Théophile de Viau

*Le Matin*

The least common form of serial lyricism originates in a noncausal, nonlogical matrix. Altogether typical is the popular song *Les douze mois de l'année*, which follows the order of the occidental calendar. Rimbaud's sonnet *Les Voyelles* is equally representative, though in a more complex manner. While using Roman letters for the sake of clarity, the poet develops his theme by following the order of the Greek alphabet. In both cases poetic succession does not reflect a natural or "scientific" pattern, but one that has been established and maintained by the force of tradition alone.¹

In late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century France the conventional structure most widely used in the lyric was derived from the religious meditation.² A rapid survey of its treatment—with emphasis on a typical poet's solution to the problem of fragmentation and rupture—will provide useful background to discussion of Théophile de Viau's *Le Matin*.

Modeled on the ancient process popularized by Saint Ignatius Loyola in his *Vrays exercices spirituels*, the activity is tripartite. The méditant begins (after an elective preliminary prayer) by drawing on memory and imagination to "compose" the scene that he will contemplate; he then reasons on its significance; finally, he addresses an appropriate object of religious sentiment. In La Cèppède's *théorème*, "Dez qu'on eut achevé cet injuste
The speaker then realizes that the incident is necessary as a fulfillment of prophecy and as the climax to a collective career of imposture; finally, he directly addresses Christ, expressing grief and indignation at the unparalleled affront.  

Irregularities abound in the Théorèmes, but close analysis reveals that the poet has usually embroidered on tradition, not rent it asunder. For instance, the many individual sonnets containing only one of the three required elements almost always prove to be predictable sections of long sequences that do adhere to the ternary pattern. The well-known text “L’Autel des vieux parfums” (III, 23), which lacks both composition and prayer, appears in the analytical movement of a complete meditation on the cross (III, 10–31). More problematic is the sonnet that exhibits two or three constituents unconventionally linked. In “Achevant ces propos, d’un long baiser jumeau” (III, 13), the composition is interrupted by prayer. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between fundamental, contributory, and derivative structures. In the seemingly disrupted sonnet, composition is—and remains—essential; the prayer is merely parenthetical, serving to heighten the scene’s emotional intensity.

It happens, of course, that a certain number of La Ceppède’s théorèmes simply fail, in the sense that they do not achieve or contribute to consecutive unity and are not salvaged by any compensatory device. Characteristically, these are “free-floating” analyses, like “Jesus donc ne veut point ce baiser refuser” (I, 47), which follows no composition and leads to no prayer.

La Ceppède was clearly a transitional poet. By allowing some analyses to float freely, he based his practice on that of his immediate predecessors, who merely let their fragmentary or ruptured sequences stand telles quelles. But his tendency to appropriate other irregular structures by devices of hierarchy and subordination aligns him at least in part with the subjects of this essay. Nevertheless, La Ceppède did not arrange the bits and pieces of ruptured sequences into nonconsecutive patterns, nor did he use compensatory devices. Thus it is possible to distinguish his art from that of Malherbe, Saint-Amant, and above all
Théophile de Viau, who, in *Le Matin*, shattered and restructured a form as conventional as the meditation itself.

**Le Matin**

L'Aurore sur le front du jour  
Seme l'azur, l'or et l'yvoire;  
Et le Soleil, lassé de boire,  
Commence son oblique tour.

5  
Les chevaux au sortir de l'onde,  
De flamme et de clarté couverts,  
La bouche et les nasceaux ouverts,  
Ronflent la lumière du monde.

La Lune fuit devant nos yeux;  
La nuit a retiré ses voiles;  
Peu à peu le front des estoilles  
S'unit à la couleur des Cieux.

10  
Desjà la diligente Avette  
Boit la marjolaine et le tin,  
Et revient riche du butin  
Qu'elle a prins sur le mont Hymette.

Je voy le genereux Lion,  
Qui sort de sa demeure creuse.  
Herissant sa perruque affreuse,  
Qui faict fuyr Endimion.

15  
Sa Dame entrant dans les bocages  
Compte les Sangliers qu'elle a pris,  
Ou devale chez les esprits  
Errant aux sombres maresscages.

Je voy les Agneaux bondissans  
Sur les bleds qui ne font que naistre:  
Cloris chantant les mene paistre,  
Parmy ces costeaux verdissans.

20  
Les oyseaux d'un joyeux ramage  
En chantant semblent adorer  
La lumière qui vient dorer  
Leur cabinet et leur plumage.

