

**SYDNEY, 1957 — PARIS AND MELBOURNE, 1976:
THE LITERARY FRIENDSHIP OF
TWO FRENCH EXILES,
ANTOINE DENAT AND LOUIS BRAUQUIER**

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In 1957, Louis Brauquier took up his duties as Agent Général of the Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes in Sydney. This was his third stay in Australia. On 2 June of that year he wrote to his friend, Gabriel Audisio, about "le réacclimatement dans ce pays où nous avons aussi des amis et, dirais-je, des habitudes parfois longuement interrompues."¹ Various details are mentioned: work, the flat rented in Elizabeth Bay, the warm winter and the drought, quiet weekends spent painting. The citizen of the waning Fourth Republic seems quite at home so far from France:

[. . .] nous vivons comme des Australiens, et c'est à peine si nous savons que le Ministère est tombé.²

One detail is, however, more important than the others:

Nous avons découvert un restaurant chinois, auquel nous faisons de fréquentes visites, car il est excellent.³

It is more important because Brauquier had discovered the setting in which he would meet another Frenchman in voluntary exile and in which a long literary friendship—literary in its largely epistolary form and literary in its central preoccupations—would begin.

Ten years later, in 1967, in Melbourne, Antoine Denat would address a sonnet to . . . a cheque (destined to pay his subscription to the review mentioned in the text, an issue of which—n° 29-30, 1966, numéro de Provence, containing a presentation of Louis Brauquier by Armand Guibert and Brauquier's essay "Quelques poètes de Provence"—had been sent to him by Brauquier). He would further address it, with three other texts, thus:

A Louis Brauquier né poète, en vrac et in globo des poésies de circonstance (j'aime le genre, car pour moi, Pégase est rétif)

J'ai connu Armand Guibert
 A Saint-Sulpice la Pointe;
 De Braquier la voix prenante
 Entre poire et camembert

A Sydney, au Jade Vert
 Où les canards laqués tentent
 Notre goût, et se repentent
 D'être nés loin de Nevers

Chèque, à la Voix des Poètes,
 Vole avecque les mouettes
 Vers le lointain Parisis

Et le brouillardieux automne
 Des rues aux parfums moisis
 Où, las, mon esprit chantonne [MS.Lettres] ⁴

Louis Braquier, Agent Général de la Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes and "poète" and Antoine Denat, teacher, philosopher, poetician and author of occasional verse, met at the Green Jade restaurant in Sydney in 1957. They would maintain a friendship, seeing one another (when Denat was on leave in France) and, more importantly (even for them, for they seem to have enjoyed the fact that their friendship was founded in more ways than one on *l'écriture*), writing to one another, often in verse, for almost twenty years.

The *naufage* that Braquier feared—

Autrefois je me demandais dans de lointains
 Ports exotiques, si je reverrais Marseille,
 Après toutes ces années, au mouillage dans la nuit.

Maintenant, tant de fois revenu, quand elle
 Installe ses phantasmes au chevet de la chambre,
 Je voudrais être sûr que je reverrai l'aube.⁵

—separated them on 8 September, 1976. Braquier's death occurred, curiously, "in exile": not in Marseilles or its (and Braquier's) *campagne*, Saint-Mitre-les-Remparts, but in Paris where he had gone to

visit Audisio in hospital. Brauquier remained an exile in death as he was an exile through his working life and as he was, perhaps, always an exile from himself. *Feux d'épaves*, the title of the final volume of Brauquier's poetry published in his lifetime, could justify the idea that death is the *abîme*. Even though what is gone to the abyss and the danger of the abyss itself are signalled to the living by that "beacon" which is text, even though life leaves its marker, the ultimate fate of the living has its metaphor in the *épave*. Brauquier's death therefore separates him from Denat on another level in that it preceded by only a number of weeks what was for Antoine Denat, on the contrary, an end and a beginning, an exile and a return, foreseen, meditated, but never quite encompassed and comprehended:

Avançant doucement aux hivers incertains,
Ma vie rencontrera ce Terme qui l'étonne
Et mon amour se dissoudra dans les lointains.⁶

This *Terme* was met on 31 December, 1976. It is an end in the sense of a limit, a *terme* like Sartre's *Mur*, and so the *étonnement* is the shock of fear and the *dissolution* is loss. But it is also an accomplishment, an end in the sense of a destination reached, thus a *terme auquel on est mené* (and one thinks here of the end of Dante's travels, of the connotation of birth). And *terme*, of course, is synonymous with "word", *Terme* with "Word". . . , and so the *étonnement* is also the shock of admiration and the *dissolution* is also transformation, maintenance in another form.

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Louis Brauquier first came to Australia in 1926, spending three years in the Sydney office of the Messageries Maritimes as a *commis détaché de la métropole*.⁷ In the same year he had married Georgette (Geotte) Gauthier and transferred to the overseas agencies section of the Messageries Maritimes from its sea-going personnel, which he had joined in 1924. Perhaps the shared itinerant life of lengthy overseas postings was, for the married man, preferable to the constant separation involved in the life of the *commissaire à bord*: in the years 1924-1926, from the time he successfully presented the *Concours du Commissariat de la Marine marchande* until his transfer, Brauquier sailed to various

Mediterranean and Far Eastern ports (Alexandria, Port Said, Jaffa, Beyrouth, Algiers, Colombo, Saigon, Haiphong).

This young Marseillais—he was born in the *cité phocéenne* on 14 August, 1900, in the now long-demolished rue Sainte-Marthe, a few steps beyond Saint Cannat church as one walks north towards the Porte d'Aix from the quai des Belges where the Canebière runs down to the Vieux Port—was already the author of two volumes of poetry when he arrived in Sydney. *Et l'au-delà de Suez* was published in 1922 and won the Prix Catulle-Mendès in 1923. *Le Bar d'escalier* came out in 1926. His late teens had been marked by a double passion, poetry and the port (not just the sea, travel and adventure, but the port itself as a text, as a fascinating tissue of signs, presentment of another life and another world, of the other both beyond and within the poet and his world). Looking back on that period in a text dated 1930 he writes:

*Autrefois je marchais dans les rues de Marseille
Avec AUDISIO avant d'avoir vingt ans;
Nous bâtissons le monde et disions des poèmes
A haute voix jusqu'à trois heures du matin,
Nous étions suivis par des agents de police
Nous n'avions pas de sous pour entrer dans les bars.*

*Nous étions les amis des mâts et des platanes,
Des kiosques à journaux qui s'endorment debout,
Des fontaines perdues; parfois sur notre route,
Signalées sous les feux des fanaux, rouge et vert,
Des pharmacies nous dépassaient par le travers.*

*Rien ne nous était dû, tout nous était promis;
Par les recoupements des ruelles sordides
Où nous errions chargés de nos rêves trop lourds
Navigateurs perdus dans une étrange ville
Nous finissions toujours par retrouver le port.⁸*

At the time of those *promenades-rêveries-récitations*, he wrote (but also re-cited—the notion that a writer is first of all a reader is confirmed here):

Je jouis de me voir tous ces livres à lire
Et que je n'ai pas lus.
Des écailles de lune à l'entour du navire
Que je n'ai jamais vu;

Et que je reverrai peut-être près du môle
D'un autre port lointain.
Toute la nostalgie de l'équateur au Pôle
Est dans ce soir marin.

[. . .]

