d'Albert Samain".

A. de Bersaucourt, "Albert Samain".

that the hero of the two stories is the same) that Samain works. His play is a love-tragedy; and the three principal characters are those of Theocritus' poem, Polyphemus, Galatea, and Acis. Samain has softened and humanised the savage nature of the Cyclops, and has added a character to the story - Galatea's little brother Lycas. In addition he has taken from the Homeric legend the detail of Polyphemus' blindness; but in this modern tragedy, it is the Cyclops who blinds himself, in his jealous despair, at the sight of the young lovers' happiness.

It is important to note that the three changes which Samain makes in the original material provided by the legends are all of psychological significance. The conception of Polyphemus' character has been entirely altered and humanised (at least from that of the Homeric tradition - in Theocritus he is already less savage). Lycas is introduced in order to provide opportunities for further psychological revelation on the part of the Cyclops (that is, to act as a foil to Polyphemus' character), and in order that Polyphemus may have a companion and a comforter in his anguish, someone on whom he may lavish his caresses exactly as Hyalis lavishes his on his pet lamb. Finally, the blinding of Polyphemus becomes an action on

the part of the monster himself, and so has also a definite importance in the revelation of the Cyclops' character.

2. The Literary Value of "Polyphème".

(a) The Psychology. In "Polyphème" Samain again reveals himself as a sympathetic and subtle psychologist. The studies of Polyphème, Galatea and Lycas are all admirable. Acis alone is not drawn in any detail; but the slightness of this character-portrayal is consistent with the unimportance of the part played by the shepherd in the development of the action. The latter, indeed, depends entirely upon the psychological reactions of Polyphemus and Galatea, and Acis appears only as the rather passive object of Galatea's choice.

Polyphemus. In his study of Polyphemus, Samain has drawn a being psychologically complex. The Cyclops of the early legend is of course a primitive creature, hideous and mis-shapen, animal in his desires, and more subject to physical than to moral suffering. Samain has kept something of the savage nature of the Cyclops, and also his physical repulsiveness, but he has humanised this nature by making it capable of gentleness and kindness, and at the same time - for else Polyphemus would have no resemblance to a human being - making it

susceptible to extreme mental suffering. Thus Polyphemus is at once violent and gentle-hearted - but so skilfully are these two dominant traits woven into the Cyclops' character that their presence there together proclaims no lack of harmony.

The portrayal of a passionate and hopeless love gives ample scope for scenes where Polyphemus reveals the violence which is such an outstanding element in his nature. He is at times almost an animal in the frenzy of his love and of his jealous despair. He himself paints the nymph a pitiable picture of his suffering:

"Tu ne sais pas que j'ai le feu dans les entrailles;  
Que, le jour, je me roule en sang dans les broussailles,  
Et qu'en haut sur les monts souvent le fauve a fui  
En m'entendant hurler aux étoiles, la nuit!"

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 186.

and even the somewhat spineless Acis is moved by this great and uncontrolled grief:

"Je l'ai vu se traîner a genoux dans les ronces,  
Imitant comme un fou ta voix et tes reponses,  
Et poussant des sanglots si terribles, vois-tu,  
Et si tristes qu'au coeur un frisson m'a couru!"

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 215.



In his animal passion he is capable of inflicting physical violence on the woman he loves, and his transports even express themselves at times in a brutal desire to take her life:

"Oh! bondir...les surprendre...et m'élancer sur elle...

Et lui tordre le cou, son cou de tourterelle...

Et la jeter sanglante!!..."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, pp. 203-4.

In the first act there is a well-drawn study of the ultimate rousing of Polyphemus' passion (for he is usually patient and long-suffering) in face of Galatea's continued and exasperating indifference to his advances, and of her intimacy with Acis, which has not escaped the Cyclops' notice. Driven by his jealousy and his despair, Polyphemus arrives at a pitch of feeling so great that he can no longer hide his love; and, in a wave of masterfulness, he realises that he possesses over Galatea the superiority of strength, which, if it only conquers her indifference to arouse in her feelings of actual repulsion, can at least make her listen to his declaration of love:

"Non...Non...Tu resteras a la fin...Je le veux.

Je te tiens; je suis fort; sauve-toi si tu peux."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 185.

