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The Old Testament in the poetry of Alfred De Vigny

Dorothy Johnson Samuel

Atlanta University

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THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE POETRY
OF ALFRED DE VIGNY

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
DOROTHY JOHNSON SAMUEL

DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JUNE 1941
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to show how Alfred de Vigny, French Romantic poet, used material in the Old Testament as a source of poetic inspiration. It is significant because of the great role that religion played in the Romantic movement.

Only the poems chiefly restricted to sources from the Old Testament will be discussed in this treatise. For instance, Le Bain, fragment of Suzanne, based upon the Apocrypha, and Le Mont des Oliviers, inspired by the New Testament, will be omitted, because they are outside the limitations of this paper. The Appendix, however, contains an outline showing the location of Biblical allusions appearing in all the poems of Vigny not included in the discussions in the text.

The data are divided into three main parts: first, a discussion of the influence of the Bible on French Romantic literature; secondly, an account of those events of the poet's life which cause his resort to stoicism, and a discussion of his ideas concerning religion; and thirdly, a detailed analysis of his poems based upon the Old Testament, followed by a summary of the findings.

In regard to the analysis of the poems the following method is observed: (1) General location of Biblical sources; (2) Special text quoted from one or two key verses; (3) Interpretation of the poem, followed by a statement of conclusion. To avoid monotony, each interpretation has an individual method of development.

1 Supplemented by a chart.
2 Quotation in English indicates the failure of the poet to supply a text.
BRIEF CHART OF THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE
IN MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE
(Prior to Chateaubriand)

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2 French translation did not appear until 1812 and 1813.
3 French translation appeared in 1789
4 Followed by Aubert's Voeu de Jephté (1765) and Bitaubé's Joseph (1787).
CHAPTER I

HISTORY OF THE BIBLE IN MODERN FRENCH POETRY

Chateaubriand, whose Génie du Christianisme appeared almost simultaneously with the conclusion of the Concordat, is immediately responsible for leading the Romanticists back to the Bible for literary inspiration. To appreciate fully, however, the influence of the Bible on Romanticism it is necessary to know something about the history of the Bible as a source in modern French poetry. This history begins with Marot's translations of the Psalms (1540-1543), which were used as a hymnal for the Protestants. At this time the Protestants were undergoing many hardships for their faith; therefore, they chose stories from the Bible that illustrated similar trials experienced by its personages. The Catholics, on the other hand, chose incidents which manifested God's displeasure against heretics. Hence, the first part of the sixteenth century used the Bible much more as a means of conversion to faith than as a purely literary source for inspiration. During the second part of the century, the poetry exhibited a medley of Biblical personages with the characteristics of personalities found in classical or Italian literature.

In the sixteenth century Protestant and Catholic poets had used the Bible as an instrument of religious propaganda; in the seventeenth it was used not only for religious, but also for moral and social instruction as well. Racan attacks the free-thinkers, the practice of duelling, unfair taxes, and other abuses of his day. The chief burden of the religious poetry of the seventeenth century was the championship of Providence; therefore whatever books could furnish the best arguments for this defense were exploited. Consequently, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Epistles were the primary sources of inspiration.

During the seventeenth century Racine's Esther and Athalie encouraged
other poets to use subjects from the Bible; the authors of the eighteenth century continued to write Biblical plays. Lefranc, J.-B. Rousseau, and Louis Racine followed the example of Racan in their paraphrases of the Psalms by advocating social reforms and taking up the defense of Providence. Just before the middle of the century, however, the poets seemed to lose interest in Biblical subjects, and it was not until numerous foreign influences were brought to bear upon their literature that French writers began to resort to the Bible once more for inspiration.

Probably the first of these foreign influences was a series of lectures delivered in 1753 by Bishop Lowth at Oxford in Latin. These lectures on the Bible, the De sacra poesi hebraeorum, were later translated into English and in 1812 into French and published in book form. Numerous French writers -- Voltaire, Rouyer, Chateaubriand -- were acquainted with this work, which sought to encourage the study of the Old Testament from the purely literary point of view and to call attention to the imagery and the grandeur of Hebrew poetry. During the same period the German writers -- Bodmer, Klopstock, and Gessner -- began to turn to the Bible for literary subjects. One author claims that Gessner led the French back to the utilization of the Bible for literary purposes. At any rate, two French works seemingly inspired by Gessner's Death of Abel (1758), were published in 1765: a Lettre de Cain après son crime à Mehala son épouse and Aubert's Voeu de Jephté. These were swiftly followed in 1767 by Bitaube's Joseph and later by his Isaac et Rebecca. Herder, in his Spirit of Hebrew Poetry (1782), hoped to make of the Bible a source of literary inspiration equal to Homer and Ossian. Herder, whose aim was to complement Lowth, did much to stimulate a taste for Oriental and Hebrew antiquities.

N. H. Clement, op. cit., p. 152
Perhaps of greater moment than the influence of foreign literature on French writers, was Napoleon's success in establishing Catholicism on a firm basis once more. The people of the eighteenth century had been greatly influenced by the deistic philosophy of both Voltaire and Rousseau. Since 1791 the Catholic cult had been disorganized. The Pope had refused to accept the Civil Constitution of the Clergy voted by the Assembly. A schism had resulted in the Church of France. During the persistent troubles of the Revolution, the church doors were closed and the monks were defrocked. Consequently, there grew up a generation of deists and atheists. Napoleon, although nourished upon philosophical ideas, was too shrewd a politician not to realize the importance of religion. Entering into negotiations with Pope Pius VII, he succeeded in restoring the Catholic Church on a regular footing. The Concordat, signed by the Pope and Napoleon in 1802, was welcomed with joy by the population. Both Napoleon and Chateaubriand were instrumental in making religion fashionable, however, for it was the publication of the Génie du Christianisme, just four days before the signing of the Concordat, that led the Romanticists to the Bible for literary inspiration. Indeed, the Bible not only became the rival of Homer and Ossian, but soon supplanted them. Chateaubriand's comparison between Homer and the Bible is distinctly to the advantage of the Bible. He stressed the simplicity, imagery, and sublimity of Hebrew poetry and called attention to the picturesqueness of its landscapes, of its manners and customs.

The remarkable success of the Génie du Christianisme is in part due to the time of its appearance. For seven years Catholic ceremonies had been celebrated all over France; clergymen had been officiating in 36,000 parishes since 1796; then the Concordat united the Church and State almost simultaneously with the appearance of the book. Public opinion was in the mood to accept such a work.
Il est très certain que le christianisme avait besoin d'être réhabilité. Le XVIIIe siècle l'avait ouvert de ridicule, affirmant qu'il n'y avait que les imbéciles pour y croire. Il fallait créer le préjugé contraire, rassurer l'amour-propre du Français, fondamentalement catholique par son héritage, par ses souvenirs de jeunesse, par toutes les habitudes de sa vie, affranchir les classes éclairées de la peur du ridicule attaché à la pratique de la religion, la leur représenter respectable, décente et belle. Pour cela, il y avait à ranimer plutôt qu'à démontrer la foi; il suffisait de réveiller par des tableaux pittoresques et pathétiques la religiosité endormie au fond des âmes. Ce fut justement le dessein de Chateaubriand.1

The Classicists had sought to bar religion from literature by placing a barrier between the profane world of art and the realm of the divine. The neo-classicists of the eighteenth century like Voltaire had continued this divorce of religion and art because they did not conceive of spiritual, mystical values as well as those of reason. Religion for the Romanticists immediately following Chateaubriand is less a matter of conviction than of vague spiritual aspirations and delight in exterior beauty. Therefore, we might say that religiosity becomes a dominating element in French literature during the period of Romanticism. Millevoye was quick to see how the use of the Bible as a source of inspiration might promote the renovation of poetry. He introduced to some extent the customs and manners of the Bible in his Salamîte and in David plorant Saul et Jonathas. The influence of Chateaubriand and the Bible on Lamartine is found throughout his works: Méditations, Harmonies, Déesie sacrée, Chants lyriques de Saül, L'Apparition de l'ombre de Samuel, Cantate pour les enfants d'une maison de charité, Fragment biblique, Le Tombeau de David, and La Chute d'un ange. In his Méditations and the Harmonies, Lamartine adopted one of Chateaubriand's basic ideas, the fostering of the religious sentiment in the hearts of men through poetry. The inspiration of the Méditations is religious and Christian and of the Harmonies vaguely religious. In fact, this latter work is mainly deistic in sentiment; its publication in 1830 marks the beginning

1 G. Lanson, P. Tuffrau. Manuel d'histoire de la littérature française, (Paris, 1936), p. 523
of the poet's eventual drift in the direction of pantheism. Although the Romanticists in general were primarily interested in the picturesque-ness of language and the imagery of the Bible, Lamartine's chief interest was in Biblical stories which would lend themselves to the lyrical expression of his own personal feelings.

The dramatization of the Bible with local color appeared on the stage for the first time in 1822 in Soumet's Saul. About the same time Vigny published Moïse, La Fille de Jephé, La Femme Adultère, and Le Bain. La Colère de Samson appeared in 1839, Le Mont des Oliviers in 1840, and Le Déluge had been published in 1824. The local color so characteristic of the poems of Vigny is derived not only from the Bible, but also from Don Calmet's Dissertations on the dress, musical instruments, and customs of the Hebrews and from Fleury's Histoires de Israélites.¹ Even so, Vigny's main interest lay in stressing the characters, sentiments, and especially ideas in his poems.