Levons l'ancre, le soir est prometteur d'extases,
O mon âme, mon cœur,
A travers le désir haletant et les phrases,
Je reste le vainqueur.⁹

During his late teens, in 1918, Brauquier had helped found the review *La Coupo*—"petite revue 'mistraliennne'" according to Audisio¹⁰—and in 1919 had worked with Audisio, Jean Ballard and Marcel Pagnol, among others, on the review *Fortunio*, which would later become *Les Cahiers du Sud*. At the same time, having completed his schooling at the Lycée Thiers in Marseilles, he was employed as a customs clerk in the Marie Moreau shipping company in the rue Papère and began studies for a law degree which he obtained in 1923 after completing his military service (1921–1923).

When Brauquier left Australia in 1929, he took with him some of the poems that would make up *Eau douce pour navires*, published by Gallimard in 1930. They include the texts grouped under the title "Pipes le soir sur la vérandah australe" and "Voyage commercial", a long poem about the Wool Derby, the shipping race to get the wool clip to Europe. The opening verse of the latter text has a certain irresistible charm. It marries the rhythm of the alexandrine, the rhythm of mundane events set in and expanding over the wider spaces of the sea to the heavens, and the rhythm of an exotic place name (at least for French ears). Its four successive clauses span successively twice six, then twelve, and finally twenty-four syllables; twice a hemistich, then the line and finally, in an enjambment which both isolates the vast sky and encloses in it a point in the world, two full lines.

Le pilote est à bord, l'agent vient de descendre,
 Les remorqueurs crochent l'aussière pour virer,
 Et la nuit d'Australie pleine d'étoiles dures
 Enveloppe le quai noir de Woolloomooloo.¹¹

Brauquier's career at the Messageries Maritimes made him an exile from France for most of his working life. After his initial Australian posting, he returned to the Pacific for three years in 1930, taking up a post in Nouméa. His duties included sailing as supercargo on the *Saint André* doing a "milk-run" through the New Hebrides. There followed postings to Alexandria (1935–1939) and Djibouti (two months in 1937) before mobilization in 1939 and a period as interpreter with the British military police. After demobilization in 1940, Brauquier was posted in 1941 to Shanghai where he stayed until 1947, experiencing four years of Japanese occupation. Postings followed to Diego-Suarez (1948–1951), Saigon (1951) and Colombo (1952–1953), before he returned to Sydney as Agent General for the Australia-Oceania zone (1954–1955). He was in Alexandria when the Suez crisis broke in 1956 and was under house arrest before his expulsion from Egypt that year. 1957 saw him, of course, back in Australia before his final posting to Nouméa (1957–1960) preceding his retirement.

The same years were punctuated by the publication of Brauquier's writings. After *Eau douce pour navires* came *Pythéas*, a play in verse, published by *Les Cahiers du Sud* in 1932 and performed in Bordeaux in 1935. *Pilote* was published in the *Nouvelles littéraires* in 1934 and in the *Cahiers de Barbarie* in Tunis in 1935. In 1941, Charlot, in Algiers, published *Liberté des mers* which Gallimard republished in 1950, including *Ecrits à Shanghai* in the same volume.

Throughout the same period, Brauquier was first a keen photographer—an exhibition of his work, *Escapes de Louis Brauquier*, including photographs taken in Australia, was held in Alexandria, Paris and Marseilles in 1990—and then, from the period of his stay in Colombo, a Sunday painter in a style which his friend Jules Roy described as tending towards "le naïf impressionniste"¹²—the Musée Cantini showed fifty-one of Brauquier's approximately eighty works, including two "portscapes" ("Un coin du vieux Sydney" and "Grues dans le brouillard à Woolloomooloo") painted in Australia in 1957, in its 1978 *Louis Brauquier. Poète et peintre* exhibition.

Brauquier's retirement was active. He continued to paint and to write as well as participating in cultural life (especially that of Marseilles) through membership of the Académie Ronsard (from 1963) and the jury of the "Grand Prix littéraire de Provence" (from 1964), through contribution to a number of reviews, and through his radio talks, *Lire et relire avec Louis Brauquier*, on the Marseilles-Provence regional station. In 1966 Gabriel Audisio published his *Louis Brauquier* and in 1970 Gallimard published *Feux d'épaves*, the last book of his poems to appear in Brauquier's lifetime. Recognition came to the poet through the 1962 Grand Prix littéraire de Provence, the 1971 Médaille de la Ville de Marseille, and finally the Grand Prix de poésie de l'Académie française, also awarded in 1971.

On 20 April, 1969, Brauquier wrote to Antoine Denat telling him that he had learned from Gaston Gallimard that his collection of poems had been accepted for publication:

Voilà donc pour moi un problème capital heureusement réglé. Je ne pense pas que j'écirai encore beaucoup de poèmes. Et, en principe, j'aurai réalisé à peu près tout ce que je voulais faire dans ma vie. [MS.Lettres]

He was obviously not counting with his own view of poetry expressed in a letter to Audisio in 1921. He sees it as an ambiguous but undeniable force, marked by both Eros and Thanatos. Expounding a now familiar literary ideology, he places life well above Art and places writing (to be distinguished from literature, a self-absorbed practice) between them: not as authentic as life, not a substitute for the reality of living, but linked to that reality and authenticity; not artificial, fake, a betrayal of life like Art, but always threatened by it, always somehow nurturing its self-absorption, ever suspect:

Vivre d'abord et rien que vivre. Ecrire, c'est de l'à-côté obligatoire; nous y sommes forcés et nous le devons, et surtout c'est notre plaisir et notre tourment, mais je hais également l'Art et les Artistes.¹³

On Brauquier's death in 1976 there remained enough poetry to fill a final volume, published posthumously in 1978 under the title *Hivernage* in the

Collection Sud (n° 10) at the same time as the review published an issue devoted to the author (*Sud*, 27, automne 1978).

The interest in Braquier that saw him figure in various anthologies of modern French poetry—Pierre Seghers's *Livre d'or de la poésie contemporaine*,¹⁴ for example—was maintained in the 1980s. His letters to Audisio (selected and annotated by Roger Duchêne) were published in 1982 by Michel Schefer, the same Marseillais publisher who, in the same year, produced *Peindre*, a limited edition "coffret" in which reproductions of paintings and texts stand together. *Et l'au-delà de Suez* has been republished by Fata Morgana and an edition of Braquier's early poems in Provençal, written before he was twenty, has been published under the title *L'Aucipres courouna de nerto* (Toulon, L'Astrado, 1982).

The interest that he can inspire here, in Australia, and now, can perhaps best be expressed in his own words. In another letter to Antoine Denat, dated 6 December, 1959, a short time before his departure from New Caledonia and for retirement, he expresses this regret:

Nous ne retournerons donc point aux rivages du grand continent austral que je suis un des rares français à avoir aimé. Hélas! il ne m'est pas donné de le revoir comme je l'espérais. [MS.Lettres]

That love of Australia may well have been shared by other Frenchmen then and since. But it has not found through them the form that Braquier gave it.