La charrue escorche la plaine;  
Le bouvier qui suit les seillons  
Presse de voix et d'aiguillons  
Le couple de boeufs qui l'entraîne.
Alix apprête son fuseau;
Sa mère qui luy fait la tasche,
Presse le chanvre qu'elle attache
A sa quenouille de roseau.

Une confuse violence
Trouble le calme de la nuit,
Et la lumière avec le bruit
Dissipent l'ombre et le silence.

Alidor cherche à son resveil
L'ombre d'Iris qu'il a baisée,
Et pleure en son ame abusée
La fuite d'un si doux sommeil.

Les bestes sont dans leur tanière,
Qui tremblent de voir le Soleil;
L'homme remis par le sommeil
Reprend son ouvrage coutumière.

Le forgeron est au fourneau,
Oy comme le charbon s'alume;
Le fer rouge dessus l'enclume
Etincelle sous le marteau.

Ceste chandelle semble morte:
Le jour la fait esvanouyr;
Le Soleil vient nous esblouyr:
Voy qu'il passe au travers la porte.

Il est jour: levons-nous Philis,
Allons à nostre jardinage
Voir s'il est comme ton visage,
Semé de roses et de lis.

ALBA LONGA

The principle governing linear development in Le Matin originates in the custom of illicit lovers, who—singly or together—rise at dawn and separate. The same practice serves as the basis of the alba. It would be difficult, however, to prove that Théophile knew any medieval examples of the genre. On the other hand, like the trouvères who created the vernacular alba, Théophile must have known an important classical model, Ovid's Amores 1. 13. (In addition to the dawn/departure formula, several other of that elegy's structural peculiarities also occur in Le Matin, namely, the reference to Endymion, and the
account of occupations normally pursued after sunrise, especially tilling,7 and spinning.8)

Obviously, however, *Le Matin* radically deviates from the convention: though the lovers may depart from their trysting place, they will not separate. Instead, if the speaker has his way, they will pursue a new activity—in unison. Were this deviation insufficient in itself to preclude consecutive unity, another formal problem—the length, complexity, and disjointedness of the speaker’s opening description—certainly would do so.

*The Sunne Rising* (verses 1–56)

The poem opens on a note of extreme ambiguity. It is not clear who the speaker is or where, whether he is perceiving, imagining, remembering, reasoning, or engaging in a combination of these activities, whether his monologue is interior or dramatic—and if dramatic, whom he addresses. It is only in the second section that most of these problems are resolved.

The speaker begins by describing the dawn in the manner of countless poets (including Ovid):9 Aurora appears and flings colored light; while the moon flees and the stars fade, the sun, a golden chariot drawn by fire-breathing horses, arises from the sea to begin its customary circuit.10 There follows an account of dawn’s effect—the resumption of diurnal occupations—but passage from one item to the next is not rigorously determinate. Instead, the speaker presents a series of loosely associated tableaux, opening with celestial and closing with earthly activities or passivities. This implies that the verb “voir” (v. 17) refers less to perception than to an alloy of memory and imagination.

Pictured first is the bee (vv. 13–16), linked to the preceding section by images of drinking, movement, and union. Both the sun and the bee have imbibed—though on radically different scales (vv. 3 and 14); the sun’s horses and the bee are, respectively, ascending and descending (vv. 5 and 15–16); finally, just as “le front des estoilles / S’unit à la couleur des Cieux” (vv. 11–12), so the *marjolain* and the *tin* are combined in the bee’s crop. (The reference to Mount Hymettus is of philological interest, for it is from this peak that Ovid’s Aurora dispels darkness from the world.)

The suggestive link between the bee and the lion (vv. 17–20) is negative. The two creatures are, for example, opposites in size
and power. Moreover, the bee returns to an enclosure—the hive—whereas the lion emerges from one—his “demeure creuse” (v. 18). Finally, the bee is active but the lion has yet to begin his daily depredations. (When he asserts that bristling his mane, the lion makes Endymion flee [vv. 19–20], the speaker confuses the hypothetical with the real for the sake of creating a brilliant hyperbole. The speaker means, of course, that the lion’s perruque is so frightful that it would awaken the eternal sleeper and frighten him away if only Endymion were susceptible.)

The ambiguous possessive adjective sa in verse 21 leaves some doubt about the identity of the Dame. Does the speaker refer to the lioness (an equally predatory member of the pride), or to Selene-Diana, goddess of the moon, a huntress who loved Endymion and visited him in his demeure creuse? That the subject of this stanza goes to visit marsh sprites (vv. 23–24) tilts the interpretation in Diana’s favor, for she was attended by a band of water nymphs. In either case, the transition from the preceding stanza is effected by the contrast between “entrant” (v. 21) and “sort” (v. 18), along with its synonym, in this context, “fuyr” (v. 20).