Hugo, on the other hand, sought picturesqueness above all else in his utilization of the Bible. This love of the picturesque is manifest in style, language, and color. The religious sentiment in Hugo, as in Lamartine, undergoes variations. When Hugo writes such poems as La Vision, Le Dévouement, L'homme heureux, and Jehovah, he is in the first fervor of his religious enthusiasm, but as 1830 approached, he, too, experiences doubts which are responsible for his later deistic and pantheistic leanings. Therefore, the influence of the Bible on Hugo's works goes through several stages.² From 1818-1821, in his Odes, Book I, Hugo uses the Bible as an auxiliary for the imagination; from 1821-1826, in his Odes II-V, as a confirmation of his religious beliefs; from 1826-

¹ Mentioned by Clement and Dupuy, and substantiated by Canet and Estève. Passages for comparison are quoted in a later chapter of this thesis.
² N. H. Clement, op. cit., pp. 156-157
1830, in Les Orientales and in Cromwell, as a source for picturesque effects; from 1830-1854, in the Feuilles d'Automne, Chants du Crépuscule, Voix Intérieures, Rayons et Ombres, Contemplations, as an inspiration for lyrical expression. From 1854-1859 he is drawn towards the epical portions of the Bible, and assumes the tones and attitudes of the prophets of the Old Testament, as in the Légende des Siècles, Dieu, and La Fin de Satan. In such poems of the period 1854-1860, such as La Sacre de la femme, La Conscience, Les Lions, Bœz endormi, and Première rencontre de Christ avec le tombeau, Hugo clearly portrays the color and picturesqueness of the Bible in his descriptions of its personages, institutions and life.

Therefore, the Bible, though used as a source for poetic and dramatic inspiration from time to time since the days of karot, experienced its greatest prestige as a literary source during the period of Romanticism. In turn, Romantic poetry owes to the Bible a number of stories, an intensification of its melancholy, and much of its picturesqueness and imagery. Following Chateaubriand, three great Romantic poets imbued their works with inspirations from the Bible, yet each in a different manner: Lamartine, by his lyricism; Hugo, by his picturesqueness; and Vigny, by his symbolism.

It is Vigny's remarkable success with his Biblical symbols, selected and created from the Old Testament, that influenced the writer to choose this poet's works for the discussion which follows.

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
Pessimism is one of the outstanding moods of the Romanticists. It differs from the pessimism of the Ancients in being personal: it has its origins in the sentiment of the inadequacy of one's own life. It finally develops into a dissatisfaction with life in general. For the Romantic pessimist life cheats existence of all hope and happiness and makes even regrets appear vain. With Vigny, this pessimism is as much the result of the circumstances of his life as it is of temperament.

Born in 1797, he was just eight years old when his mother had him installed in the Hix boarding-school. Here he was maladjusted, partly because of his sensitive nature, and partly because his title of nobility isolated him from his companions, who, through jealousy, often harassed him with practical jokes. Growing up during the period of France's great military victories under Napoleon, Vigny's one great ambition was military glory. Studying mathematics in preparation for entrance into the artillery, he was going to present himself at the Polytechnic School when the fall of the empire changed his plans. His parents succeeded in getting him placed in the corps of red musketeers, which had just been re-established by the Bourbons. There he remained from July, 1814 until the triumphal return of Napoleon in March, 1815 obliged the Bourbons to flee. Vigny, remaining faithful to Louis XVIII, was imprisoned at Amiens during the Hundred Days. At the second Restoration, his company was done away with, and he was placed in the fifth regiment of infantry of the royal guard and ranked as a second lieutenant. Thus instead of military glory he was doomed to military servitude in the monotony of garrison life.

The boredom of this existence was interrupted only by the publication of several poems and his final promotion to captain of the 55th regiment.
of infantry in 1823. Then came a second hope of military glory, when he was to be sent to take part in the Spanish War. But again he was to be disappointed, for he was never sent to Spain, but instead to a detachment at Oloron and later at Pau. Meanwhile he had fallen in love with the beautiful Delphine Gay, but his mother refused to consent to their marriage. Later his mother consented to a union which she believed rich; Vigny married in 1825. In 1827 he resigned from his twelve years of garrison life to pursue a literary career.

He was already successful as a poet, thanks to the fame of Moïse and Eloa, but it was in the theater that he gained his greatest glory. Cinq-Mars and La maréchale d'Ancre both enjoyed considerable success, but that of Chatterton was overwhelming. Marie Dorval, whom he loved, played the role of Kitty Bell. However, she soon deceived him not only as an actress but also in love. His final break with her (1835) was the signal of Vigny's retirement.

In 1842 he sought election to the French Academy, but lost five times before he was at last accepted in 1845. He suffered a great deal from the hostile reception he received there from Count Molé -- a reception condoned by Saint-Beuve perhaps through jealousy. In 1848 and 1849 he lost two legislative elections.

From then on his life was uneventful. Burdened with a chronically ill wife, and still grieving over the death of his mother, he spent his last years in the solitudes of Charente. One more misfortune was yet to befall him -- cancer of the stomach. No longer able to eat, he survived his wife only by a few months. He died, with the same stoicism which had been a part of his life, in September, 1863.

Consequently, thwarted so often in his material hopes and living in an age of religious doubt, Vigny sought an expression of his own despair

in the symbols of his poetry.
VIGNY'S IDEAS ON RELIGION

Vigny's ideas on religion are not those of a devout Christian, but rather those of a philosopher. Judging from the numerous entries in his Journal concerning his meditations and theories on religion, Vigny must have made a careful study of the Bible. Nevertheless, his ideas do not show a reverence for God, but pity for humanity suffering at the hand of God.

In preparation for the story of Lameruel, Vigny expresses this view:

"Craignez Dieu. Toujours craindre, est-ce adorer?"

"Je suis plus pieux que tous les horateurs, dit Lameruel, parce que je sais mieux que tous la terreur du Tout-puissant. Dans cette terreur vivent sans cesse la nature et la race humaine. La terre sait que tout ce qu'elle porte est faible comme le verre et doit se réduire en poussière; elle sent ses entrailles frémir et son axe trembler en tournant. Une fièvre éternelle la fait frissonner parce qu'elle sent toujours sa ceinture dévorée par les feux du soleil, tandis que sa tête et ses pieds sont chargés de glaces éternelles. Elle sent la punition et tout ce qu'elle porte la subit en naissant, en vivant et en mourant. Mais c'est l'homme qui souffre la plus dure de toutes. C'est l'homme qui est aux avant-postes dans ce combat éternel, infini, incompréhensible, des êtres créés contre la puissance créatrice et vengeresse. C'est l'homme qui est le plus près du Ciel et qui sent ses plus rudes coups."

First, Vigny believes that God is brutal in his desire for bloody revenge and his punishment of the innocent. This is the idea embodied in Le Déluge and in La Fille de Jéphthé. Quoting from the latter, Vigny reproaches God thus:

"Seigneur, vous êtes bien le Dieu de la vengeance; En échange du crime il vous faut l'innocence. C'est la vapeur du sang qui plaît au Dieu jaloux! Je lui dois une hostie, ô ma fille! et c'est vous!"

1 Vigny's Journal d'un poète is very important for an understanding of his ideas, his works, and his personality.
Vigny's entire philosophy concerning God is in direct contrast to such a passage as the following: "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."¹ He regards God as powerful, but malicious in His intent concerning man:

La Présence de Dieu, n'est-ce pas le Destin? La Providence est plus gaie, plaisante amèrement et dit à l'homme: Je te donne la vie. Voyons ce que tu vas en faire. Je sais ce que tu devrais faire mais je ne veux pas te le dire, par malice. Je sais d'avance ce que tu feras, mais il me plaît de ne pas t'en empêcher.

Tu es libre de faire le mal, mais je t'en punirai peut-être dans la vie et certainement après, pour l'Éternité. Tu es libre de faire le bien mais tu n'en seras peut-être pas récompensé ni dans la vie ni après. Car si, par exemple, tu es perdu et condamné d'avance. Quant au bien et au mal, tu n'as aucun guide pour les connaître et tu disputeras sur cette science toute la vie. J'ai créé le péché, la douleur et la mort, tu ne sauras jamais pourquoi. L'homme sera comme Job.²

Vigny does not share the views of those who think that man's misfortunes are justified. Against this opinion held by Joseph de Maistre, he writes:

Il est plaisant que Joseph de Maistre, qui a l'insolence d'accuser Pascal, Rousseau, Locke, Bacon de légèreté, dise ceci: "La mal est sur la terre très justement et Dieu ne saurait en être l'auteur. C'est une vérité dont nous doutons ni vous ni moi et que je puis dispenser de prouver." Et il passe à autre chose.

Il me semble que cette bagatelle valait qu'on s'y arrêtât. Hume valait la peine qu'on l'écoute quand il dit dans ses essais: "Aux yeux de l'homme rien ne peut absoudre la Providence d'avoir créé le mal et la mort."³

In fact, Vigny criticizes Creation itself: "La Creation est une ébauche. Le tableau se perfectionnera-t-il? Peut-être? Qui sait? Il n'est pas en train pourtant."⁴

Secondly, he believes that God⁵ has taken unfair advantage of man in

¹ Psalms CXXXVI, 1
² Alfred de Vigny. Journal d'un poète, p. 299
³ ibid., p. 306
⁴ ibid., p. 332
⁵ Vigny sometimes challenges the very existence of God, e.g. (Ibid., p.33): "Dieu. Sais-je ce que vous êtes, et si vous existez?"
the matter of ignorance. He has placed man on earth, giving him no inkling of whence he has come, why he is here, nor where he is going.

Voici la vie humaine. Je me figure d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants saisis dans un sommeil profond. Ils se réveillent emprisonnés, ils s'accoutument à leur prison et s'y font de petits jardins. Rien à peu, ils s'aperçoivent qu'on les enlève les uns après les autres pour toujours. Ils ne savent ni pourquoi ils sont en prison ni où on les conduit après, et ils savent qu'ils ne le sauront jamais.

Il est certain que le maître de la prison, le gouverneur, nous a fait savoir, s'il l'a voulu, et notre procès et notre arrêt.