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Antoine Denat arrived in Australia in 1949, accomplishing an alliterative switch in his exotic life as a Détaché des Affaires Culturelles because, as he liked to observe,¹⁵ he left Bucarest to go to Brisbane. This could have been an interlude in a life that might have become like Braquier's: a series of different exiles. In 1955, having completed five years' service as a lecturer in French at the University of Queensland, Denat was appointed Professeur adjoint à l'Attaché Culturel in Cairo. A car accident and lengthy hospitalization prevented him from taking up that position, and in 1956 he returned to Australia, this time to the University of New England. Apart from periods of leave in France, he would spend the rest of his life in Australia. He taught at the University

of Sydney (1957–1958) and again at the University of Queensland (1959–1963) before completing his career at the University of Melbourne from which he retired as Reader in French in 1972. He married an Australian, Margaret Johnson, in 1961. They met in 1959 when she was appointed to a tutorship at the University of Queensland: on her arrival from Adelaide, she was met at the airport by Antoine Denat, who invited her out to a dinner which was, in her words, "rather grand":

He took me to one of the posh hotels in Brisbane. I think we got through five courses. And, if my memory serves me correctly, I think we talked about food most of the time. And I think that's when I first became aware that the French not only have an excellent cuisine [. . .], but they also enjoy talking about food, the food they've eaten ten years ago or food they might be eating ten years from now, planning menus . . . and the men do it as well as the women. I think I've got a jumbled memory of eating a pretty good dinner, on one level, and on the other gastronomic level, I was being treated to a discourse on Provençal delights.¹⁶

They shared their relative isolation in Brisbane, their profession, their tastes (including the cinema) and their intellectual curiosity:

We used to joke sometimes that we had made an endogamous marriage, *un mariage endogame*, a marriage between colleagues or people of like interests.¹⁷

Most importantly, perhaps, they shared a language—French—and a culture and a passion for the products and production of that language and culture. Increasingly they would share a passion for Australian culture.

The earlier part of Antoine Denat's life is the subject of his own unpublished writing. A text which the author calls a *récit* and whose initial title was *Années disparues*—another later, alternative title for the text as it was reworked and found different manuscript forms was *Les Défuntes Années*, including sections entitled *Le vert paradis*, *Les bords du rêve* and *Le vin de la jeunesse*—covers the period from his birth (17 February, 1905) in Castres to the outbreak of the Second World War. It is both moving and fascinating.

It is moving, first of all, because the manuscript bears the marks of the context in which the text was written: the prisoner-of-war camps in which Denat spent the years from June 1940 to April 1945. It is moving in another way: one of the charms of the memories evoked in captivity is the escape, the freedom they provide, but that flight is complicated, even hampered and stopped sometimes because it leads back to internal conflicts, back to metaphorical fences and guards which in other ways cut the rememberer off from his world and himself: the memories are sometimes golden but often reveal a difficult break from a *milieu*, a family and a culture and ideology, from an idealized self, so that the remembering, so often reworked, can be read, in its first context and beyond, as a process of mourning, a process whose resolution is always problematic.

The text is fascinating in its meticulous, loving but not uncritical recording of the life of the very pious, Catholic, conservative provincial bourgeoisie of the first half of the century, in its fulfilling of the wish expressed in the epigraph taken from Novalis:

On devrait s'appliquer davantage à noter fidèlement ce qui mérite d'être retenu de l'époque où l'on vit, et le léguer aux hommes à venir comme un pieux testament . . . c'est comme autant de saintes reliques qu'une postérité plus sage recherchera tous les témoignages qui se rapporteront aux événements du passé—et même la vie d'un particulier sans importance ne lui sera pas indifférente, puisqu'il est certain que la vie complexe de son époque s'y reflète plus ou moins . . . [MS.D]

The text bears witness, in the most moving and fascinating way, to the informing of experience—experience remembered and the experience within which the remembering takes place, each one informing and shaping the other, each one ideologically (re-) contextualizing the other—and to the mediation of experience by a discourse (for Antoine Denat was not immune to the charms of what one of the writers he most admired, Francis Ponge, called through clenched teeth *le beau langage*,¹⁸ even though I suspect he sought immunity from it, like Ponge but through another technique, in his later ironic practice of pastiche which always tends to parody).

Denat spent his childhood in Castres. The last of three children, he was born, well after his sisters Paula and Jane, when they were already adolescents and his mother was forty. His family were members of the comfortable bourgeoisie. His father seems to have been some sort of businessman, owning vineyards near Narbonne, at Gasparets (where the young Antoine spent holidays which he loved), while living in Castres. He was the *correspondant* in Castres of the *Express du Midi*, royalist and Catholic:

Dans son bureau il y avait le portrait de SAR le Duc d'Orléans et mon père portait alors superbement la moustache en croc et les cheveux en brosse. Il avait dessiné dans le jardin une fleur de lys bordée de buis, fait peindre l'escalier de fleurs de lys, tapisser les fauteuils idem, et portait une fleur de lys à sa cravate.

Il fut un des premiers abonnés à l'Action Française et chaque année ne manquait pas d'assister à Paris au banquet de la presse monarchiste et royaliste des départements. [MS.D]

Denat's childhood was relatively privileged and very happy. He revealed himself to be less than a brilliant and assiduous pupil at the *petit séminaire* at Castres and, at the age of twelve, was sent to St Théodard College in Montauban as a *pensionnaire* in 1917. In October 1924 he went to the Ecole des Anglais (which became the Ecole Sogno), a Catholic institution in Lyon, to prepare the entrance examinations for the Ecole des mines in St Etienne, Pau or Nancy. He continued his studies in 1925 in Paris at the Collège Ste Barbe, detesting them:

D'ailleurs je subissais dans mes études une nouvelle et immense déception. Les cours de Spéciales de St Louis étaient encore le bagne, avec l'aggravation de l'anonymat. Il me suffit une fois de voir M. Labrouste au tableau, avec son visage ravagé et menaçant, pour être à tout jamais détourné des mathématiques, non en elles-mêmes, mais comprimées en amères pilules rapidement lancées aux jeunes monstres qui préparaient les Grandes Ecoles. [MS.D]

A crisis, leading to one of the breaks referred to above, had been mounting for some time. Its beginnings go back to Montauban:

La classe de troisième fut décisive pour l'orientation de toute ma jeunesse. J'avais choisi, un peu poussé par mes parents et aussi par

mes goûts, la section C, latin-sciences au bout de laquelle je voyais briller la carrière d'ingénieur, épanouissement de mes jeux d'enfance, de mes lectures de Jules Verne et de la Science et Vie.

Mais en même temps je découvrais la musique et la poésie largement représentées par l'abbé Ferrié. J'eus mon âme partagée, et cette crise ne prit fin qu'en 1925, au jour où je quittai le Lycée St Louis, en spéciales, pour la Faculté des Lettres. [MS.D]

This partage de l'âme seems to have been an ongoing process, marked by crises. It is, for example, in these terms (themselves marked by oppositions: order/disorder, dream/reality, communion/loneliness, joy/disappointment) that the young Denat is seen by his older self:

Cette odeur des rues de Paris dans le printemps de 1926, les trams verts et blancs, qui traçaient un sillon d'ordre et de régularité dans le désordre des autos et des quelques voitures à chevaux qui existaient encore, la joie des jeunes femmes et des parfums, la joie des arbres verdissants et du soleil plus glorieux, tout cela composait pour moi un hymne invincible de vie profonde. Le reste m'importait peu: réussir dans la vie, avoir une situation, toutes ces duretés bourgeoises me semblaient un rêve bon tout au plus à effrayer les enfants qui ne font pas leurs devoirs. La réalité, pour moi, c'était ce bonheur qui s'écoulait en des journées splendides, ce bonheur pourtant sans amour. [MS.D]

Yet the same young man would give up that world to begin his noviciate with the Dominicans at the *couvent royal* at St Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume at the end of the summer of the same year:

J'arrivai à Aix-en-Provence le 18 septembre 1926 par une journée splendide de Provence et descendis à l'Hôtel de la Mule Noire, dans une petite rue montante à côté du Cours Mirabeau. J'écrivis mes dernières lettres et bus mes derniers apéritifs au café des Deux-Garçons: je disais adieu au monde en y dépensant mon dernier argent. C'est ainsi que je pris des seconds pour aller d'Aix à Gardanne et St Maximin, dans ces paysages de Cézanne et de Derain que je ne me lassai pas de regarder. [MS.D]

Around the same central figure of the sun and its glorious splendour, two loves and two lives stand illuminated. The choice and the *partage* their incompatibility imposes will be awful.