The bounding lambs following a shepherdess (vv. 25–28) stand in antithesis with the lion and “esprits / Errant” (vv. 23–24), just as their respective settings contrast with one another: “sombres marescages” (v. 24) and “bleds . . . costeaux verdissans” (vv. 26–28).

The description of birds warbling at the light that decorates their retreat (vv. 29–32) articulates with the preceding tableau by the repetition of the key word “chantant” (vv. 27 and 30) and the related “ramage” (v. 29).

The tiller’s stanza (vv. 33–36) conjoins with that of the birds by negative suggestion: undisturbed “plumage” (v. 32) contrasts sharply with the surface of the soil, which his plow “escorche” (v. 33); and the birds’ sequestered “cabinet” (v. 32) stands in opposition to the open “plaine” (v. 33) on which he labors. The total effect is one of antithesis between a closed, tranquil environment decorated by animal life and an open, violent setting dominated by man.

From the image of oxen, driven by the tiller, to that of Alix preparing to spin (vv. 37–40), there is a great distance, bridged associatively by the formal similarity between “aiguillons” (v.
35) and the "fuseau" (v. 37), as well as the repetition of the term pressé—with its play on its literal and figurative meanings (vv. 35 and 39).

The following tableau presents an unusual problem:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Une confuse violence} \\
\text{Trouble le calme de la nuit,} \\
\text{Et la lumière avec le bruit} \\
\text{Dissipent l'ombre et le silence.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Vv. 41-44)

These lines serve to recall that the activities described before and after them are occurring simultaneously at the break of day, i.e., that the time required for reading or recitation of so many vignettes does not entail the forward movement of the poem’s pseudonarrative time by so much as a second. The strophe-rappel is linked to those of the spinner and tiller by the antithesis between orderly work performed in the latter, over against the "confuse violence" (v. 41) of dawn.

Linking the strophe-rappel to the conventional alba ending are the repetition of the word "ombre" (vv. 44 and 46), the analogy between Iris's disappearance and the dispersal of night, and the abrupt transitions from night to dawn (vv. 43-44) and from sleeping to waking (v. 45), plus the depiction of an aggrieved lover separating, or separated, from his beloved at dawn (vv. 45-48). Why Le Matin does not terminate at this point is obvious. Developmentally this stanza lacks closural force, as it leaves the speaker’s identity and situation—as well as the nature and purpose of his acts—in a state of unresolved ambiguity. To stop at this point would leave the poem formally incomplete and thus disunified. Moreover, no special terminal features—allusive or stylistic—are present to help arrest expectation of further development and to prepare for the end of the discourse.

The opening section's penultimate stanza (vv. 49-52)—which describes small animals trembling in their burrows and men going to their accustomed work—articulates with the Alidor tableau on two levels: that of analogy (between Iris’s flight and the concealment of the prospective prey) and that of imagery (for interiority is denoted by the synonyms "en" [v. 47] and "dans" [v. 49]. Finally, the smith’s labor and perception prolong the idea of "œuvre" (v. 52).
The Closed Compass (verses 57-64)

Having set the scene at extraordinary length, the speaker finally prepares to take action or exhort to it, stressing the paradox of darkness at dawn and the chiaroscuro resulting from light's penetration of the door (vv. 57-60). The visual and aural associations of "étincelle" (v. 56) facilitate the transition from the preceding stanza.

There follows an invitation from the speaker to Philis: not to separate but to join him in the garden where they can test his analogy between the coloring of her face and that of the flowers. The repetition of the verb voir (vv. 60 and 63) and the repeated image of passing through a portal (vv. 60 and 62) smooth the transition from scene to act.

The last stanzas constitute a model finale. First and most obviously, they complete the convention, though in an unexpected and perverse way. They also resolve the poem's ambiguities by revealing the speaker's identity, situation, and action: he is a lover who greets his waking mistress with a dramatic monologue rich in recollections and fancies focused on the time of day, as well as the actions and sufferings of other creatures—all of this as a prelude to departure for a "task" that awaits them outside their dwelling. Because the finale is unexpected and potentially disconcerting, it is necessary that closure be as strong as possible. And it is, thanks to the poet's use of special terminal features. The poem concludes with a pointe whose open/shut structure arrests expectation of further development:

Allons à nostre jardinage
Voir s'il est comme ton visage,
Semé de roses et de lis.
(Vv. 62–64)

Beginning with verse 54, there is also a major shift in syntax—away from the simple declarative patterns that dominate the poem to a series of imperatives ("oy" [v. 54], "Voy" [v. 60], "Allons" [v. 62]), the last of which seems to suggest a conclusion drawn from the preceding materials. Moreover, the vocabulary of the final verses recapitulates—explicitly, by synonymy, or by metaphor—many of the terms found in the opening stanzas, e.g., "front" (v. 1) / "visage" (v. 63), semer (vv. 2
and 64), and "yvoire (v. 2) / "lis" (v. 64). This device provides a conclusive sense of "having come full circle."