Such fits of violence represent the mythological

side of Polyphemus' nature; this does not exactly mean that these feelings are non-human, but that they are primitive, and lack the control of the civilised human being. Between these primitive traits of character and the gentler, more characteristically human ones (for the primitive man is akin to the brute) transitional qualities reveal themselves, which link up the two sides of the Cyclops' character and thus prevent these contrasting qualities from being logically irreconcilable in the same nature. The Cyclops, because of his primitive nature, is a creature of impulses - and we have seen this lack of reflexion and so of self-control in his utter abandonment to his passion; but (and here the gentler, more civilised side of his nature declares itself) these transports of anger or hatred are invariably followed by corresponding movements of remorse, and earnest efforts at reconciliation with those whom he has offended by his violence. For instance, he asks Galatea's forgiveness after he has forced her to listen to him, in the scene previously described. In the same way, the bitter resentment which he feels at the recollection of Galatea's scorn is immediately softened when he sees her lying asleep in all the grace of her youth and beauty:

"Toute cette amertume en moi, sombre et cruelle,  
Quand je la vois ainsi, s'efface."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 177.



Passer sur soi l'haleine ardente d'un desir,  
Et déborder pourtant d'amour et de tendresse!"

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 202.

With this longing for affection, we are back again in the realm of the most elementary (but none the less human) feelings.

Nothing could be more realistically human than Polyphemus' moral blindness where Galatea is concerned. For, as we shall see, the nymph is very inferior to him morally, but her charm and beauty have such power over him that he will risk his life to procure for her a flower at which, when at last he brings it to her, she will scarcely deign to glance. He is almost ridiculous in his humble adoration of this child of fifteen - though there are moments when he realises his own folly:

"Humblement, pauvrement, mendier des caresses,  
Sans recevoir jamais, d'un geste de dédain,  
Qu'une aumône qu'on donne en retirant sa main."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 202.

This infatuation fills us with pity rather than with a desire to laugh; and indeed, pathos abounds in this play. Nothing could be more pathetic than Polyphemus' realisation of his essential unattractiveness; or the sadness, the boredom and the languor which alternate

with his fits of violence, and which constitute the very first aspect of the Cyclops' nature which the poet shows us:

"A présent, lourdement, je traîne ma journée.  
Vers un seul but mon âme à toute heure est tournée.  
Je marche sans savoir, et, de longs jours ardents,  
Je demeure immobile et des sanglots aux dents,  
A regarder mourir le flot sur le rivage."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 172.

Polyphemus is a very lovable character, and he appears lovable to the reader not merely for his essential good-heartedness - "l'infini de son coeur"<sup>(1)</sup> - which reveals itself both in his friendship with Lycas, and in his final forgiveness of Galatea, but also for his very pitifulness. And he is pitiful as a human is pitiful, because he has human failings - because he is strong in passion, and weak in reflexion and decision. He rarely finds the courage - and even more rarely seeks it - to master his grief. For one thing, there is a complete absence of hope in his character. We might

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(1) "Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 173.

alter the old adage without impairing its truth, and say, "While there's courage there's hope", and certainly Polyphemus' lack of hope is due to a complete lack of moral courage. Certain strength of will is needed, it is true, to face deliberately the whole truth of Galatea's relations with Acis<sup>(1)</sup>, and to take the last irrevocable step<sup>(2)</sup>; but, on the other hand, both these actions reveal a shrinking-back in the face of suffering.

"J'ai mieux aimé vider d'un seul trait la douleur",

("Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 209)

he says - because he realises that the worst suffering is that of uncertainty. M. Bonneau has pointed out, that as regards the Cyclops' self-blinding and his departure "vers la mer", the most courageous action would have been to go on living<sup>(3)</sup>. Of course, we are all ready to moralise on the actions of the characters we meet with at the theatre

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(1) See further, pp. 191-2, and in the text, Vol. III, pp. 205-11.

(2) i.e., to put out his own eyes.

(3) G. Bonneau, "Albert Samain, poète symboliste", p. 115.

"L'acte de Polyphème est une lâcheté larmoyante dans un affaïssement moral...le sacrifice véritable eût consisté à vivre pour continuer d'aimer."

or in novels; but certainly the human impulse is always to escape any avoidable suffering.