In view of this state of affairs, Vigny maintains that man has a right to respond to the Creator in the following words:

Pourquoi m'avez-vous condamné à être Oedipe ou Job? Rien m'importe de savoir si je suis libre ou non, puisque ma liberté est aussi aveugle et aussi que l'antique esclavage. Quel est le meilleur d'être conduit par le bras à un mal inévitable et l'on ne sait où? ou bien de pouvoir marcher dans un cage remplie de souricières dans lesquelles vous tombez, cages qu'une main invisible porte on ne sait où?

Fatalité, Providence, livre du Destin ou livre de Dieu, je suis certain que nul de mes semblables ne vous comprendra. Lorsqu'ils disent vous avoir compris, je ne le crois pas. Vous êtes une seule puissance qui faites de moi ce qu'il vous plaît, que je ne dois ni bénir, ni maudire mais ignorer jusqu'à la mort. Voilà la réalité.

Thirdly, Vigny believes that God's injustices to man are not always those of omission but sometimes wrongs of commission.

Dans l'affaire de Gain et Abel, il est évident que Dieu eut les premiers torts, car il refusa l'offrande du laborieux laboureur pour accepter celle du fainéant pasteur. Justement indigné, le premier-né se vengea.

Vigny believes that the whole earth would revolt against God were it not afraid of Eternity and that in secret men are indignant about the injustices of creation:

La terre est révoltée des injustices de la création; elle dissimule par frayeur de l'Eternité; mais elle s'indigne en secret.

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1 Ibid., p. 172
2 Ibid., p. 299
contre le Dieu qui a créé le mal et la mort. Quand un contempteur
des dieux paraît, comme Ajax, fils d'Oilée, le monde l'adopte et
l'aime; tel est Satan; tels sont Oreste et don Juan.
Tous ceux qui lutèrent contre le ciel injuste ont eu l'admiration
et l'amour secret des hommes.¹

Fourthly, Vigny charges God with indifference to the prayers of men.
Vigny dramatizes the silence of God in Le Mont des Oliviers when Jesus
Himself can hear no response, and concludes that:

S'il est vrai qu'au Jardin sacré des Ecritures
Le Fils de l'Homme ait dit ce qu'on voit rapporté;
Muet, aveugle et sourd au cri des créatures,
Si le Ciel nous laissa comme un monde avorté,
Le juste opposera le dédain à l'absence
Et ne répondra plus que par un froid silence
Au silence éternel de la Divinité.²

Doubtless, the same idea inspired these lines of La Mort du Loup:

Gémir, pleurer, prier est également lâche.
Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche
Dans la voie où le sort a voulu t'appeler,
Puis, après, comme moi, souffre et meurs sans parler.³

Small wonder then that Vigny's plan for a poem on the Last Judgment
should embody the following idea:

Ce sera ce jour-là que Dieu viendra se justifier devant toutes les
âmes et tout ce qui est vie. Il parlera et parlera. Il dira
clairement pourquoi la création et pourquoi la souffrance et la
mort de l'innocence. En ce moment, ce sera le genre humain res-
suscité qui sera le juge, et l'Éternel, le Créateur, sera jugé par
les générations rendues à la vie.⁴

On the other hand, Vigny seems to love and admire Jesus — Jesus
who loves and pities suffering humanity. He mentions in details the
miracles of kindness performed by Christ in the opening stanzas of Eloa,
ou la Soeur des Anges. Indeed, it is from one of Jesus' tears wept at the

¹ Alfred de Vigny, Journal d'un poète, p. 288
³ Ibid., p. 218
tomb of Lazarus that the imaginary Eloa is created. That is why Eloa becomes the essence of pity and mercy. Vigny speaks of Christ thus:

"L'humanité devrait tomber à genoux devant cette histoire, parce que le sacrifice est ce qu'il y a de plus beau au monde, et qu'un Dieu né sur la crèche et mort sur la croix dépasse les bornes des plus grands sacrifices."

Vigny likewise loves and pities humanity: "J'aime la majesté des souffrances humaines. Ce vers est le sens de tous mes poèmes philosophiques."

However, he considers it futile for men to believe in mortality after death. He does not claim that there is no hereafter, but simply reasons that we who are living can never know during this life what takes place after death.

"Pourquoi nous résignons-nous à tout, excepté à ignorer les mystères de l'éternité? .........Nous ne sommes pas sûrs de tout savoir au sortir du cachot, mais sûrs de ne rien savoir dedans."

Yet, in spite of his seeming admiration of Christ, Vigny does not identify himself with Christianity: "Sur trois vertus, les trois théologales, en avoir deux, c'est beaucoup. J'ai la charité et l'espérance, mais je n'ai pas la foi." Speaking in general he makes this criticism: "L'Evangile est le désespoir même. La religion du Christ est une religion de désespoir puisqu'il désespère de la vie et n'aspire qu'à l'éternité."

Again he states: "La terre est maudite par le Christianisme et placée entre deux Paradis, celui de la terre et celui du ciel."

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1 Alfred de Vigny. Journal d'un poète, p. 55
2 Alfred de Vigny. Les Destinées, p. 47
3 Alfred de Vigny. Journal d'un poète, p. 172
4 Ibid., p. 546
5 Ibid., p. 356
6 Ibid., p. 560
Vigny does not believe in any organized religion as such. He plans to satirize these controversies over religious cults and denominations in his treatment of Lemuel's character:

Lamuel a cette religiosité organisatrice qui cherche toujours le Code dans les religions. -- La sœur Saint-Ange a la foi simple qui aime Dieu et aime tous les hommes pour Dieu. -- Lamuel remonte à la foi naïve ou plutôt, faisant effort pour revenir, y succombe. Soeur Saint-Ange l'emporte au ciel par ses exemples.  

Interesting to note is the criticism Vigny makes concerning Lamennais: "Il n'est pas coupable de chercher la vérité, mais il l'est de l'affirmer avant de l'avoir trouvée."  

Probably never entering into the spirit of worship, Vigny seems to enjoy the outward display of the church service:

Quand un peuple se lève et s'assied dans l'église
J'aime ses mouvements, ses bruits silencieux,
Sa réserve paisible et sa gentille mise
Quand l'orgue fait lever la multitude assise
Qui retombe à genoux sur le sol spacieux
Le froissement des pieds, des livres et des robes,
N'est-ce pas, O Seigneur .......

Although he declares that "toute théologie est la définition d'une supposition", Vigny sanctions the search for truth:

Les hommes qui détournent leurs yeux des questions religieuses dans la crainte de découvrir qu'une vérité consacrée était une fable sont des malades qui ne veulent pas voir de médecins dans la crainte d'apprendre le nom du mal qu'ils ont. Dans cette crainte ils ne se guérissent pas.

Vigny believes that there is but one essential difference between those who profess to believe certain religions and those who are labeled as skeptics or atheists:

Toute religion n'a jamais été crue qu'à moitié et a su eu ses athées et ses sceptiques. Mais les sages ont gardé leurs doutes dans leur cœur et ont respecté la fable sociale reçue généralement et adoptée du plus grand nombre.

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1 Ibid., 437 f.
2 Ibid., p. 536
3 Ibid., p. 554
4 Ibid., p. 584
5 Ibid., p. 558
6 Ibid., p. 548
When one is acquainted with these ideas cherished by the poet, he is not too surprised to find that Vigny is a pessimist and a stoic. A soldier for many years, he believes in the "culte de l'honneur." "La religion de l'honneur a son dieu toujours présent dans notre coeur."¹

To express these thoughts Vigny has created a new poetic form: the symbolic poem.² Consequently, the characters of the Bible which appear in Vigny's poems are often transformed into lofty symbols of the poet's philosophy. Hence, Vigny utters his own disillusionment concerning women through the mouth of Samson and bewails his own solitude, ennui, and despondency by means of his "homme fatal," Moses.

Vigny's attitude on religion may be summarized in his own explanation which he planned to express poetically under the title of Bisson:

Tel est l'homme moderne en France. L'honneur est sa foi, la conscience sa morale, le devoir sa loi; il est actif et savant. Sa science première est celle de son état; il ne veut plus permettre à son imagination d'errer dans les champs de la théologie et de la superstition; il combat et sert la patrie et l'espèce humaine dans les temps présents, sans vouloir prêjuger de l'éternité. Il désire que Dieu soit et qu'il reçoive le juste dans sa paix; mais ne croit pas toujours et n'affirme plus. Quelle est l'idée qui soutient son courage? Il ne le dit même pas."³

In conclusion, then, Vigny could scarcely be considered an atheist since he does not deny the existence of God, but his opinions could doubtless brand him as an agnostic, since he denies that man possesses any knowledge of the ultimate nature of things but he neither affirms nor denies the existence of a personal Deity.

¹ Ibid., p. 307
² G. Lanson, P. Tuffrau. _op. cit._, p. 562
³ Type of character frequently used by the Romanticists to portray the sorrowful man of destiny, e.g., Chateaubriand's René and Hugo's Hernani.
⁴ Alfred de Vigny. _Journal d'un poète_, p. 311
CHAPTER IV

MOISE

General location: Deuteronomy xxxiv, 1-12.

Special text quoted: "And there arose not a prophet since in Israël like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."

Deut. xxxiv, 10.

It is not improbable that Vigny had more than one thing in mind when he chose the subject Moïse. First, Chateaubriand in his Génie du Christianisme had suggested the rare qualities of such a subject:

"Nous les avons, ces préceptes divins: et quel préceptes pour le sage! et quel tableau pour le poète! Voyez cet homme qui descend de ces hauteurs brûlantes. Ses mains soutiennent une table de pierre sur sa poitrine, son front est orné de deux rayons de feu, son visage resplendit des gloires du Seigneur, la terreur de Jéhovah le précède; à l'horizon se déploie la chaîne du Liban avec ses éternelles neiges et ses cédres fuyant dans le ciel. Prosterné au pied de la montagne, la postérité de Jacob se voile la tête dans la crainte de voir Dieu et de mourir."