Thus the poem opens, unfolds, and ends, its sequential unity blasted by a long, loosely articulated digression. Closer examination of the imagery and symbolism, however, points to the pervasive analogical reasoning, which not only redeems but metaphysically necessitates the dislocated exposition.

A PHAÉTON OF THE MIND

As indicated above, a portion of Le Matin originates in Ovid's Metamorphoses 2, whereas generally the poem's structure has marked affinities with that of the thirteenth elegy of the same poet's Amores 1. These would be little more than marginally interesting historical facts if they did not bear directly on the solution to the poem's formal problems.

In the section of the Metamorphoses from which the two early lines are adapted, the narrator recounts the catastrophic ride taken by Phaëton in his father Apollo's sun chariot. Careening back and forth between heaven and earth, Phaëton saw many objects: great cities set aflame by the car, the Alps, the Moon, and—of greatest interest here—the constellations. These he perceives not as groups of stars but as the figures whose cardinal points the stars traditionally indicate:

For the first time the cold bears grew hot with the rays of the sun and tried, though all in vain, to plunge into the sea. And the Serpent, which lies nearest the icy pole, ever before harmless because sluggish with the cold, now grew hot and conceived great frenzy from that fire. They say that you also, Boötes, fled in terror, slow though you were, and held back by your clumsy ox-cart. (Vv. 171-77)

Note that at least one of these, Boötes, is engaged in his oeuvre coustumiere. This theme of labor at (or soon after) dawn is a concern of the speaker in Ovid's elegy as well: he hates sunrise in part at least because it announces the resumption of toil:

You cheat boys of their slumber and give them over to the master, that their tender hands may yield to the cruel stroke; and likewise many do you send as sponsors before the court, to undergo great losses at a single word. You bring joy neither to lawyer nor to pleader; each is ever compelled to rise for cases anew. (Vv. 17-22)
Now close examination of the text strongly suggests that in the central descriptive stanzas the speaker fuses and transforms the two Ovidian motifs: that of earthly loss and labor at dawn, and that of the living constellations.

The bee, already associated with celestial activities by its operations on Mount Hymettus, parallels the constellation Apes (renamed Mosca), found to the east of Aries. The lion, distinguished by its terrifying perruque, is analogous to the fierce Leo Major, two of whose brightest stars, sigma and upsilon, are found in the mane. There being no lioness in the skies, it is even more certain that the Dame of verse 21 is Endymion's lady, the moon goddess Selene-Diana. Her descent into darkness is an analogue for the moon's setting. The agneaux represent Aries, which have been perceived as a flock of sheep. Meanwhile, the oyseaux are analogues to the Pleiades (also known as the Colombae). The tiller goading his oxen to pull the plow is burlesque analogue of Apollo himself, goading his horses to pull the sun chariot. The filial Alix—whose name suggests nobility or honesty—typifies the Lost Pleiade or Virgo. The latter holds a palm, symbol of rebirth, not a distaff, although the distaff might symbolize renewal for, by its action, the hemp will change its mode of existence, its potentialities, and its ends. The lovers, Alidor and Iris, symbolize Orion and his mistress Eos (Aurora by a different name), who naturally disappears moments before the break of day. The bestes in their burrows are analogous with Lepus, seen in the sky crouching low on the horizon, almost trampled by Orion. And finally, the forgeron—who seems remarkably like Vulcan—resembles the sun itself, for which Vulcan was sometimes taken as a symbol. The identifications converge and form one term of a master analogy crucial to the speaker's thought and hence to the unity of Le Matin. As an earthbound, diurnal equivalent to a round-the-clock labor force in heaven, they constitute a microcosm. Significantly, however, the speaker excludes his mistress and himself from this universal scheme of labor and loss. They correspond to no constellation, they do not labor—physically, at least—and they do not separate, as social conventions dictate.

The lovers' anomalous standing receives further emphasis in images repeated by the speaker throughout the poem. There are at least three great networks that implicate the celestial and ter-
restrial domains, as well as the lovers'. These are movement, substance, and sound.