Nevertheless, in spite of Polyphemus' very human qualities, the duality of his nature proves that Samain has not altogether, as H. Bocquet claims <sup>(1)</sup>, "ôté le merveilleux à la légende". Polyphemus is a Cyclops, a primitive creature; the savage traits in his character are marks of this primitive being; and his portrait only remains consistent and true to life as long as we realise the fact that he is a Cyclops, that is to say, an imaginary creature, related to man, but not quite human. A certain fantasy is retained in the creation of this character. This point is important, for it shows that Samain has not altered his peculiar conception of psychological portrayal, of which we saw a number of examples in the Tales - that is to say, a realist study of an unusual or exceptional character. Galatea. In the characterisation of Galatea, Samain is face to face with the same difficulty as in his representation of Polyphemus - that of combining with consistency two contrasting psychological aspects in the same character. For Galatea too has a dual nature. She is

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(1) "Albert Samain, sa vie, son oeuvre".

two-sided in her mental and moral development; for she is not a grown woman, but an adolescent, and if at times her character reveals her approaching womanhood, at other times she has all the naïveté of a child. Polyphemus realises very well how unformed her character is when he says:

"C'est une enfant en somme, un petit coeur frivole,  
Qui n'est pas même heureux de faire tant souffrir!"

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 201.

The key-note of Galatea's character is her unconsciousness of other people's feelings. In the scene in which she appears with Polyphemus, her indifference to his attentions, and her absolute non-realisation of his love, are only explicable by her childishness. A grown woman in nearly every case instinctively suspects the existence of a man's love for her, and however little her own inclinations respond to his, the realisation that she is loved makes her take a certain interest in him; Galatea appears totally uninterested in the whole question. She has not, moreover, the self-control which comes with womanhood. She is capable of extreme irritability when crossed, and, behaving exactly like a child, when Polyphemus has angered and frightened her she vents her spleen on her small brother, and scolds him for imaginary misdemeanours - a delightful



touch of psychological realism. Indeed, nowhere does her childishness appear more than on the occasions when she adopts the tones and gestures of a woman - as in her haughty assumption of responsibility where Lycas is concerned, or in the exaggerated account which she gives to Acis of her bravery in front of Polyphemus' savage love-making:

"Muette ainsi qu'une statue  
Je l'ai bravé."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 193.

On the other hand, she is a grown woman where her love for Acis is concerned - for here it is not a question of mere affection nor of flattered acceptance of the shepherd's attentions - her love for him, if it lacks the violence of Polyphemus' passion, is nevertheless true love, and has the power of transfiguring her whole being, so that Polyphemus detects her feelings for Acis in spite of her denials:

"Tout, son front et ses yeux, sa voix, tout ment en elle;  
Aussitôt qu'elle en parle, elle devient plus belle!"

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 202.

She is a woman too in her self-assurance. When Polyphemus' passion breaks out, and he forces her to listen to his declaration of love, she knows only a moment's fear, and

then her feelings towards Polyphemus change to impatience, irritation and disgust. Although she is not yet enough of a woman to exploit her power over men deliberately, she is old enough to realise vaguely that she does possess this power, and this realisation gives her confidence in herself.

It is only natural that this immature character should have many faults. Galatea is selfish, irritable, and empty-headed, and certainly - at any rate in her present state of development - unworthy of the love which the great-hearted Polyphemus offers her. Here lies the real tragedy - not in the hopelessness of the Cyclops' passion, nor in his self-blinding and his death - but in his unjustified love, in his self-abasement before a child who by her very nature, naively egoistic and absolutely carefree, is incapable of understanding what he feels. The contrast is a tragic one between these two natures, for whom there can be absolutely no communion of spirit, and yet of whom one is breaking his heart for love of the other. Nevertheless, Galatea is not so unworthy as to make Polyphemus' love for her entirely incomprehensible. She is thoughtless, and so appears selfish; but she is good-natured enough when all goes well, and when she is

not too preoccupied with her own desires to think of others. Polyphemus is not alone in loving her - young Lycas too has a great affection for his sister, which all her fits of bad temper cannot destroy, and even this child seems to realise that her nature is fundamentally good:

"Elle est si bonne et puis si belle,"

("Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 207.)

he says. In the scene where Galatea appears with Polyphemus, we see how sweet and lovable she can be at moments. The sight of Polyphemus' tears, if their exact significance escapes her, nevertheless moves her to pity; and her swift movement of repentance for her thoughtlessness reveals the good-heartedness which does exist in her nature:

"Ton âme est, je le sais, douce pour Galatée.

Tu la traites toujours comme une enfant gâtée:

Alors elle en abuse et manque de raison.