Secondly, Vigny believed that everything which exists suffers in proportion to its greatness. This idea he brings out not only in the poem, Moïse, but also in his novel, Stello, and in his drama, Chatterton. In other words, he believed that genius is its own victim. Surely the man elected by God to lead six hundred thousand Israelites out of bondage would make a fitting symbol for the embodiment of this idea concerning the melancholy isolation of great minds.

The beginning of the poem is colorful and majestic. Vigny places Moses on the side of Mt. Nebo where he is to die. A setting sun casts its rays about the vast countryside — a setting sun symbolic of a declining life. All Canaan with its superabundance of natural resources is visible in the distance. Below him are the Israelites. He stretches his hand out over them, then continues his ascent. The assemblage of

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Hebrews mills about with upturned faces watching Moses until his head pierces the cloud beyond which is God. At this instant the crowd bows into the dust and sings a sacred song of praise.

In the following stanza the second division of the poem takes place. No longer are we conscious of the mass of people at the base of the mountain, but instead our attention is riveted upon Moses voicing his lament to God. It is in this lamentation that Vigny reviews some of the outstanding works of Moses. Here, also, Vigny has Moses to repeat as a refrain the lines which will emphasize the idea of the solitude of men of genius:

Hélas! je suis, Seigneur, puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre!

Vous m'avez fait vieillir puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre!

O Seigneur! j'ai vécu puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre!

At the end of this plaint the scene shifts again to the Israelites kneeling in the dust, praying to God, and not daring to gaze upon the holy mountain. Soon the cloud which has been obscuring Moses and the summit of the mountain passes away, revealing the peak without Moses. There is a pause indicated by a dash. He is mourned. Another pause, and then we see Joshua, the successor of Moses, marching "pensif et pâlissant" toward the promised Land.

In comparing the poem Moïse with the Old Testament references, several things must be taken into account. It must be remembered, first, that Vigny had more than one source for his poems even when the essence of the material is taken from the Bible. Chateaubriand's Génie du Christianisme, Byron's Childe Harold and especially his

Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, pp. 16, 18, 19.
Manfred, Schiller's Cassandre, and Hillevoye's La Sultamite have all been selected by Canat and Estève as probable sources for some of the ideas and expressions found in Moïse.

Secondly, Vigny's aim is not to reproduce the identical figures found in the Bible but to transpose them into symbols imbued with his own philosophy. Vigny himself passed the following judgment on Moïse:

"Ce Moïse n'est pas celui des Juifs. Ce grand nom ne sort que de masque à un homme de tous les siècles, et plus moderne qu'antique: l'homme de génie las de son éternel veuvage et désespère de voir sa solitude plus vaste et plus aride à mesure qu'il grandit. Fatigué de sa grandeur, il demande le néant."

Thirdly, certain characteristics common to Romanticism tend to modify Vigny's tableaux. The expression of the emotions, descriptions of nature, and a disguised form of lyricism are all prevalent in his poems. It is thus that varied elements are introduced into the familiar Biblical narrative.

In three distinct ways, however, Vigny has followed the Biblical text with precision: in his reference to geographical names and locations, in his use of customary Biblical phrases, and in his adherence to historic details.

It is with great care that Vigny has located, presumably from map studies of ancient Palestine, the following places which he declares visible from the height of Mt. Nebo: Pisga (Fisgah), Galaad (Gilead), Ephraïm, Manassé (Manassah), Juda, Nevihtali, le mer occidentale (Dead Sea), les champs de Moab. He is careful not to give these places a description too grandiose, in contrast to other Romanticists, but portrays them with sobriety and simplicity of detail.

His choice of familiar Biblical phrases may be seen in those expressions:

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Alfred de Vigny. Morceaux choisis, p. 105
homme de Dieu——— used in apposition with Moses

haut lieu ———— used instead of mountain

votre peuple ———— used in reference to the Israelites, God's chosen people

Dieu jaloux ———— a term explained and emphasized in the Ten Commandments

Roi des Rois ———— used instead of God

Tout-rouissant ———— used in reference to God

It is obvious that Vigny is following historical records when he has Moses to ascend Mt. Nebo, to view the land of Canaan where he is forbidden to enter, to anticipate his death on his encounter with God who has promised him death ere the Israelites can enter the Promised Land, to have Moses disappear on the mountain, to have him mourned, and to have Joshua succeed him. Specific allusions which bear the stamp of accuracy are found in the following lines:

Dans le nuage obsc representait face à face (line 46)

Et six cent mille Hébreux, courbés dans la poussière (line 55)

Que vous ai-je donc fait pour être votre élu? (line 51)

J'ai conduit votre peuple où vous avez voulu (line 52)

Voilà que son pied touche à la terre promise (line 53)

Je lui légué mon livre et la verge d'airain (line 56)

Ruisseau du mont Horeb jusqu'au mont Nebo (line 59)

Mon doigt du peuple errant a guidé les passages (line 62)

J'ai fait pleuvoir le feu sur la tête des rois (line 63)

L'avvenir a genoux adorera mes lois (line 64)

Pour tarir dans leurs flammes la source des orages (line 78)

J'èlève mes regards, votre esprit me visite (line 85)

The writer italicizes the words or expressions which correspond to Biblical passages to differentiate them from the interpolations of the poet.
Sitôt que votre souffle a rempli le berger (line 91)
J'ai marché devant tous, triste et seul dans ma gloire (line 98)
 Aussi, loin de m'aimer, voilà qu'ils tremblent tous (line 103)
Bientôt le haut du mont resparaît sans voix (line 113)
Il fut pleuré. — Marchant vers la terre promise. (line 114)
Josué s'avancait pensif et pâlissant (line 115)
Car il était déjà l'élu du Tout-puissant. (line 116)

There are a few lines, however, which contain certain obscurities which lend themselves to diverse interpretations upon which nothing has been conclusively decided. Those lines are the following:

Des tombes des humains j'ouvre la plus ancienne,
Le mort trouve à ma voix une voix prophétique.

Je suis très grand, mes pieds sont sur les nations,
Ma main fait et défait les générations.

Je commande à la nuit de déchirer ses voiles;
La bouche par leur nom a compté les étoiles,
Et, dès qu'au firmament mon geste l'appela,
Chacune s'est hâtée en disant: "Je vois."

J'engloutis les cités sous les sables mouvants;
Je renverse les monts sous les ailes des vents.

Any of several things could have been in the mind of the poet: he could have been endowing this "homme de Dieu" with divine powers peculiar to God; he could have been using his own imagination to express the power of Moses symbolically; or he could have made these allusions as the result of vague confusions concerning his data.

Disposing thus of the lines of strict adherence to the Bible, and of those commonly regarded as obscure, there remain only those inspired by sources other than the Bible and those which are pure expressions of the poet's sentiments.

— Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, pp. 16-18
E. g., line 86: "La terre alors chancelle et le soleil hésite," suggests the miracles of Joshua rather than of Moses.
Edmond Estèbe attributes to Hillevooye's La Sulamite the inspiration
for Vigny's:

Et les fils de Lévi, s'éllevant sur la foule
Tels qu'un bois de cyprès sur la sable qui roule. (ll. 41-42)

Byron² (Lanfred, II, 2) seems to have inspired the following lines:

Sitôt que votre souffle a rempli le borgèse,
Les hommes se sont dit: Il nous est étranger. (ll. 91-92)

Probably Chateaubriand had as much influence in inspiring the next line as did Exodus:

Les vierges se voilaient et craignaient mourir. (l. 96)

If all these verses selected thus far are reminiscent either of the Scriptures or of other literary works, then where is the intermixture of Vigny's own ideas? In the first place, it must be understood that Vigny lacks originality and imagination, and borrows from these sources in order to be able to cloak his opinions in symbols.

Hélas! vous m'avez fait sage parmi les sages! (l. 61)

and

O Seigneur! j'ai vécu puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre! (ll. 106-108)

are the lines which really express the idea that Vigny attempts to portray in the poem. He himself feels misunderstood and attributes it

1 Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, p. 14, n. 3: Hillevooye, la Sulamite:

Comme l'humble arbisseau rentre dans la bruyère,
Quand le pin jusque'aux cieux lève sa tête altière,
Les enfants d'Israël s'abaissent devant toi.

2 Ibid., p. 18, n. 1: Byron, Lanfred:

By joys, my griefs, my passions and my powers,
Made me a stranger.

3 Fassim cit.: La postérité de Jacob se voile la tête dans la crainte de voir Dieu et de mourir.
to his poetic genius. Like Moses, he believed he was elected to
guide the people of his day, for he states in his Journal: "Les
prêtres de la société actuelle sont les poètes, les peintres, les
statuaires."¹

Including the line: "Pourquoi vous fallut-il tarir mes espérances?"²
with "Hélas! vous m'avez fait sage parmi les sages!"³ Canat makes the
following observation:

Hélas! et ...... Pourquoi... C'est en ces deux mots que se
résume, pour Vigny, le philosophe de la vie: angoisse de l'esprit,
souffrances du corps, de l'âme, du cœur. L'homme ne peut con-
naitre le pourquoi de rien: il n'est sûr que de sa misère. Il est
torturé par le doute. ⁴

In conclusion, it appears that while Vigny was well acquainted with
the Biblical narrative and in several instances was inspired by the
works of Chateaubriand, Byron, and Millevoye, his main purpose in
writing the poem Neige was to give expression to the solitude and the
despondency in his own soul and to picture the man of genius condemned
to live alone because of his very greatness.

¹ Alfred de Vigny. Journal d'un poète, p. 444
² Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, p. 15
³ Ibid.
⁴ Alfred de Vigny. Morceaux choisis, p. 102, n.3
CHAPTER V

LE DÉLUGE

General location: Genesis vi, 1-22; vii, 1-24; viii, 1-14; ix, 13

Special text (selected by Vigny):

"Serait-il dit que vous fassiez mourir le Juste avec le méchant?"