Antoine Denat spent two periods at St Maximin: September 1926 until November 1927 (when he started his military service), and mid-1929 until September 1934. He finished his military service on 30 April, 1929, but appears to have experienced some crisis of vocation before determining to resume his noviciate:

Ce printemps de 1929 fut une des plus étranges périodes de ma vie, et la plus déséquilibrée. Le cœur partagé horriblement, écartelé entre l'appel du monde et l'appel du cloître, je ne savais où aller. [MS.D]

The period of military service and Denat's wartime and post-war army service are recorded in a manuscript entitled *Huit ans vingt-deux jours (souvenirs militaires)*. Of his military service, spent in Morocco and in France, one incident at the Ecole Militaire et d'Application du Génie (from which, "[a]vec un 19 de croquis et un zéro d'équitation, je sortis bon dernier de ma brigade: ce n'était que justice, tous mes camarades étant ingénieurs" [MS.D]) seems indicative:

[Le] terrible et fraternel Lt Jhean [. . .] me mit entre les doigts les diverses pièces d'un F.M.24 que j'eus grand mal à remonter sous son œil critique. Un autre jour, alors que j'avais plus ou moins confondu madriers, poutres et corps morts, il s'exclama (à juste titre): "Qu'est-ce que vous f... donc dans le civil?" — "Novice dominicain, mon lieutenant." — "Pas une raison" . . . Puis il enchaîna sur la première communion, la bataille de Verdun, et son respect des opinions et croyances. [MS.D]

The experience of monastic life for Denat is one of fluctuation if not constant division. Part of that life, at the same time discipline and recreation, were long walks around St Maximin:

Dès ces premières promenades sur les pentes du Mont Aurélien, à Seillons ou Ollières, je reçus le choc merveilleux que je ne devais jamais oublier et ce qui resta de plus fort de mon passage à St Maximin: la compréhension vivante des paysages de Provence, la vie exaltante avec le vent, les arbres, les odeurs, les chemins. Parfois une joie à crier. Parfois le sentiment très doux d'avoir rencontré ma vie toute entière, déroulée comme un tapis jusqu'au

tombeau. J'avais pourtant le vague pressentiment que je ne resterais pas à St Maximin: le monde est trop vaste et mon cœur est trop instable. [MS.D]

However foreshadowed, the *déchirement*—that is the title Denat gives his account of this moment in his manuscript—was terrible.

Les plus belles années de ma vie étaient derrière moi. La vie religieuse demandait un effort dont je n'étais pas capable. Je fis retarder deux fois ma profession solennelle. Avant le sous-diaconat je fus arrêté. Je passai avec angoisse mon dernier séjour à Pivaux, et ma dernière fête de Ste Marie-Madeleine. J'échafaudais toutes sortes de projets pour l'avenir: légion étrangère, agrégation de philosophie. [. . .] J'allai quelque temps à Prouille en attendant les lettres de Rome. Ce voyage fut quelque chose d'hallucinant. Brusquement jeté dans le monde, et un monde bien changé, j'arrivai la nuit à Montpellier, attendant le petit jour dans la salle d'attente. Les michelines illuminées m'aveuglaient. [. . .]

Il fallut enfin un jour revêtir le costume civil apporté par mon père et mon beau-frère. C'était un nouveau chapitre qui commençait. [. . .] J'étais un étranger dans un monde nouveau. [MS.D]

A teaching position was obtained for Denat at the Ecole d'Agriculture and the *petit séminaire* at Saint-Sulpice-la-Pointe, which allowed him to earn a living and to continue his studies at Toulouse where he completed his *Licence-ès-Lettres* and *Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures* (with a thesis on *L'Esthétique d'Henri Bremond* supervised by Vladimir Jankélévitch). If he had lost a vocation he had not lost his faith: he would remain *tertiaire dominicain*, a member of the third order of the Dominicans, until his death. And indeed another vocation—teaching—came to him.

The pre-war years seem, however, to have been as troubled personally for Denat as they were nationally and internationally. War, imminent and actual, *drôle* and *pas drôle* (to use his words), would determine his life for some years.

En 1939, ayant décidé d'abandonner l'enseignement de la philosophie pour devenir lieutenant de réserve du génie en situation

d'activité, la guerre me paraissant alors inévitable, je reçus l'ordre de rejoindre Metz au début de juillet. Ayant assisté à l'examen de mes élèves à la Faculté des Lettres de Toulouse, et sachant que je partais pour longtemps, je vendis ma machine à écrire et mes livres, laissant mes notes à Castres, chez mes parents. Dès septembre 1938 j'avais appris à faire une valise ne contenant que l'essentiel, mais en ce mois de Mûnich l'atmosphère était lourde. En 1939, on se résignait déjà à l'inévitable. [MS.D]

He was posted to the Metz-Sud district and served in the region with some distinction (Croix de Guerre) until he was captured on 21 June, 1940. There followed a long period as a prisoner in Lübben-in-Spreewald, Münster-in-Westfalen and Soest-in-Westfalen, during which both his mother and father died in March and June 1943 respectively. Over these years of captivity, far from being questioned by the nature of the world in which he was living, Denat's faith seems to question the world in which human action seemed, for others (better placed, it is true, to engage in it), the only resource. The notebook in which Denat's memoirs are written becomes, in June 1944, a diary entitled *Journal du retour*. But the nature of the return—to France? to (greater) faith or to that faith which sustained his monastic life? one through the other?—cannot be determined. The diary seems to have that title on 16 June, 1944, not too early to be hopeful if not confident of a return to France, but begins with a reflection on spiritual life which this note closes: "Dieu, je l'espère, finira par tenir en moi toute la place, mais le chemin est encore long." Antoine Denat had perhaps entered a period of mystical faith, which could explain an entry in that diary, dated 24 June, 1944, shortly after the Normandy *débarquement* about which he knew immediately¹⁹ and amid *bombardements* which he experienced:

Au milieu des incertitudes, des désespoirs, des espoirs, d'un avenir à la fois certain —si les événements permettent tout de même un jugement —quant à l'issue de la guerre et très incertain quant à nos malheurs, il me reste depuis longtemps une seule ressource, mais qui maintient ma vie en équilibre et même en joie: une confiance absolue en la Providence, au Père qui sait notre infamie, nos besoins, notre mauvaise tête. J'ai récité mille fois la prière de St Augustin: Seigneur, nous portons devant vous le poids de nos péchés et les plaies qu'ils nous ont fait . . . Je reste persuadé, dans

l'intime du cœur, que la cause profonde des guerres c'est le désordre de tous nos péchés personnels et que chaque âme qui se rapproche de Dieu fait plus pour la fin du cauchemar que tous les bombardements et tous les débarquements.²⁰ [MS.D]

Following his liberation, Antoine Denat returned to France and was sent to Berne, where he worked in the office of the French Military Attaché until the end of 1945, being promoted to the rank of captain. He returned to the Army Engineers in 1946 before being demobilized and appointed, in July of the same year, to the *Mission universitaire de Roumanie*. He was *lecteur* at Jassy University until 1949 when the Cold War saw the end of the French presence in Romania and Denat accepted a post in Australia.