Mais sa tête est si folle et ton coeur est si bon!"

"Polyphème", Vol. III, pp. 181-2.

She is not only good-hearted, but has a very charming personality - coquettish, delicate, laughter-loving. Can we wonder that this graceful and joyous nymph, in everything the opposite of Polyphemus' blunt, downright nature, and dainty while he is clumsy and heavy, makes by this very contrast an instant appeal to the Cyclops?

The mixture of good and bad in Galatea's character make of her a very human person. Nevertheless, here again we are face to face with an exceptional psychology. For we get the impression, not of an ordinary adolescent of fifteen, but of a child who has grown up too soon. We can only praise Samain for the realism which he has brought to the study of such a character.

We have already seen, in "Hyalis", Samain's success in the portrayal of child-psychology. In the character of Lycas we have another example of this. The admirable scene in the second act, where Polyphemus questions the boy on the subject of his sister's intimacy with Acis, has already been pointed out by other critics<sup>(1)</sup>. At first Lycas replies frankly to the Cyclops' questions; he recounts naïvely the lovers' interviews, and unsuspectingly reveals to Polyphemus that Galatea has lied, and that, contrary to the assurance she has given to the monster, Acis comes to see her every day. Then, slowly perceiving Polyphemus' emotion, and the increased urgency of his questioning, the boy becomes at first astonished, then troubled, hesitates, stammers out

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(1) F. Gohin, "L'oeuvre poétique d'Albert Samain", p. 53.

that his sister has forbidden him to speak, takes refuge in silence and tears; finally, in face of Polyphemus' uncontrolled rage, he gives a despairing nod in answer to the Cyclops' question, "S'embrassent-ils?", and instinctively realising the gravity of his reply, flings himself into his tormentor's arms, and sobs on his breast. Child as he is, the experience of the last few minutes has taught him that it is not always politic to tell the truth, and when footsteps are heard on the road, he assures Polyphemus that it is Galatea coming home - alone; in actual fact Acis is with her. But we should scarcely expect a small boy to be a consummate actor in a love-intrigue, and Polyphemus realises at once, from the hesitation in Lycas' tone, that he is lying. And the boy, incapable of real understanding of the situation, but with an intuition that something terrible may happen now, flings himself in front of him, and implores him to spare Galatea, appealing to the Cyclops' affection for his sister, assuring him that she meant no harm in deceiving him.

The rôle of Lycas is, of course, introduced primarily as a foil to the characters of Polyphemus and Galatea. His presence in the play gives further opportunities for a study both of Polyphemus' good-heartedness (for the Cyclops loves the boy, and the two are excellent

friends) and of the brutality of which the monster is capable in his moments of passion - in the scene just recounted he ill-treats the child shamefully, in his endeavour to extract the truth from him. It serves also to reveal certain aspects of Galatea's character which otherwise might pass unexpressed - her irritability, and the domineering elder-sisterly airs which she adopts towards her small brother. But Lycas is not merely a foil to the two principal characters; he has a personality of his own. Like the child that he is, he wants to be played with, and cannot understand why his sister refuses to take any notice of him when Acis is there:

"Jamais vous ne voulez m'emmener avec vous.

Pourquoi?"

"Polypheme", Vol. III, p. 198.

It is exactly the attitude which a child does adopt in real life towards a pair of lovers - not a complete unconsciousness of the situation, but a complete incomprehension that his company may not be welcome to them. Very realistic too is his childish malice, his desire that Galatea should be jealous of him where Polyphemus' friendship is concerned:

Lycas: "Réponds...Ne m'aimes-tu pas plus que Galatée?"

Polyphemus: "Pourquoi?"

Lycas: "Pour qu'elle en soit jalouse et  
dépitée."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, pp. 176-7.

Lycas is a very delicate, and (like all the characters in the play) a very human creation.

The preceding pages clearly show, we think, that Samain's conception and treatment of psychology is the same in "Polyphème" as in the Tales. Polyphemus and Galatea reveal the same duality of character, and hence the same psychological complexity, as Hyalis or Rovère. Lycas is painted with the same sympathy, and the same delicate touches of humour, as the young faun. Moreover, the general presentation of the characters as exceptional beings, endowed nevertheless with human thoughts and feelings, is identical in the two works.