Genesis xviii, 23

The principal source of Vigny's Déluge is the Biblical drama, Ciel et Terre by Byron, although much of the material is in accordance with the text of the Scriptures. These two influences are easily recognized when one becomes acquainted with the narrative as Vigny tells it.

Vigny opens this poem, just as he began Moïse, by a setting characterized by a vivid description of nature. In Moïse it was the vast country which one could see from the height of the mountain that Vigny portrayed; in Le Déluge it is the entire earth. The earth, he says, was in its first bloom: all the forms of nature were just as God had created them.

Tout suivait sa loi douce et son premier penchant,
Tout était pur encore. Mais l'homme était méchant.1

Man was the only creature out of tune with God. Vigny describes in detail the beauty and purity of the earth, in order to make a sharp contrast between it and the wickedness of man. In the next stanza he relates the Biblical account of the major causes of human corruption. The races of men were really old; they were learned, but were bored by their own knowledge; no religion could give them satisfaction and the seeds of death were already sown in their icy souls. Nor was this

1 —— Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, p. 75
melancholy peculiar to mortals alone: the angels seeking diversion had left their high estate to cohabit with the daughters of men. Of these unholy unions children were born on earth.

This last fact mentioned is an important idea with Vigny throughout this poem, because his leading character, Emmanuel, is the offspring of one of these angels. Emmanuel, realizing that his father is immortal, naturally expects his father to save him from death in the flood. His father's failure to come to the rescue not only portrays the death of the innocent but also the silence of divine powers to the prayers of men.

Meanwhile, high up on the holy mountain of Ararat, appear a shepherd and his beloved, a virgin. Both born of simple pastoral families, they, by the gentleness of their language and the majesty of their countenances, represent the very quintessence of innocence and love. They watch the sunrise, which is followed by a weird gathering of clouds. As if by some strange premonition of evil, the birds begin to circle overhead while uttering mournful cries. Below the mountain the cities lie, but no human beings are visible. Only the voice of the shepherd, Emmanuel, is heard, first praising the beauties of the world, then foretelling the coming of the deluge, the omens of which he has read in the stars. Finally, he reveals the fact that during the night an angel has come to him. This angel, while weeping, has confessed that he is Emmanuel's father, bears the same name as his son, and since his immortality makes it impossible to join in death Emmanuel's deceased mother, he tells his son of a means by which they can be together in immortality. The angel has prayed for the pardon of the innocent Emmanuel, but insists that the shepherd must climb to the summit of Mt. Ararat where he must pray for himself. He must take no other mortals with him and he must not include them in his prayer. His father charges:
This idea is very important to Vigny, and is one of the main criticisms he makes of a belief in a personal God, as has been brought out in the discussion of the poet's religious opinions. It is further emphasized in this poem by the next lines:

Ne t'en étonne pas, n'y porte pas tes yeux;
La pitié du mortel n'est point celle des Cieux.
Dieu ne fait point de pacte avec la race humaine;
Qui créa sans amour fera périr sans haine.

These last two lines are probably the key verses to the whole poem.

On departing the angel again admonishes his son: "Sois seul, si Dieu m'entend, je viens." Notice there is a condition besides Emmanuel's obedience that will determine the angel's reappearance: "si Dieu m'entend" is the idea. Vigny does not permit the angel to return, thereby leaving the reader with two conjectures -- is it because Emmanuel is accompanied by the virgin or is it because God does not hear prayers? Can it be that He does not hear the prayer of either the mortal Emmanuel or the angel Emmanuel? This idea of God's refusal to hear the prayer of the angel could be excused by the statement that the angel had sinned by cohabiting with a mortal woman:

Que n'ai-je pu mourir lorsque mourut ta mère!
J'ai failli, je l'aimais, Dieu punit cet amour,
Elle fut enlevée en te laissant au jour.

It might be explained that God wished to torture further the angel by permitting his son to die in the flood. The writer doubts that this was Vigny's idea, however, because in Le Mont des Oliviers Vigny portrays the silence of God to the prayer of Jesus Christ, who had not sinned. Therefore, it would seem that Vigny is bringing out his

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1 Ibid., p. 82
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 31 f.
favorite idea of the indifference of God toward humanity in general.

The virgin is surprised to recognize in Emmanuel's experience a similarity to her own opportunity for salvation. One of Noah's sons, Japhet, has asked her to marry him, in order that he might legitimately carry her into the Ark with the rest of the family destined to be saved from the flood. But this same love which has prompted Emmanuel to bring Sara with him to the mountain height, has prevented her from accepting the offer of Japhet. In their ecstasy they embrace each other and both exclaim: "Ah! louons l'Éternel, il punit, mais rassemble!"\(^1\) Thunder roars, and both fall upon their knees, crying out: "O Seigneur, jugez-nous!"\(^2\)

This marks the end of Part I, which Vigny had entitled "la Jeunesse du monde". The next part describes the flood proper. The storm breaks all of a sudden. Vigny's description of it is baneful and lacks any relief. The winds howl, the waters billow, the mountains tremble, and the earth rocks. The waters are so powerful and so swift, that Vigny, introducing a bit of his own imagination into the narrative, draws a picture of the polar bears still on their floes jostling against the animals of the tropics. He contrasts the death of the animals with that of men. Just as Vigny portrays the uncomplaining death of the wolf in *La mort du Loup*, he makes the same observation in *Le Déluge*:

\[
\text{Les animaux n'osaient ni ramper ni courir,}\quad \text{Chacu d'eux résigné se coucha pour mourir.}
\]

Man, of course, ignored the overwhelming odds against him, and proceeded to battle over the remains of the earth; there was too much water to permit a land battle, so some old war vessels were called into duty. The

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 33
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 84
\(^3\) Ibid.
The war among men continued until both they and their ships were hurled to pieces by the force of the waves.

The men die gradually. Vigny gives us individual pictures of their agony. Hunger seizes some, who begin to eat the dead bodies floating about on the water. An atheist, fearing that God after all would be triumphant, desperately seeks to lengthen his life by one day while sucking the blood from the veins of a child. The ark passes by a dying king, but rather than seek the safety of the ark, he deems it more worthy to die with his subjects: he will still be king at the bottom of the sea.

Abruptly Vigny gives us a glimpse of the summit of Mt. Ararat, by reminding us that the angel has not yet made his return and that it is becoming dangerously late. This is a clever means of prolonging suspense and playing on the sympathy of the reader:

Lais sur le mont Arar l'Ange ne venait pas;
L'eau faisait sur les rocs de gigantesques pas,
Et ses flots rugissants vers le mont solitaire
Apportaient avec eux tous les bruits du tonnerre.

Finally, everything except the Ark and the apex of Mt. Ararat disappears beneath the waters. The storm is over, but the waters are still rising. The virgin is weeping in the arms of the orphan. Suddenly, a ray of sunlight falls on her forehead, and hope is reborn in her bosom. It is short lived however, because the dove, with a twig in her bill, passes them by. Then ensues the most heart-rending scene of all: the fruitless hope for the return of the angel while with every sentence the waters rise higher on their bodies. The alternating tones of hope and despair, of faith and doubt, are so symbolic, in the opinion of the writer, of the religious doubts and yearnings of the Romanticists in general, that it would be well to quote:

Ibid., p. 89
La colombe est passée et ne vient pas à nous.
Emmanuel, la mer a touché mes genoux.
Dieu nous attend ailleurs à l'abri des tempêtes.
Vois-tu l'eau sur nos pieds? — Vois le ciel sur nos têtes.
Ton père ne vient pas; nous serons donc punis?
Sans doute après la mort nous serons réunis.
Venez, Ange du ciel, et prêtez-lui vos ailes!
Recevez-la, mon père, aux voûtes éternelles!

It is the opinion of the writer that the above passage is indicative of Vigny's idea of Christianity — that it is a doctrine of pessimism. Christianity, like Emmanuel, ignores the possibility of happiness on earth and anticipates the joys of eternity. The virgin, like Vigny, is interested in the present state of affairs. She faces the situation as it stands: she is busy watching the rise of the water as it covers her feet and touches her knees. She realizes that the angel is not coming to their rescue and she is not afraid to say so. With her last breath, however, she prays for the salvation of Emmanuel at least.

Emmanuel, on the other hand, never speaks of the reality of things on earth. Refusing to look at the water beneath him, he prefers to see only the sky above. Rather than admit that the angel will not not come to their rescue, he suggests that God is awaiting them elsewhere in the shelter of the storms. Instead of considering that they are being punished by death, he looks forward to a happy reunion in eternity. Are not these the precepts of Christianity? Moreover, is it not significant that Vigny names his shepherd Emmanuel, which is one of the appellatives of Christ? Christ-like, he prays not for himself with his last utterance, but beseeches his father to receive Sara into the eternal canopies of Heaven. He supports Sara above

Ibid., p. 91

Saint Matthew 1:23 — Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, God with us.
the water as long as his strength lasts. As soon as they are both
engulfed, Vigny has the rainbow to appear signalizing the achievement
of God's purpose.

This abrupt ending immediately after the death of the innocent
shepherd and virgin tends to leave the reader wondering, as does
Vigny, about the reason, if any, for the death and punishment of the
innocent. In conclusion, it is the opinion of the writer that the
introduction of these imaginary characters into the Biblical story
enables Vigny, by centering the reader's attention on the fate of
two specific personages and by maintaining the suspense until the
very last stanza, to bring out his point with unusual force in spite
of the delicate sentimentalism of the seraphic poem.
CHAPTER VI

LA FILLE DE JEPHTÉ

General location:
Judges xi, 29-40

Special text (selected by Vigny):
"Et de là vient la coutume qui s'est toujours observée depuis en Israël."