Ron Jackson's "Préface" to Denat's *Vu des Antipodes* neatly summarizes his life and work in Australia:

Parmi les Français et Françaises venus enseigner dans les universités australiennes, aucun n'a davantage contribué qu'Antoine Denat à resserrer les liens culturels qui unissent nos deux pays.²¹

* * * *

What can have drawn two quite different Frenchmen together not just in Sydney in 1957, but over the next two decades?

Brauquier and Denat were indeed different. Different in their belief and spiritual practice. As, in fact, Denat was from many of the friends he made throughout his life and in Australia; as, moreover, he was from his wife, at least until her conversion to Catholicism. Denat came from a sectarian background in both political and religious terms, but he left that sectarianism behind him, less in the loss of his conviction than in its full force, in the knowledge that it should and the confidence that it could measure itself against other ideologies, other faiths. Few of Denat's Australian students would have readily detected in the man the Catholic intellectual, perhaps because we were confronted with a Catholic intellectual unlike the model we might clumsily have expected.

Brauquier and Denat were different even in their love of literature and of poetry in particular. Beyond a shared traditional canon, in their taste in contemporary writing and their thinking the literary, they

diverged. A letter from Brauquier to Denat, dated 9 March, 1959, in Nouméa, is a clear demonstration of Brauquier's literary conservatism (comforted perhaps by his spending so many years outside the mainstream, within an unchallenged canon of memory, even though he had home leave and received and read recent works published in France). Denat, on the other hand, had moved in a more intellectual *milieu*, and was preoccupied by questions on which his unfinished doctoral thesis, *L'Ontologie du poème*, centred.

Cher Antoine Denat,

Je suis bien en retard avec vous, depuis la réception de votre plaquette *L'Art poétique après Valéry*, mais à vrai dire je ne savais comment vous répondre car je ne suis absolument pas d'accord. Il se peut que ces messieurs dont vous donnez les noms, soient classés comme poètes dans d'oxfordiennes anthologies; mon opinion n'en est pas influencée d'un *scruple*, et je pense que ce qu'ils écrivent n'est pas de la poésie; peut-être est-ce de la métaphysique, peut-être font-ils en public leurs expériences de laboratoire, mais ils ne me donnent aucun plaisir et c'est comme s'ils n'existaient pas. Vous comprenez, Denat mon ami, la vie est trop courte pour la perdre à essayer de démêler ce que ces propos inarticulés pourraient bien vouloir dire. Et qu'allez-vous faire dans ces conformismes de l'anti-conformisme? La poésie est ailleurs, ne cherchez pas à la capturer, à la définir, ne l'interrogez pas, goûtez le bonheur qu'elle vous offre et grâce à quoi vous la reconnaîtrez.

Amitiés.

Brauquier [MS.Lettres] ²²

They did, however, have much in common. Their love of travel and the exotic, first of all. Brauquier's initiation to it came, I have argued, through the city-text Marseilles.²³ For Denat, the other world came into his world through reading: Jules Verne, *Les Belles Images*, *Diabolo-Journal*, *L'Epatant* (all of which made him an admirer, later in life, of Sartre's *Les Mots*):

Mon cœur bondissait et je voyais dessiné quelque train du Far-West attaqué par des Indiens. Les vieilles locomotives à boggie avant et cheminée en entonnoir m'étaient familières, avec leur cloche et leur grand chasse-bœufs. Je revivais ces aventures avec

une intensité mille fois plus grande que la vie de famille s'agitant autour de la table. Parfois j'essayais de dessiner au crayon un paquebot ou un train. Et le souvenir de ma première boîte d'aquarelles est resté toujours lié pour moi à une valse de Chopin que jouait au piano ma sœur aînée dans le salon voisin. Je ne savais à peu près rien des soucis de mon père et de ma mère, en ces années 1910 où leur usine brûla, où la faillite menaça notre fortune. J'en entendais parler pourtant autour de moi, mais je n'écoutais pas, tout me semblait vain en dehors des paysages que je voyais, des voyages que j'entreprenais, des odeurs enivrantes des forêts imaginées, de la splendeur du jour sur de grands ports rêvés, pleins de rumeurs et de voiliers, de couleurs et de chants. Et depuis je crois qu'il en a toujours été ainsi. J'ai toujours vécu ailleurs, plus curieux de mes rêves que de la réalité. Les médecins ont un nom pour cette belle maladie. [MS.D]

And of course his remembering-writing of his reality-mediating (or displacing) reading is mediated by other readings, including the Proust re-read entirely in two weeks in prison camp.

Within and because of their shared love of the exotic and travel, in their exile, Brauquier and Denat share a nostalgia for things not only French but for the region they both saw as home: the Midi languedocien for Denat, the Midi provençal for Brauquier (but it must be remembered that the difference between Languedoc and Provence, never to be minimized, is effaced in this friendship by Denat's long acquaintance with Provence through St Maximin, which was his other home). These men shared to a certain extent a *terroir* and even more an awareness of themselves as *hommes de terroir*. Part of this nostalgia is associated with the pleasures of the table, not necessarily eating *cuisine méridionale* (as the meeting *A Sydney, au Jade Vert* shows), but sharing an attitude to food which Margaret Denat picked up so quickly, sharing conviviality which is to a large extent, as she saw, a pleasure of discourse. It is no coincidence that Antoine Denat's file of letters from Brauquier begins with an invitation (to lunch on board the Messageries Maritimes ship *Polynésie* on 31 July, 1957, with Brauquier and his wife, the captain of the ship, R. Copillet, and his wife, Catherine Duncan, among others) and the menu from that lunch (seven courses, accompanied by Meursault 1949, Hermitage Rouge 1949 and Mumm Cordon Rouge 1949!); or that, it should contain another menu (4 June, 1959—4 courses only, humbly

arrosés with *blanc* and *rouge* but each of them *supérieur*) accompanying this copy of a sonnet dated 9 July, 1959:

Au poète ami Louis Braquier

Réponse tardive et trop rapide à son
sonnet du 18 mai 1959

Je dînais l'autre soir sur notre IRAOUADDI
Vibrants aux lourds palans qui chargeaient de la laine
Et j'essayais de savourer, l'âme sereine
Ces petits pains qui font valoir les beaux radis

Je me laissais aller à ce doux paradis
Qu'est pour un estomac le pavillon M.M.
Quand la conversation s'engagea d'elle-même
Sur Marseille, un poète et la Rue Paradis:

Je serais bien heureux, moi, si vous reveniez
M'adoucir un travail que vous soulageriez
Au moins pour quelques jours sur notre terre Australe

D'amicales humeurs et d'éloquence sainte
Qui me manquent toujours dans la fuite fatale
Des mois et des années dans ma studieuse enceinte.

[MS.Lettres]

This text illustrates what is most important in drawing two men together 20,000 kilometres from home and keeping them together over time: a shared language—not just French, but a particular social and cultural discourse (that *éloquence sainte*), a shared love of that language and of the fashioning of it, a particular play of language within and around shared conventions. Each of them, separately in exile in Sydney in 1957, must have rarely shared that language, and each of them must have heard it in each other's voice, seen it reflected in each other's face in conversation. That shared love of a *langage* continued in their shared love of writing, of receiving and producing a certain *écriture* with its conventions, its shared cultural references and intertexts, the play involved in implementing (by application or gentle infraction) its rules.

That is the evidence of the letters: a certain (however minor) *plaisir de l'écriture*.

* * * *

Only a fragment of the *traces* of the friendship between Louis Brauquier and Antoine Denat can be given here. It includes over seventy letters written by Brauquier and some copies or drafts of Denat's letter-poems. I have deliberately chosen texts which show both *faces* of a friendship and a textual game.