(b) The Poetry. The poetry of "Polyphème" helps a great deal to make the whole play a creation of beauty. There are two charming choruses of nymphs:

"Nymphes des bois et des rivières,

Nymphes des sources, des clairières,

L'archer cuirassé d'or a redoublé d'ardeur:

Venez...Les grands bois noirs ouvrent leur profondeur.

"Gagnons nos plus secrets asiles...

La mer miroite autour des îles;

Les lézards brûlent, immobiles.

"Le ciel palpite, ardent et bleu;

Nos bouches respirent du feu.

"La terre à la chaleur se pâme;

Nos bras étreignent de la flamme.

"Cherchons, dans l'antre obscur, pour nos lèvres blessées,

L'eau qui pleure en larmes glacées....."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, pp. 169-70.

"Nymphes des bois, nymphes des eaux,

Naiades ceintes de roseaux,

Petites nymphes des ruisseaux,

"Qui courez tout le jour à travers les étangs

Sur les grands nénuphars flottants,

"Un vent frais s'est levé sur les routes pondreuses:

Quittez vos retraites ombreuses

Et livrez vos bras nus aux brises amoureuses....."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 216.

Notice the grace of this poetic device (the introduction of the nymphs' choruses) by which Samain indicates the passing of time, and gives to the play the pastoral atmosphere of antiquity. In these choruses, and in incidental allusions throughout the dialogue, the whole



lovely Sicilian countryside, which forms the background of the play, is evoked for us - its rocky and shrub-covered mountains, its forests and streams, its pastures and its sea. The sheer beauty of Polyphemus' apostrophe to his mother-earth calls for special mention:

"Belle mer écumeuse et bleue où je suis né,  
Mer, chaque aurore, neuve à mon oeil étonné,  
Golfe aux eaux de cristal...Montagne aux belles lignes,  
Bords d'étangs caressés au plumage des cygnes.  
Sources froides...ruisseaux...feuillage bruissant...  
Comme je t'adorais, Cybèle au coeur puissant!  
Grands chênes pleins d'oiseaux, troncs à l'écorce rude,  
Comme j'étais royal dans votre solitude!  
Et comme, à vous pareil, au renouveau des ans,  
Je sentais mon coeur vierge éclater de printemps!  
J'étais alors le fils bien-aimé de la terre.  
La terre était à moi, la terre était ma mère;  
Et quand je m'étendais sur elle quelquefois,  
Baigné du vent du large et de l'odeur des bois,  
Il me semblait sentir une vague caresse  
Du fond du sol sacré répondre à ma tendresse."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 171.

These passages recall the natural descriptions in Samain's lyrical poems, but we have here a wider aspect of nature -

here she is glorious, because vast, and also because the characters are living the life of nature, as Hyalis does in the Tales; so she really is for them "Cybèle au coeur puissant", their mother. This pantheistic feeling for nature intensifies the material beauty of the descriptions.

It is true that the verse is inclined to reveal slightly too much the care with which it is written. (The Tales too might possibly be reproached with this fault.) "Ars est celare artem", and the images, beautiful as they are, appear at times slightly "recherchées" - this mythological representation of the sunrise, for instance, in the opening chorus:

"Levant leurs sabots d'or, ses quatre chevaux blancs  
Ont des flammes à la crinière."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 170.

But we must not forget, that when the subject is fantastic, a certain amount of fantasy in the style is also permissible, and even desirable. Moreover, on the whole the mythological references, and the descriptions of pastoral life which are introduced, succeed in giving local colour, and adding to the beauty of the whole, without appearing artificial, as the following extract will show:

"Je veux offrir alors à la source du bois,  
Puis aux nymphes, du lait, des figues et des noix,  
Un agneau nouveau-né, du miel et deux houlettes  
Avec un chapelet de sombres violettes."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 197.

The music of the verse is also to be remarked upon. The words are obviously chosen for their beauty of sound, as will have appeared from the passages already quoted; and their melody is clearer, more sonorous and more decided than the faint though sweet strains of Samain's earlier intuitive or symbolist poetry. In fact, except that the vehicle of expression is different - verse instead of prose - the language of "Polyphème" possesses the same beauties as that of the Tales - harmony, poetic imagery, charm of natural descriptions.