"Que toutes les filles d'Israël s'assemblent une fois l'année, pour pleurer la fille de Jephté de Galaad pendant quatre jours."
Judges xi, 39-40

Vigny may have been first inspired by Chateaubriand to choose
La Fille de Jephté as a subject for a poem. Estève notes that
Vigny had recourse to Fleury's Hœurs des Israélites, Don Calmet's
dissertation on the musical instruments of the Hebrews in the Bible
of Venice, Byron's Cain, and to Don Calmet's Commentaire littéral, Josué,
les Juges et Ruth.

But whereas, Vigny may have obtained a detail or so concerning
the customs of the Hebrews fro these sources, the writer feels that
the poet has followed with precision the eleventh chapter of Judges.
None of Vigny's poems bear so close a resemblance to the Biblical text.

Just as Vigny portrayed in Le Déluge, the main idea of the Fille
de Jephté is the death of innocence at the hand of God. But instead
of merely stating: "La mort de l'Innocence est pour l'homme un
mystère", as he did in Le Déluge, he is now boldly exclaiming:

Seigneur, vous êtes bien le Dieu de la vengeance;
En échange du crime il vous faut l'innocence. (ll. 51-52)

and even:

C'est la vapeur du sang qui plaît au Dieu jaloux! (l. 53)

1
Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, pp. 96-100
Passim cit.
Therefore, the God of this poem will be even less justified in his punishment of the innocent, for even though Jephthah made the vow that whatever should first come out of his house to meet him following his victory would be sacrificed to God, does it have to be this young and stainless virgin who must suffer? Vigny wonders.

Vigny could have brought out this idea of divine injustice even more effectively had he included in his poem the circumstances that led Jephthah to make his vow. Jephthah, illegitimate son of Gilead, had been thrust out of his father's house by the legitimate sons. Consequently, he had been forced to leave the community and finally established himself in the land of Tob. Later he became a mighty warrior. When the Ammonites made war against the Israelites, these same brothers who had persecuted Jephthah, found it necessary to come to him and beg his aid. Naturally, he consented only upon one condition: that he be made the ruler of the Israelites in case of his victory. When this agreement was reached, it is not surprising that Jephthah would seek all the Divine aid he could get in order to win the war so that he might have the satisfaction of becoming head of the people who had formerly made an outcast of him. Hence, not dreaming that his daughter would be connected with it, he made a vow promising God the sacrifice of whatever should meet him first on his triumphant return.

It is with Jephthah's return that Vigny begins the narrative. Interesting to note is that Vigny does not propose to tell the story himself, but makes of it a song which the daughters of Israel sing when custom brings to Mt. Carmel annually to mourn the daughter of Jephthah.

Although Jephthah ravaged more than thirty cities during his victorious campaign, Vigny mentions only three: Abel, Aroër, and
Mennith. This reference comes with a brief description at the beginning of the poem. As in Vigny's Moïse the assemblage of people is praising God in song. And like Mosés, Jephthah the leader, taking no part in this rejoicing, isolates himself in a mood of melancholy.

Mais le sombre vainqueur marche en baissant la tête,
Sourd à ce bruit du gloire, et seul, silencieux! ¹

Suddenly Jephthah stops short, shuts his eyes, for in the distance he hears the voices of the virgins coming to meet him, and he knows that his daughter, his only child, will be among them. There will be no means of evading his vow, for he has clearly stated that he would offer up for a burnt sacrifice the first thing that would come out of his own house to meet him. Vigny lets him gradually discern the various musical instruments, then the songs; as they grow nearer he can distinguish the words; he can hear the steps and the clapping of hands, and can even smell the perfumes! At last he recognizes his daughter's voice and his eyes fill with tears. Joyfully she boasts of her father's prowess to the other virgins and demonstrates her love and admiration for her father by embracing him.

Vigny embellishes the Biblical account with the above descriptions and relates an imaginary conversation between the daughter and her father. This conversation also includes the gist of the Biblical account and Vigny's own personal opinion of the turn of events.

Faut-il que ce soit vous! O douleur des douleurs! ²

That line expresses Vigny's wonder that it had to be the daughter's misfortune, as well as the grief of Jephthah, that it happened so.

Then after Vigny's bold accusation concerning God's love for the

¹ Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, p. 96
² Ibid., p. 96
sacrifice of human blood, he continues with the Biblical narration, and supplies the daughter with a few more words than the original text records, in order to explain the girl's desire to bewail her virginity. Yet he does not mention the fundamental reason for her deep distress. It was based on more than the Jewish custom of deriding sterility or the tragedy of having to die at the hand of her own father: every Jewish girl of that day believed she had a chance of becoming the mother of the Messiah, and to have to die a virgin would deprive her of this opportunity.

With Vigny's customary portrayal of uncomplaining resignation to the forces of destiny and his admiration for the stoical death, he concludes with the lines:

Elle inclina la tête et partit ..........
Dans elle vint s'offrir au couteau paternel.
.... Voilà ce qu'ont chanté les filles d'Israël.¹

In conclusion, Vigny has again successfully symbolized an idea in a poem. Compared with Le Déluge and Noise, the writer grants that La Fille de Jephté is brief, but it is probably more dramatic and is certainly richer than the other two in the appeal to the heart.

¹ Ibid., p. 100
CHAPTER VII

LA FEMME ADULTÈRE

General location:

Job xxiv, 15-17; Deut. xxii, 21, 22; John viii, 1-11.

Special text (selected by Vigny)

"L’adultère attend le soir, et se dit: "Aucun oeil ne me verra"; et il se cache le visage, car la lumière est pour lui comme la mort."

Job xxiv, 15-17

Vigny's obvious motive in writing La Femme Adultere was to contrast the idea of punishment typical of the Old Testament with that of pardon predicated by the New Testament in the teachings of Christ. Above all things, this poem should not be considered an outgrowth of Vigny's liaison with Marie Dorval; for it was written in 1819—many years before his name became linked to hers.

The poem's outstanding feature, second only to the symbol, is its local color, a thing to which the opening lines testify:

Mon lit est parfumé d'aloès et de myrrhe;  
L'odorant cimnamon et le nard de Palmyre  
Ont chez moi de l'Egypte embaumé le tapis. 

To depict faithfully this local color, Vigny was well documented. According to Étève Vigny had recourse to Byron's Parisina and Giacour, Sacy's Explication des Noms Hébreux, Fleury's Mœurs des Israélites, Buffon's Histoire Naturelle, Gessner's Historiae Animalium Liber, and Millevoye's Les Adieux d'Hélène.

Aside from this local color there is not much to the poem, so far as a narrative is concerned. The first part of the poem describes the adulteress in preparation for the reception of her lover, immediately after the departure of her husband on a long journey. The lover makes his visits, and just before dawn steals away. Later on, seeing her

\[1\text{Ibid.}, p. 101\]
Later on, seeing her small child, who resembles her husband, she is choked with emotion and shame. Meanwhile, her husband is buying her presents in the far-away Tyre, for he believes her lonely and longing for his return. There is yet another shift of scene: Juda is in preparation for a celebration. Near the temple Jesus is surrounded by a multitude of afflicted people, whom he is healing and teaching. Suddenly there is a commotion in the crowd. A woman is brought forth; they are dragging her by the hair. The Scribes seeking to tempt Jesus, ask:

Cette femme adultère est coupable et surprise
Que doit faire Israël de la loi de Moïse?

According to the Old Testament the law is as follows:

If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so shalt thou put away evil from Israël. (Deut. xxii, 22)

This, of course, is the idea of punishment that runs throughout the Old Testament. In Le Déluge and in La Fille de Jephté Vigny condemns the idea of the punishment of the innocent; in La Femme Adultère he favors the doctrine of pardon for the guilty.

Vigny embellishes the Biblical account by cries from the crowd:

Et, la pierre à la main, la foule sanguinaire
S'appelait, la montrait: "C'est la femme adultère!
"Lapidez-la: déjà le séducteur est mort!"

Then Vigny draws the magnificent contrast — the pity and mercy of Christ against this background of cold-heartedness.

"Qu'un homme d'entre vous, dit-il, jette une pierre;"
"S'il se croit sans péché, qu'il jette la première!"

Condemned by their own consciences the crowd melts away.

1 Ibid., p. 113
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
Vigny does not deem it necessary to relate Jesus' words of kindness to the woman. Judging from entries in his Journal and from the sentiment of his poems, pity was Vigny's chief virtue.
CHAPTER VIII

ÉLOA OU LA SOEUR DES ANGES

General location:

Geneis iii, 13; Isaiah xiv, 12, 13
Ezekiel xxxviii, 14; Hebrews i, 7
Psalms civ, 4; I Samuel iv, 2-4
II Samuel vi, 2; Isaiah vi, 2-4
John xi, 1-35

Special text (selected by Vigny):

"C'est le serpent, dit-elle; je l'ai écouté, et il m'a trompée."

Genesis 1

Éloa is an imaginary being, whose original habitat was with the angels on high, but whose boundless pity and love led her to leave Heaven and join Satan in his abode of darkness. It is thought that Vigny was inspired by the legend of the Holy Tear of Vendôme recorded at length in Belle-forest's Cosmographie Universelle, (Paris, 1575; t. I, p. 322), from which comes the following passage:

Lorsque nostre Seigneur resuscita le Lazare, et qu'il ploura, un Ange recueillit cette larme d'un grand nombre qui ruisselloyent des yeux du Sauveur, formant soudain un vase qui à dire vrai est de merveilleux artifice, et le dehors duquel est blanc est aussi transparent que chrystal; et la sainte Larme est de couleur d'eau et azurée; je vous en parle comme savant, qui ay pris soigneuse garde a la contempler á mon aise.