The exchange between the two men begins with two letter-poems from Denat to Brauquier. Shortly after they had met in Sydney, Brauquier left for Nouméa. Denat picks up the theme of that separation, of their activities that set them apart—teacher/painter-poet; *répétiteur* (so to speak)/creator—and of the poverty (whose metonym is culinary: fish and chips; the peas so famous in the French mythology of the Anglo-Saxon world—although myth is perhaps firmly based here on the hard ground of reality's culinary *mitraille*) that separates his world from Brauquier's wealth ("cuisine complète"). The meeting place—the Green Jade restaurant—is evoked and the "Arlésienne" is perhaps Geotte Brauquier.

Armidale (New England) le 1er oct. 57

J'ai mangé du poisson chez un grec d'Armidale,
 Vous aviez surmonté les périls de la mer;
 J'ai parlé de Stendhal à l'étudiant modèle,
 Vous aviez débarqué vos cantines de fer.

Demain je reverrai Sydney sans son poète
 Et je remangerai l'éternel petit pois
 Pendant qu'ensoleillé de cuisine complète
 Vous peindrez lentement les cargos et les bois.

Demain j'expliquerai tel vers de Baudelaire
 Alors que vous créerez une œuvre de Brauquier;
 J'essaierai de chanter tel texte .. littéraire,
 Vous accumulerez vos richesses, banquier!

Mille canards laqués sacrifiés en foule
 Laisseront vide hélas! le restaurant chinois;
 Les blondes surannées, du type qui roucoule
 Ne pourront remplacer l'Arlésienne au minois.

[MS.Lettres]

Then Denat has some fun putting Brauquier's lines into a verse tribute to the poet. His world and Brauquier's world come together in other ways, Bertagne being closer to Denat's Sainte Baume than Brauquier's Marseilles. All the conventions of the conventionally poetic are deployed—massive metaphor, among other forms of rhetorical ornament, is *de rigueur*—and the post scriptum reveals the game of *mise en vers*:

Sydney, le 20 octobre 1957

Il faut craindre de se tromper en poésie quand on ne pense pas comme
 les poètes et en religion quand on ne pense pas comme les saints.

JOUBERT

Merci, mon cher Brauquier, de votre poésie
 Débordante d'humain sous le rythme artisan
 La splendeur de vos vers jointe à la fantaisie
 Laisse effleurer l'ardeur de l'authentique sang

"La liberté des mers avec leur solitude"
 Royalement a façonné le Provençal
 Et comme un bon Pilote, avec sollicitude
 Vous avez amarré votre œuvre au quai natal.

Car Sydney, Tahiti, Shanghai, les Amériques
 N'y voient pas l'Estaque et ses matins d'air pur,
 Le blanc lavé de bleu de nos petites criques,
 Ni le Pic de Bertagne accroché dans l'azur.

Les rêves de vingt ans accomplis dans la force
 "La douceur de l'absence et le sens du retour"
 N'ont pas, emprisonnés sous une dure écorce,
 Perdu le jeune essor des aubes de l'amour.

Le vrai poète est sûr d'un destin très fidèle,
 Si "le rêve de l'homme est plus grand que le ciel"
 Le ciel qui fit mûrir la gorge de Mireille
 Des Saintes Maries garde un pouvoir éternel.

Je lève encor pour vous la vieille Coupe Sainte
 Honneur du Paysan que Pégase a béni
 Vous qu'un puissant mistral poussa loin de l'enceinte
 Du Marseille natal rêvant d'Océanies.

P.S. L'administration bienveillante
 M'ayant accordé mon congé
 J'irai toute affaire cessante
 Dans trois mois, rue de la Gaîté.
 [MS.Lettres]

Brauquier grasps the discourse game—the image of "cette humanité scissipare" is a delight in *préciosité*. Nevertheless the game does not mask a certain sincere sadness of exile and the slight bitterness of an optimism not quite fully embraced:

"Mille canards!"

(Juron portugais du XVI^e siècle, encore utilisé sur
 la Rivière des Perles par les Chinois de Macao)

Mille canards laqués sacrifiés en foule
 Laisseront vide, hélas! le restaurant chinois . . .
 Antoine Denat (*Œuvres complètes* —chez l'Auteur)

Cher Antoine Denat, le monde est ainsi fait
 Qu'à peine on s'entre'plaît, il faut qu'on se sépare.
 De cette humanité tristement scissipare
 C'est l'un des moindres maux parmi ceux recensés.

Pour nous autres, d'exil en exil relancés,
 Le plan de l'écliptique est une balançoire,
 Et l'antique Avatar, dans son terrible illusoire,
 N'a plus en stock que des futurs un peu passés.

Qu'importe! il nous faut croire encore que ce soir
 Reviendra, qui verra tous nos amis s'asseoir
 Avec toi, cher Denat, à cette longue table

Où les baguettes sont magiques, où le vin
 Colore les propos, rend les mets délectables,
 Car les canards laqués ne meurent pas en vain.

Brauquier

Nouméa —octobre 1957

[MS.Lettres]

Denat's response mixes conventionality—the acrostic—with a personal reflection. The game has its moments of seriousness, storytelling becomes confession, beyond the amusement there is self-revelation. Perhaps we are seeing the timidity which a certain ideology of poetry—the form of expression of the superior spirit—imposes on the reader whose relationship with it becomes problematic, an admiration combined with a fear that poetry can only mediate the reader's self through quotation or a form of simulation that ironizes the simulator, somehow always designates him as the fraudulent copier, is always caught between intimations of sincerity and admissions of cleverness.

En mon automne enfin je sens

Cette douceur qui me déchire.

Charles Maurras (*Musique Intérieure*)

PRINTEMPS AUSTRAL

L a mer, trop tard venue dans ma vie multiforme

O ù les désirs studieux tinrent lieu de raison;

U n dépaysement, fruit d'arrière-saison,

I nfusent dans mon âme une douceur informe.

S oumis dans ma Province à la bourgeoise norme

B ien nanti de romans dans la vieille maison,

Rien ne me destinait au dangereux poison
 Attendant le Prodiges épris d'un monde énorme.
 Un violent souvenir des éblouissements
 Qui marquent d'un enfant les beaux étonnements
 Un lit ma vie présente aux baisers du jeune âge.
 Insidieux, au printemps, le ciel se fait plus doux;
 En mon cœur cependant vit mieux le beau visage
 Riant en Languedoc, jadis, au soleil d'août.

pour le consoler de l'énorme bétise
 qui me fit une fois écrire BROQUIER,
 ce qui eût fait, mille canards!,
 échouer l'acrostiche.

Hawkesbury River

2 Novembre 1957

[MS.Lettres]

The absolutely mundane is the subject of two of Brauquier's letter poems concerning Denat's activities during leave in France and the U.S. and an accident which befell Brauquier while performing some official function at Nouméa's airport. The poet Gabriel Audisio was, as Brauquier writes, a friend from his youth in Marseilles. Brauquier had met and formed a friendship with the novelist Claude Roy in Saigon in 1951. Hytier, by then teaching in the U.S., had, in the early 1920s, founded a review, *Le mouton blanc*, to which Audisio and Francis Ponge (in whom Denat was increasingly interested) both contributed.