(c) Underlying Philosophy. The third characteristic which "Polyphème" has in common with the Tales is the philosophic or symbolic value of the subject. We find here a broader, more universal attitude to life than is usually present in Samain's poetry, and a sublimity of inspiration which lends dignity to the whole play. The subject of the tragedy is not, indeed, Polyphemus' unhappy love for Galatea, but Love

universalised - its passion and its sacredness. Polyphemus, spying upon the lovers, is filled with the desire to kill at the sight of this happiness in which he has no part; but a strange awe comes upon him, and he drops his arm to his side, muttering:

"Je ne peux pas tuer!...Leur bonheur m'épouvante."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 222.

For, although the recollection of what he has seen is so poignant that he puts out his eyes in an effort to expell the sight from his memory, he has realised the truth that love is a holy thing, and must be respected by all:

"Les dieux avec l'amour leur ont donné raison."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 228.

And realising this, he forgives Galatea her deception and her cruelty:

"T'en vouloir?...A quoi bon?...Petite âme imprudente,  
Tu jouais. Tu riais de ma détresse ardente..."

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 230.

and he calls on nature to bless the nymph, and to spare her all pain and all knowledge of evil:

"Grands arbres doucement par la brise agités,  
Plaines, coteaux, vallons des nymphes habités,  
Bonne terre et toi, nuit, dont la majesté veille,  
Protégez a jamais cette enfant qui sommeille..."

Qu'elle ignore le mal par le mal expié:

Ayez pour elle, ayez un peu de ma pitié!"

"Polyphème", Vol. III, p. 232.

In "Polyphème" we find the symbol put to its true use, to express "une grande idée philosophique"<sup>(1)</sup>. Already in the Tales we see in narrative form the preparation of this essentially dramatic method - the creation of characters who, by their reactions and by their relationship with each other, express an idea of universal significance - the sacredness of love or of grief, for example. (We must impress upon our readers, in passing, that in spite of the purpose they serve, Samain's characters do not lose their essential human realism, for it is not they themselves who are symbols, but their lives.)

In "Polyphème", indeed, we can see a dramatic method fully worked out. The action, as in Racinian tragedy, is purely psychological, and the whole interest of the plot lies in the interaction of the characters one on another. The symbolist significance of the story, the centralisation of the action around a great philosophical idea, the universality of the theme, seem to bring both unity and grandeur to the work. The purely dramatic

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(1) A. de Bersaucourt.

interest, the tension which alone creates a tragic atmosphere, is provided by the violence of Polyphemus' transports, and by the certainty which this rouses in the minds of the spectators that the dénouement of the play will involve the destruction of at least one of the characters.

There are one or two weaknesses in "Polyphème" which Samain might have corrected, had he lived; the play, in spite of its symbolic grandeur and the rapidity of the action, seems somewhat lacking in strength; and, as we have said, the poetry, for all its beauty, might perhaps be a little more natural. In spite of this, "Polyphème" is a noble creation, measured and thoughtful, and delicate and stately at the same time; and we can only regret that its author was not spared to give us more work of the same type.

CONCLUSION.

Only a short conclusion is necessary. We have endeavoured to show in these pages what are the merits, and what the limitations, of Samain's work. His worst work (parts of "Au Jardin de l'Infante" and "Le Chariot d'Or") exhibits exaggerated artistic pretensions, undoubted faults of taste, and an imitation of other writers which at times approaches actual plagiarism. But in his best work ("Contes", "Aux Flancs du Vase", "Polyphème") the judgment is sure, the inspiration original. Moreover, as regards the publication of much of the inferior verse just mentioned, it must be pointed out that "Le Chariot d'Or" did not appear until after Samain's death in 1900, although some pieces are dated as far back as 1888 ("Les Morts", "Symphonie Héroïque") or 1889 ("Le Fleuve"). When an author who has already published two volumes of poems leaves a third unpublished, the natural conclusion is that he does not consider it worthy of publication or at least that he is hesitant as to its value; and in such a case our judgment of the work when published posthumously by the author's friends must necessarily be indulgent. Samain's early death also is of course responsible for much. The

poet died at the moment when he was at last finding his true path; undoubtedly, had he lived, we should have had from his pen more works of real merit than we unfortunately possess. Samain's potentialities are great, but judged by the work he has left, he is not a great poet; he lacks force, and when he treats the great human themes, there is always a degree of fantasy present which removes his work from the atmosphere of real life, and makes it slightly ethereal. In the domain of fancy, however, there is perhaps no writer who quite equals Samain for quaintness of inspiration, for delicacy of touch and for tenderness, for the freshness and soft colouring of his rainbow-hued canvases.



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