In addition to this, Chateaubriand had suggested the idea which Vigny symbolizes in the poem:

L'homme pouvait détruire l'harmonie de son être de deux manières, ou en voulant trop aimer, ou en voulant trop savoir. Il pécha surtout par la seconde; c'est qu'en effet nous avons beaucoup plus l'orgueil des sciences que l'orgueil de l'amour; celui-ci aurait été plus digne de pitié que de châtiment. 3

1 Vigny does not quote the Scriptural passage; this text is a paraphrase.
2 Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, p. 25 (n. 4)
3 op. cit., Part I, Bk. III, p. 66
Other sources of information, according to Estove, were Byron's Ciel et Terre, Milton's Paradis Perdu, and Moore's Amours des Anges. 1

Vigny begins the poem by narrating the good deeds of Christ, as he travels about the countryside performing miracles for the relief of the sufferings of his multitudinous followers. Having cured the sick, blind, deaf, maimed, and lepers, he arrives at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, for whom he weeps. From one of his tears, which is caught by an invisible seraph and carried to the heavens, the imaginary Eloa is created. Born of the tear of the Man of Sorrows, Eloa is the very essence of pity and love.

One day she is warned by the other angelic beings against a feeling of false security, simply because she is on high, and they relate to her the fall of Lucifer as an example. Instead of scorning the fallen angel as did the others, Eloa becomes filled with curiosity to see him. No longer able to appreciate the joys of Heaven, she flies down, down, down, in search of Lucifer.

On reaching a region lower than the other angelic beings had ever dared to come, she sees the reflection of her eyes in the depths of Chaos, but thinks she sees other Heavens. Just at that moment Satan appears and begins to tempt her. He tries several methods of seduction. First, he compliments her upon her beauty and grace, referring to "ta beauté merveilleuse et tes rayons de gloire." 2 Next he accuses her of being his enemy:

\[ \text{Mais plutôt n'es-tu pas un ennemi naissant} \]
\[ \text{Qu'instruit à me haïr mon rival trop puissant?} \]

Then, of course, he "warns" her against God:

1 Alfred de Vigny. Poèmes antiques et modernes, pp. 25-37
2 Ibid., p. 49
3 Ibid., pp. 49 f.
Je suis un exilé que tu cherchais peut-être:
Mais s'il est vrai, prends garde au Dieu jaloux ton maître;
C'est pour avoir aimé, c'est pour avoir sauvé
Que je suis malheureux, que je suis réprové.

After drawing a voluptuous picture of his activities with men, he
tempts her curiosity to see his possessions:

As-tu venue, avec auelues Anges des cieux,
Admirer de mes nuits le cours délicieux?
As-tu vu leurs trésors? Sais-tu quelles merveilles
Des Anges ténèbres accompagnent le veilles?

Then Satan attempts to justify his deeds in order to make himself
appear misjudged:

Ce méchant qu'on accuse est un Consolateur
Qui pleure sur l'esclave et le dérobe au maître,
Le sauve par l'amour des chagrins de son être,
Et, dans le mal commun lui-même enseveli,
Lui donne un peu de charme et quelquefois l'oubli.

Having succeeded so far, he begins to declare his love for Eloa:

Sois à moi, sois ma soeur; je t'appartiens moi-même;
Je t'ai bien méritée, et dès longtemps je t'aime,
Car je t'ai vue un jour. Parmi les fils de l'air
Je me mélais, voilé comme un soleil d'hiver.

Satan enhances his declarations with descriptions of long suffer-
ing anguish in his desire for recognition from Eloa:

Dans tout être créité j'ai cru te reconnaître;
J'ai trois fois en pleurant passé dans l'Univers;
Je te cherchais partout ............
J'Osai même, enhardi par mon nouveau déliire,
Toucher le fibres d'or de la céleste lyre.
Mais tu n'entendis rien, mais tu ne me vis pas.

Eloa listens in sympathy to all these words of the fallen angel
whom Vigny does not label Satan until the last line of the poem. Yet
she hesitates because she does not understand how he can really love
her if he hates God.

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid., pp. 52 f.
3 Ibid., p. 56
4 Ibid., p. 60
5 Ibid., p. 61
But Satan is clever enough to break down that objection by suddenly becoming eloquently relorsful, cursing his stupidity in attempting to rival God, and professing a rebirth of love for the Creator.

Interesting to note is the suggestion made by Vigny:

Ah! si dans ce moment la Vierge est pu l'entendre,
Si le céleste main qu'elle est osé lui tendre
L'est saisie repentant, docile à remonter ...
Qui sait? le mal peut-être est cessé d'exister. 1

Unfortunately for Eloa, she loses this opportunity, and through pity and kindness, agrees to accompany Satan to his realm of darkness since he cannot climb to her abode of light.

The last stanza is more than pathetic:

"Où me conduisez-vous, bel Ange? — Viens toujours.
— Que votre voix est triste, et quel sombre discours!
N'est-ce pas Eloa qui soulève ta chaîne?
J'ai cru t'avoir sauvé. — Non, c'est moi qui t'entraîne.
—Si nous sommes unis, peu m'importe en quel lieu!
Nommee-moi donc encore ou ta soeur ou ton Dieu!
—J'enlève mon esclave et je tiens ma victime.
—Tu paraissais si bon! Oh! qu'ai-je fait? — Un crime.
—Serons-tu plus heureux? du moins es-tu content?
—Plus triste que jamais. — Qui donc es-tu? —Satan. 2

In conclusion, the poem Eloa is outstanding for three reasons: first, because of the beauty of its language and style; secondly, because of the depiction of Satan as an "homme fatal", a characterization typical of the Romanticists; and thirdly, because of the splendid symbol of love and pity.

1 Ibid., p. 68
2 Ibid., pp. 72 f.
CHAPTER IX

LA COLÈRE DE SAMSON

General location:
Judges xvi, 4-31

Special text:

"And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines . . . .
"And she made him sleep upon her knees: and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head . . . . . . . . and his strength went from him."
Judges xvi, 18, 19

According to Vigny's assertion in his Journal he does not write under stress of great emotion. Therefore, it will not be surprising to note that his Colère de Samson, inspired by the betrayal that he suffered at the hand of the woman whom he loved, is dated four years after the rupture of their friendship.¹

Vigny has taken a part of the story of Samson and Delilah and has poured into the narrative the bitterness of his own heart. Its merit lies in Vigny's successful portrayal of his own remorse under the guise of a Biblical story. Like Noëse, this poem is symbolic of the poet's personal feelings as well as of an idea.

As in Le Déluge and as in Noëse, Vigny begins the poem by painting the setting. The reader is not however surveying the scenery from a mountain height nor witnessing the beauties of the virgin earth as in the other two poems; this time he is transported to the desert, where solitary and silent, the sands stretch endlessly on. It is night and two shadows are visible from the door of the tent. They are Samson

¹ The poem bears the date of 1839.
and Delilah — Samson meditating and Delilah asleep.

Samson has three times repulsed the attempts of Delilah to learn the secret of his power, but at last growing unwary he has divulged it to her. According to the Biblical narrative Samson was a Nazarite — one pledged to God and whose miraculous strength lay in his unshaven locks and abstinence from strong drink. The secret has already been told when Vigny opens his story. Samson, who in the Bible does not berate woman, gives vent in the poem of Vigny to all the bitterness and rancor with which the poet has been afflicted. The following lines are demonstrative:¹

Une lutte éternelle en tout temps, en tout lieu,
Se livre sur la terre, en présence de Dieu,
Entre la bonté d'Homme et la ruse de Femme,
Car la femme est un être impur de corps et d'âme. ²

Et, plus ou moins, la Femme est toujours DALILA.³

— Donc, ce que j'ai voulu, Seigneur, n'existe pas!

La Femme est, à présent, pire que dans ces temps
Où, voyant le humains, Dieu dit: "Je me repens!"

Éternel! Dieu des forts! vous savez que mon âme
N'avait pour aliment que l'amour d'une femme.

Then Vigny expresses his resignation to the forces of Destiny which is a favorite theme with him:

C'est trop! Dieu, s'il le veut, peut balayer ma cendre.
D'ai donné mon secret, Dalila va le vendre.
Qu'ils seront beaux les pieds de celui qui vendra
Pour m'annoncer la mort! —— Ce qui sera, sera!

Finally, he prays for revenge:

Terre et ciel! punissez par de telles justices
La trahison ordie en des amours factices.

² l. 38 ³ l. 60 ⁴ l. 72 ⁵ l. 76 ⁶ l. 82 ⁷ l. 108 ⁸ l. 134
In conclusion, *La Colère de Samson* may be considered more truly lyrical than any other poem that Vigny wrote from Biblical models, first, because it is the expression of a profound emotion experienced by the poet, and secondly, because it is symbolic not so much of an idea as of a true sentiment. Vigny felt akin in spirit to the Biblical Samson in that they had both been betrayed by women whom they loved.

These ranting denunciations of woman found in the stanzas of *La Colère de Samson*, however, must not be considered Vigny's final word concerning woman. On the contrary, Vigny's true and impartial opinion of woman is found in the stanzas of *La Maison du Berger*. The entire poem is dedicated "À Ève", but certain of its stanzas pay a high tribute to woman in general, indicating that Vigny considered women not only as a companion for man, but also as an inspiration for him.

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Subtitle of *La Maison du Berger*. 
The purpose of this study was to show how Alfred de Vigny used material in the Old Testament as a source of poetic inspiration. We must remember that the entire Romantic school was influenced to a great extent by the emphasis placed on religion by both Chateaubriand in his literary works and Napoleon in his compact between Church and State. It is far more than a coincidence that Lamartine, Hugo, and Vigny all sought inspiration from the Bible for their poetic works. Interest in religion was the trend of the times. Consequently, the Romanticists realized the importance of including Biblical subjects in their literary productions.

Alfred de Vigny's extensive use of the Bible as a source of literary inspiration for his poems is tempered to a high degree by his agnostic views on religion. If God exists, He is brutal in His insatiable desire for revenge and in His visitation of misery and death upon mankind. Deaf to the prayers of men, He should be answered by a silence akin to His own. Of the three great virtues extolled by Christianity, Vigny admits that he lacks one—faith. He often takes issue against God concerning man's ignorance of the ultimate nature of things. Therefore, Vigny's poems, even though based upon the Bible, could hardly be termed religious in the general sense of the word.