Deuxième épître à Antoine Denat
 alors qu'il logeait à pied à l'Hôtel de Lutèce à Paris

Cher Antoine Denat, tandis que de Lutèce —
 Pèlerin sauveté de l'océan austral —

Dans l'air léger, le cœur plein de douce allegresse,
Vous foulez le pavé hotelier et royal,

Allez voir mes amis les plus chers à mon âme
Et qui vous recevront comme un homme de bien,
Gabriel Audisio, seize rue des Pyram — (e) —
ides, qui dirige l'Office Algérien;

Avec lui j'ai vécu ma brève adolescence
Et de toute une vie je n'en saurai guérir.
L'autre c'est Jules Roy, boulevard Montmorenc — (e) —

Y, au soixante et un, et téléphone MIR
soixante-dix-huit deux fois.

Allez et que la chance
Couronne de vos pas l'amical devenir.

Brauquier

Nouméa — le 31 Janvier 1958

[MS.Lettres]

Troisième épître à Antoine Denat
qui m'écrivait de New York

Cher Antoine Denat, j'admire, tant et plus,
Qu'à New-York vous logiez chez Saint-Thomas d'Aquin;
C'est tellement plus beau qu'un quelconque faquin
Qu'il se nomme Waldorf, Hilton ou Barnibus,

Et que loin du subway, des taxis et des bus,
Vous ayez pu, menant leurs ombres par la main,
Auprès du cher Hytier, étrange américain,
Evoquer nos amis au Columbia Campus.

Je vous écris, dolent et la jambe en écharpe.
Hélas! j'avais laissé les pinceaux et la harpe
Pour accueillir un général à Tontouta.

Il faisait nuit; j'au buté dans un attelage
De chariots en fer. J'ai dû céder le pas.

Immobile, je rêve aux vierges — folles? — sages? —

Eternelles dansant sur le Taygeta.

Brauquier

Nouméa, le 15 Mars 1958

[MS.Lettres]

A final text, printed here in facsimile, once again develops the tension between literary game and more powerful personal expression. The context within which this (*Faux*) *Sonnet d'adieu et d'au-revoir* is written is Brauquier's retirement. When he leaves New Caledonia for Marseilles he knows he will not come back to the Pacific, never see Sydney again: hence the *sonnet d'adieu*. He will, however, see Antoine Denat again in France, and so the *au revoir*. The sonnet is *faux*, quite evidently, from line 10 on, when the formal game (the gratuitous play of rule for its own sake) is abandoned, overtaken by the urgency of personal memory: "Mais ce qui plus me point" is the *charnière*, where the *vrai* begins to make the pure convention *faux*, where the convention or given form (the play of rule, the constraint) takes shape (perhaps imperfect or incomplete here) as the *matière du vrai*, as the stuff of its diction rather than its contra(-)diction.

The text, of course, alludes to the well-known sites of Sydney: the Domain, Kings Cross, the Harbour Bridge, the Rocks and Miller's Point which Brauquier knew so well (and would hardly recognize today). He alludes to the mythology of his friendship with Denat: "canard laqué" is almost a code-word between them and "chez Nelson Lee" is their Jade Vert. But what touches is the personal mythology, the story which is the grand metaphor of Brauquier's physical and spiritual exile. Audisio recounts it in the conclusion to his essay for the Seghers *Louis Brauquier*:

Il raconte lui-même une anecdote curieuse au sujet de sa maison natale. Elle était située, à Marseille, derrière l'église des Prêcheurs, à deux pas du Vieux-Port, rue Sainte-Marthe, qui devait être démolie en 1925 avec ce qu'on appelait "les vieux quartiers". Or, en 1928, pendant que Brauquier était à Sydney, il vit arriver le *Commissaire Ramel*, des Messageries maritimes, qui faisait son premier voyage sur l'Australie. Ce navire, qui devait au retour

prendre un chargement complet de laine, avait été lesté, à l'aller, avec des gravats provenant des démolitions du dit quartier "de derrière la Bourse". En arrivant à Sydney ce lest fut jeté à l'eau quelque part, dans une baie de l'immense rade. "Ce qui me permet, conclut Brauquier, de penser que ma maison natale est au fond de l'océan Pacifique."²⁴

The text has a number of intertexts within Brauquier's own texts connected with Australia. The image of crossing the Bridge reminds one of the lines from "A la mémoire de Hugh M. Bradley, Wharfinger":

Je suis parti, on construisait le North Shore Bridge
[. . .]

Je le lui avais promis,
En riant, le cœur serré,
Qu'un jour, rien que lui et moi,
Revenu exprès de France,

Nous traverserions ensemble
Et bras-dessus, bras-dessous,
Le grand pont sous lequel passent
Les navires qu'il servait.²⁵

The evocation of the "vieux bâtiments près de Circular Quay" immediately brings to mind some lines from a text in *Feux d'épaves*, dedicated "A Antoine et Margaret Denat", which is followed by a note in brackets: "(Du côté de Miller's Point)":

Un "pub" s'ouvre dans la ruelle,
C'est "Le Héros de Waterloo".

Pousse la porte.

A la rambarde
Du comptoir, loin dans le brouillard,
Sous les yeux creux des barmaids blondes,
Des ombres à l'oreille d'or
Toastent au stout et au ginièvre,
Dans l'âcre odeur du tabac froid
Le "blackbirding" et la baleine
Le troca et l'île au trésor.

Murs tatoués de flèches larges,
 Proies shanghaiées par le destin,
 Chaque fois que la porte claque
 S'en vont des hommes à la mer.²⁶

This intertext has its own obvious intertexts, from Stevenson to pub stories, so that its discourse is built less on raw experience than experience of . . . discourses. Perhaps the (*Faux*) *Sonnet d'adieu et d'au-revoir* begins to ring true precisely where the repetition of given discourse is interrupted, when the assumed diction is subverted by a contra(-)diction, no less a diction—there is no *degré zéro*, but not simply assumed, taken for granted as the given or only way of writing: it is actively assumed, taken against and from the historically defined discursive norm.

* * * *

This short study has tried to do a number of things. It has tried to represent two men, looking at them often through their representations of themselves. It has tried to represent a friendship which is extraordinary—because of the men involved and its context, but no less because it is, essentially, founded on and sustained by text, the textual representations of both participants, representations (sent and received) of self, other and the world. What it cannot escape—not just in concluding about its objects—is how that representation is bound into a play of discourses or perhaps more accurately, a rehearsal of discourses. On the one hand one can read these men, through their writing and through the textual exchange of their friendship, repeating discourses that informed them, practising received readings of the world. On the other—and this is perhaps truer of Denat, for even though he tended to venerate *le poète* and mime his conventions while never seeing himself as one, even though he was a man of ritual (the daily mass with its fixed *formules*), he was a man of contradictions too, admiring many *poètes* and thinkers, many discourses which challenged and *moved* him, as shown by the *synthèses* and the *carrefours*, all *critiques*, which he claims as the substance of his essays—the practice of language moves towards a different performance of language, towards a *mise à l'épreuve* of life's script, towards a different text, however modest.

Monash University

(Faux) Sonnet d'adieu
et d'au-revoir

Cher Antoine Denat, les lauriers sont coulés,
Nous n'avons plus au Bois qu'un homme "le Dommaine",
Ni à la Croix-du-Roy son fils ni de Bohême
Non plus chez Johnson Lee son fils ni le canard Paquet.

Nous ne passerons plus sous le pont de Tynney, -
Ni dessus, au bas des amis qui se promènent -
Nous ne saluerons plus la flèche de la Reine
Sur les vieux bâtiments près de Cuculus Quay
Où les gens de London partaient à la Paix.