The imagery of movement includes three subtypes, which in one case overlap: the vertical, the oblique, and the emergent. Just as the sun's horses "sort[ent] de l'onde" (v. 5), the lion "sort de sa demeure creuse" (v. 18)—both to begin their daily tasks. By contrast, the lovers will emerge from their shelter, but not to engage in physical labor; instead they will visit their garden, and test the speaker's analogy. The sun emerges from the sea and rises, just as the bee flies up to Mount Hymettus, and the growing lambs, full of surplus vitality, leap up on the verdure—as part of their daily routine. But if and when Philis arises in response to her lover's request (v. 61), her sole purpose will be to test poetic comparisons. Meanwhile light falls from above, the bee comes back down from Mount Hymettus, and Diane dévale among her attendant sprites, just as the plow cuts deeply into the soil, rabbits burrow, and the smith strikes the anvil. In none of this downward movement, however, do the lovers participate. Perhaps a "minus factor," this phenomenon points yet again to the lovers' freedom from ordinary labor; it may also imply their exemption from humble and humbling acts or preoccupations. Finally there is curved or slanting movement: the sun will make an "oblique tour" (v. 4), and Alix will spin a wheel. The lover, too, makes an oblique tour, but in a sense wholly different from that of verse 4—he will think and speak in equivocal, indirect, and analogically rich terms—a fact by which he points (obliquely!) to his unusual rank.

The imagery of substance and sound give further clues. The universe of loss and labor—macrocosm and microcosm—are directly cognizable in terms of conventional categories—animal, vegetable, and mineral; fire, air, earth, and water. But his mistress's face is ineffable in ordinary language; it can be apprehended only by an analogy, ingeniously provided by her lover. In the universe at large, moreover, sound is generally noise or simple patterns of tone: the snorting of Apollo's horses, Cloris's song, the warbling of birds, the tiller's shouts, Alidor's weeping, and so on. The lover, however, whose speech the poem itself more than amply illustrates, is, as already indicated, the master of the oblique tour: equivocal, dovetailing, implication-laden discourse—in short, poetry.
To sum up, all the personages in *Le Matin* are wholly subject to most ordinary rules—except the lovers. All—except the lovers—are not more than minor terms in a universal analogy of loss and labor. The lovers’ various characteristics and action distinguish them as marginal participants ultimately transcending this scheme. Like mankind they are earthbound and physically limited. Like lesser divinities they are superior in power and dignity to mankind. But above all, they together resemble the supreme divinity: the mistress, like God, is not directly knowable and is declared capable of self-reflexive thought (no other personage in the poem can make that claim); but her thinking is restricted to the figurative terms provided by her privileged intimate, the speaker, a man endowed with the power to create verbal equivalents to the divinely ordained analogies of which the universe is constituted. In short, the lover portrays his mistress and himself as constituting a set apart, intersecting those of man, the gods, and God. Exceptions to nearly all hierarchies, they are comparable to the lovers described by Donne, who are a microuniverse and a law unto themselves.

The fragments of the conventional sequence are thus resolved into a lavish description of a state or condition of being, presented contrastively, aspect by aspect. In terms of this descriptive unity, the violation of the literary rule, itself a mere reflection of a broken social rule, is not merely appropriate but absolutely indispensable to the coherence of the poem.

Outside the devotional sequences, lyrics with “conventional” structures are relatively rare during *le premier dix-septième siècle*. Any account of those which deviate from pre-established norms but attain nonconsecutive unity nevertheless would certainly include two very well-known texts: Malherbe’s *Consolation à M. du Périer* in its last revision and Saint-Amant’s *sonnet à treize vers*.


2. For much of the data from which I draw the inferences to follow, I am indebted to Terence C. Cave’s indispensable study *Devotional Poetry in France ca. 1570–1613* and Nancy Hafer’s “The Art of Metaphor in La Céppède’s *Théorèmes* of 1613,” as well as her important refinement of Cave’s
theory, "Developmental Patterns in La Ceppède's Théorèmes." All of these studies stem, of course, from Louis L. Martz's classic, *The Poetry of Meditation*. Regrettably, Paul Chilton's cogent anticonventionalist argument in *The Poetry of Jean de La Ceppède* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) was unavailable to me as I completed this essay.

3. All citations of La Ceppède refer to *Les Théorèmes sur le sacré mystère de nostre rédemption*.

4. All citations of "Le Matin" refer to Théophile de Viau, *Oeuvres poétiques*, 1:13-16. I have normalized the punctuation.

5. See Rudolph Schevill in *Ovid and the Renaissance in Spain*, p. 126.


7. V. 15 of Ovid, cf. vv. 33-36 of Théophile.


PART TWO
BEYOND INDETERMINACY