Most of Vigny's poems inspired immediately by the Bible, are based on material from the Old Testament rather than from the New. Le Mont des Oliviers is a notable exception. His interest in the Old Testament might be due not only to the great variety of colorful incidents and dynamic characters which its chapters contain, but also to the
numerous portrayals of the Creator as a vindictive and ruthless Being, wreaking His vengeance on the weaknesses of man. Le Déluge is a magnificent example of the wholesale slaughter of men, and Vigny's introduction of the shepherd and the virgin into the story further emphasizes the death of the innocent. Le Fille de Jephté dramatizes the pleasure that God seemingly takes in human sacrifice. In Eloa, a celestial being becomes the victim of Satan through her very virtues of love and pity, yet no aid is proffered her from Heaven. La Femme Adultère brings out the Old Testament's doctrine of punishment (in this case, by the excruciating method of stoning) in contrast to the idea of mercy and pardon advocated by Christ. God's failure to compensate those whom he has endowed with genius, by dooming them to a life of solitude and hatred, is the idea brought out in Eloa. Hence, the writer concludes that Vigny chose material from the Old Testament because it readily lent itself to the interpretation of his personal attitude toward religion.

In addition to this, Vigny probably had another reason for using the Bible as a source of inspiration. We remember that Vigny's chief merit as a poet lay in the expression of his philosophy. Not able to boast of a prolific imagination and lacking in originality of subject matter, Vigny must have realized the opportunities which the Old Testament afforded him for dressing up his philosophical ideas in an artistic and picturesque manner. The idea of the solitude experienced throughout the ages by men of genius finds indeed a lofty and magnificent expression when voiced by the Hebrew leader who "talked with God face to face." How much more appealing to the reader is the death of the innocent when chanted by the mourning daughters of Israel in Le Fille de Jephté, than it would be restrained to the prosaic language of an essay! Therefore, the writer is convinced
that Vigny sought in the Old Testament the dramatic background so necessary to the artistic and picturesque treatment of his philosophic conceptions.

Furthermore, the writer believes that Vigny made use of biblical personages and incidents in order to camouflage his own emotions. While other Romantic poets -- Lamartine, Hugo, and Musset -- were popularizing the innovation of "le moi" in their poetry, Vigny was restraining himself to an almost Classic objectivity. He could afford to disregard this personal lyricism employed by the other poets, since, by means of his symbolic poems, he was able to express his emotions in a more objective manner. Is it not the disillusionment of the poet which is apparent in the lament of Moses? Why should Moses bewail above all else his solitude instead of the exasperation he experienced because of the ingratitude of the Israelites, who were constantly forsaking his precepts? Was not this solitude also a part of the poet's life, from the days of his unhappy school experiences to his final seclusion at Charente? As for La Colère de Samson, Vigny's transformation of the uncomplaining Samson of the Bible to the ranting denouncer of women in his poem, seems to the writer to be excellent of the attempt of the poet to express his own bitterness against the woman who betrayed him. The love that Vigny had for his mother and the devotion that he showed in caring so long for his ill wife, as well as his complimentary reference to woman in La liaison du berger, indicate that the scathing remarks against her in La Colère de Samson, are the product of pent-up emotions. Consequently, Vigny seems to have resorted to the Old Testament sources in search of an inobtrusive means of voicing his sentiments.

Although Vigny identified himself with no established system of
religion, he had a personal doctrine which he attempted to promulgate through his poems. Vigny was a humanitarian; his doctrine was that of universal love and pity. He found consolation in contemplating the "majesty of human sufferings" and in meeting the misfortunes of life with the stoicism of the dying wolf. But just as Vigny does not resort to the essay to explain his philosophy, he does not resort to the sermon to preach his doctrine. His poetic interpretation of the Scriptures will suffice. _Mémoires et Sara on Mt. Ararat in Le Déluge_ represent pure love -- faithful and undefiled in its innocence; _La Femme Adultère_ extols the idea of mercy for the transgressor; _La Fille de Jézabel_ lauds paternal solicitude and filial duty; _La Colère de Samsom_ describes in vehement terms the agony caused by a love betrayed; while _Elia_ incites pity for Satan himself and suggests that even he might have been rehabilitated had he been encouraged during his moment of repentance. Both _La Femme Adultère_ and _Elia_ contain numerous verses epitomizing the humanitarian program of Christ. The writer feels that the desire to create symbols of love and pity for the support of humanitarian principles was a motive which led Vigny to the Bible for his source material.

The writer suggests, also, that it is Vigny's extreme pity for humanity that alienates him from God. How could a personal deity view the sufferings of mankind throughout the ages and yet not alleviate this universal misery? There is no God the Father for Vigny. In this life, since God is indifferent to the sufferings of humanity, it is up to men to be kind to one another.

Finally, the writer is persuaded that Vigny must have realized the opportunities offered by the Old Testament sources for manifesting the literary characteristics favored by the school of Romanticism. We have
We have already noted the Romanticists' frequent recourse to the Bible for ideas. Likewise we have shown how Vigny avoided the use of "le moi" as such, but attempted to veil his personal sentiments under a somewhat transparent cloak of objectivity. Other Romantic traits are also apparent in his Biblical poems. Vigny frequently began his poems with descriptions of nature. 

**Le Déluge** begins with a description of the earth "in its first flower". **Hoëse** begins with the description of the outlay of land seen from the mountain height. **Le Colère de Samson** begins with a vivid picture of night on the desert. **Éloa** is chiefly concerned with descriptions of ethereal regions. **Le Déluge** is almost a nature poem with its lengthy descriptions of the storm and flood in all its stages, preceded and followed by pictures of sunrise. When we realize that Vigny could not receive any consolation from nature, but regarded nature only as a tomb, the writer considers it noteworthy that Vigny was so painstaking in his development of this particular motif. As for Vigny's portrayal of human emotions, each poem gives its own examples: **Hoëse**, disillusionment and sorrow; **Le Déluge**, tenderness of affections, fear, despair, pity, and hope; **La Fille de Jephté**, joy, melancholy, regret, grief, and love; **La Femme Adultère**, shame, revenge, fear, and pity; **Éloa**, compassion, remorse, and love; **La Colère de Samson**, despair, wrath, and desire of revenge. Consequently, it appears to the writer that Vigny has successfully incorporated the leading ideas and motifs of the Romantic school of thought into his poems based upon Biblical sources.

We cannot overlook, however, the fact that Vigny lacked originality. His editors — Canat, Estève, and Baldensperger — as well as the critic Dupuy, substantiate the claim that he had recourse to such authors as Byron, Milton, Fleury, Hillevoye, and Don Calmet. In many other instances his strict adherence to the Biblical text is pronounced.
Obscurities such as are noticeable in certain verses of Hose and inconsistencies such as the rather voluptuous elements found in the seraphic poem, A coherence, are noted by the writer as faults which can hardly be defended. His extreme effort to avoid subjectivity rob him in some measure of the spontaneity that would otherwise be his. The writer believes that a mouthpiece in a poem is not always so effective as the unconcealed outpourings of a poet's own soul.

Nevertheless, the writer feels that these faults need not be greatly deplored, first, because they might be considered for the most part a mark of Vigny's individuality when compared with other Romanticsists; and secondly, because they do not deprive him of the great contribution which he made to Romantic literature. His skilful transformation of Biblical personages to fit his own needs, without changing the essence of the Biblical narrative; his use of supplementary sources in order to document himself on Hebrew customs and Romantic motifs; and his creation of the symbolic poem in which to cloak his personal emotions and to promulgate his philosophic ideas, have all served to win for Vigny a permanent place among the immortals of French Romantic literature.

Whereas the writer is an admirer of Vigny as a poet and respects his doctrine of universal love, yet it seems a pity that he should attempt so overwhelming a task as to challenge the deficiencies of God. The writer regrets that Vigny had no chance to reply to James Weldon Johnson's philosophic assertion:

Young man --
Young man --
Your arm's too short to box with God.¹

APPENDIX

THE LOCATION OF SOURCES OF BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS IN POEMS NOT ANALYZED
# Location of Sources of Biblical Allusions in Poems Not Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Poem</th>
<th>Source of Allusions (chapter)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Prison</td>
<td>Psalms 28, 37, 38, 55, 59, 130, 140, Job 30</td>
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<td>Le Trappiste</td>
<td>John 2, I Rois 28</td>
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<td>Paris</td>
<td>Revelations 31, 17, 22, 28, Genesis 3</td>
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<td>L'Ange Tombée</td>
<td>Revelations 1, 4, 5, Deuteronomy 34</td>
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<td>Suzanne au bain</td>
<td>Song of Solomon 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, Proverbs 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gout Judaïque, (fragment)</td>
<td>Exodus 15, 27, 30, Isaiah 3</td>
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<td>La Mort du Loup</td>
<td>(none)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maison du Berger</td>
<td>Genesis 2, 3, Song of Solomon 6, 8, Ecclesiastes 7, I Rois, 3, 12, 13, 15</td>
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<td>Les Oracles</td>
<td>Daniel 5, Genesis 41, Psalms 2</td>
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<td>La Sauvage</td>
<td>Genesis 4</td>
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1 Compiled from notes by Edmond Estève, editor, Vigny's Poèmes antiques et modernes and Les Destinées, which the writer has checked with the Bible.
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<thead>
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<th>Name of poem</th>
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<tr>
<td>Le Mont des Oliviers</td>
<td>John 3, 13</td>
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<td>Wanda</td>
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<td>Wanda, second billet de</td>
<td>Job 31, 87</td>
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<td>L'Esprit pur</td>
<td>Genesis 10</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