Mais ce qui nous me pince, c'est de ne pas revoir
Celle baie, mal connue, dans le port, où un jour
On jeta les débris de ma maison natale

Qui ballastaient le "Ramel" des Messageries.

Cher Denat, traversant, parfois, dans l'âme Riva
Où le toit était tant été - de ce feng,
Bon Marseille et bon moi, donnez une amicale
Pensée, à la pauvre âme étrangère en ces mers.

Notes

1. *Lettres de Louis Brauquier à Gabriel Audisio* (choisies et annotées par Roger Duchêne), Marseilles, Editions Michel Schefer, 1982, p. 160. Hereafter this work will be referred to as *Lettres*.
2. *Lettres*, loc. cit.
3. Loc. cit.
4. Unpublished poem from the papers of Antoine Denat which his widow, Margaret Denat, generously made available to me. These include various manuscripts which Denat did not publish, many letters received by Denat from various people (from Roland Barthes to Henri de Lubac), and a separate file of letters received from Louis Brauquier and copies or drafts of some of Denat's letters (especially letter-poems) to Brauquier. All quotations from Denat's unpublished manuscripts will be identified using the abbreviation "[MS.D]" below the quotation in the body of the text. All quotations from the Brauquier-Denat letters will be identified using the abbreviation "[MS.Lettres]".
 My thanks go to Margaret Denat for her generosity, which extended to talking with me and answering many questions about Brauquier (whom she met on several occasions) and, more importantly, about Antoine Denat. Those conversations were recorded, with her consent, for further reference.
 For permission to quote from Brauquier's letters to Antoine Denat and reproduce one of them, my thanks go to Mademoiselle Eugénie Brauquier, the poet's sister and the vigilant but generous guardian of his work and memory.
5. Louis Brauquier, *Hivernage* (poésies posthumes), Marseilles, Collection Sud, n° 10, 1978, p. 139.
6. Antoine Denat, "Halte", *Revue du Tarn*, 3^e série, n° 88, Hiver 1977, p. 492. This poem, dated April, 1961, was published with an obituary by Pierre Chabbert. It is perhaps the only poem by Denat which is not, in some way, overtly or covertly, a pastiche or parody.
7. A good deal of the biographical information herein has been drawn from two sources: the catalogue to the exhibition entitled *Louis Brauquier. Poète et peintre* held at the Musée Cantini in Marseilles from October to December 1978; Gabriel Audisio's *Louis Brauquier*, Paris, Seghers, Collection "Poètes d'aujourd'hui" n° 140, 1966.
8. Louis Brauquier, *Liberté des mers*, Paris, Gallimard, 1950, p. 11. The italics are the author's.
9. Louis Brauquier, *Et l'au-delà de Suez*, Aix-en-Provence, Société de la Revue *Le Feu*, 1923, pp. 124-125.
10. Gabriel Audisio, op. cit. p. 15.
11. Louis Brauquier, *Eau douce pour navires*, Paris, Gallimard, 1930, p. 65.
12. Quoted in Edmonde Charles-Roux's "Brauquier, naïf solitaire" in *Louis Brauquier. Poète et peintre*, catalogue to the exhibition already mentioned (no pagination).

13. *Lettres*, p. 35.
14. Paris, Marabout Université, 1969, vol. 1, pp. 118–120. The biographical note in that anthology is interesting in that it romanticizes Brauquier's life, typically investing the poetic in experience rather than language.
15. Anecdote recounted to me by Margaret Denat. For the biographical information here I am indebted to Margaret Denat. It comes from Antoine Denat's manuscripts and from my conversations with her in August and September 1992.
16. Conversation with Margaret Denat.
17. *Ibid.*
18. "Forcé souvent de fuir par la parole, que j'aie pu seulement quelquefois retourné d'un coup de style le défigurer un peu ce beau langage, pour bref qu'il renomme Ponge selon Paulhan." (*Tome premier*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p. 10) This is the second of Ponge's *Douze petits écrits*, first published in 1926.
19. Cf. this passage from Denat's *Souvenirs militaires* which make it clear that there were radios in the camps:

Le 6 juin 1944, à midi, il avait plu et je rencontraï par hasard dans le camp vide, à l'heure de la soupe, le Cap. Maugué, fidèle de la chapelle protestante, qui revenait de l'écoute: "Ça y est, me dit-il, ils ont débarqué ce matin". Revenant en courant dans ma chambre pour annoncer la nouvelle, je bégayai pour la première fois de ma vie.
[MS.D]

20. I can only admit to being puzzled or even dismayed by this final remark. Perhaps it can be understood in the following framework:

Max Charlesworth, in a recent article for an issue of *Meanjin* devoted, in tribute to him, to "The Public Intellectual" (vol. 50, n° 4, Summer 1991), writes "something about [his] religious commitment as a Christian" (p. 466). He examines the claims on the believer of God, as "the only 'necessary being' (that being which cannot possibly not be)" (loc. cit.), and of creation, described as "radically contingent" (loc. cit.). On the one hand:

The religious believer ought, *par excellence*, to be safe from the temptations of 'false necessity'—the absolutizing or idolizing of Nature, or History, or The State. God ought, so to speak, exhaust our passion for absolutizing and leave us free to recognize the radical contingency of everything else. (Loc. cit.)

On the other hand, there is the other claim, and a pendulum effect is set up:

Further, religious people must be wholeheartedly in the world—nothing human can be alien to them—and at the same time they must be able to distance themselves from

the world and even to stand in prophetic judgement on it and, as St Paul says, "redeem the time". The religious person is, or ought to be, a "participant observer". Again, the believer sees this world as a symbol of a higher or deeper order of reality. For the religious person the world can never be taken literally or at its face value: while being dear and precious in itself, it always points beyond itself. (p. 467)

One wonders where Denat, unable to be a *participant* observer, only partially able to observe, suffering in and from a world he could only hear about, stood or could have stood between these claims.

21. In Antoine Denat, *Vu des Antipodes. Synthèses critiques*, Paris, Didier, Coll. "Essais et critiques", n° 8, 1969, p. 5.

A second volume, *Vu des Antipodes. Deuxième série: Carrefours critiques* (Paris, Didier, Coll. "Essais et critiques", n° 12, 1971), had been published and a third was in preparation at the time of Denat's death.

22. The end of this letter reminds one of a letter already quoted in part here. It is addressed to Audisio on 21 June, 1921 and begins:

Je suis heureux quand tu m'écris que tu restes à Alger, et que la race t'a pris comme un de ses plus beaux fils. Que veux-tu aller faire à Paris? Ce n'est pas la place des poètes. Si tu évites la publicité, qui te possède inévitablement, tu tomberas dans la chapelle, grande ou petite, et alors, c'est la petite vanité, la brasserie, l'étouffement, la vie littéraire enfin, c'est-à-dire entièrement tournée vers la littérature, cette horrible copie de la vie multiple. [*Lettres*, p. 35]

A certain literary ideology of the natural comes through both letters which denies language any function other than that of transparency, of being the window on authentic experience, and which denies the substance of Brauquier's own literary technique.

Denat's *Art poétique après Valéry* can be found in *Vu des Antipodes. Synthèses critiques*, pp.87-107.

23. See above and also my "Lui s'en va chez les kangourous . . . The Australian experience in the poetry of Louis Brauquier", *Romance Studies*, 21, Winter 1992/Spring 1993, pp. 25-36.
24. Gabriel Audisio, op. cit., p. 70.
25. Louis Brauquier, *Liberté des mers*, Paris, Gallimard, 1950, pp. 48-49.
26. Louis Brauquier, *Feux d'épaves*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, pp. 97-98.