

Despair Has Wings

Selected Poems
of Pierre Jean Jouve

Translated by David Gascoyne

*Edited with an introductory essay
by Roger Scott*



ENITHARMON PRESS

DESPAIR HAS WINGS

David Gascoyne & Pierre Jean Jouve

'A poet I still regard as the greatest it has been my good fortune to know'¹

In an article published in *Le Monde* in 1984, Hubert Juin ranks influences on David Gascoyne as follows:

Gascoyne has his masters. At the very top: Rimbaud and Hölderlin. And just below that: Pierre Jean Jouve. He has a guru: Jacob Boehme. He found guides, very uncomfortable ones, it's true: Kierkegaard, Chestov, Fondane, Berdiaev.²

In the entry for 27 February–1 March 1940 in his *Collected Journals 1936–1942*, Gascoyne lists the literary figures who have influenced and inspired him to a marked extent: he names Rimbaud, Pascal, Marx and Freud, Breton and Fondane; then makes particular reference to Jouve: 'to a great extent' and to Blanche Reverchon-Jouve: 'quite as much'. In the 'Afterword', completed in November 1989, he writes: 'Among the writers I was lucky enough to have frequented in Paris before the War, Pierre Jean Jouve and Benjamin Fondane both had a decisive and lasting influence on me.'³

Five years earlier in an interview for another French newspaper, he had agreed with Patrick Mauries that Blanche Reverchon was just as important to him as her husband in his life and development as a writer. At the same time, he acknowledged that Pierre Jean Jouve does not appear often in the *Collected Journals*: 'If you're keeping a journal, you can't know in advance and select what will be truly important for you afterwards.'⁴

*

The year 1937 was crucial in David Gascoyne's development which saw a marked change in his poetry and personal philosophy. He had gone to Paris to live for two years in an attic overlooking Notre Dame. In the

autumn, quite providentially, he found a copy of Jouve's *Poèmes de la folie de Hölderlin* (1930)⁵ in a second-hand bookseller's box on the *quais*. This translation from the German 'led to my essay, poems and translations⁶ published by Dent the following year as *Hölderlin's Madness*.⁷ He explains in an article published in 1981 that 'I had thus discovered a poet whose work, which at that time was far from being complete, suddenly seemed to present an ideal example of the kind of poetry that I would have wished to write then.'⁸ Then he bought *Les Noces* (1931) and various novels – everything that Jouve had written in poetry and prose – from a bookshop beside the Gare du Luxembourg, and opposite the Luxembourg Gardens. Noting his interest – Gascoyne had just been reading *Histoires sanglantes* and *Hécate* – the owner introduced Gascoyne to Jouve who was both a relative of hers and a regular weekly customer, which led to an invitation to visit the apartment at 8 rue de Tournon, a 'mixture of luxuriousness and austerity [...] and silent. I have always thought that this house was that described by Henry James in his novel *The Ambassadors*.' Instead of wallpaper there were paintings by Sima and two 'extraordinary'⁹ works by Balthus: *Alice*,¹⁰ in Jouve's bedroom, and the picture of a young girl asleep in a green mountain meadow illustrating one of his poems.¹¹

A short while afterwards, Jouve and his second wife, Blanche Reverchon, his senior by nine years,¹² asked Gascoyne to their Thursday *soirées*, attended from 9 p.m. to midnight by writers, philosophers, musicians and some of Blanche's most interesting patients, like Schiaparelli and Gascoyne himself.¹³ Blanche, in collaboration with Jouve and Bernard Groethuysen, had published with Gallimard in 1923 their translation, *Trois Essais sur la théorie sexuelle de Freud*.¹⁴ In March 1933, Jouve and his wife had collaborated on an article for *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 'Moments d'une Psychanalyse'¹⁵ which, according to Margaret Callander, 'describes the mental illness of a young woman, and transcribes the most rich and suggestive of her strange dreams.' She points out that Jouve 'used this or very similar material' in one of his *Histoires sanglantes* (1932), 'Les Rois Russes.'¹⁶ In fact, Madame Jouve, who had been analysed by Freud,¹⁷ supplied her husband with a mass of psychi-

atric material which he incorporated in the poems of his collection *Sueur de sang* and in his novel, *Aventure de Catherine Crachat*, which Gascoyne considers to be 'the most remarkable ever written on psychoanalysis.'¹⁸ He always believed that 'Jouve's debt to her [Blanche] was generally very greatly underestimated.'¹⁹ Jean Wahl wrote that 'Blanche Jouve was for Jouve what Beatrice represented for Dante.'²⁰

Jouve's 'real career as a poet began, according to him,' writes Germaine Brée, 'with a double conversion to Christianity and to psychoanalysis.'²¹ Ian Higgins argues that Jouve was recognized as a poet in 1933 with *Sueur de sang*, 'in which his interest in the Freudian theory of the unconscious combines with his Catholic spirituality in a search for release from the sense of imperfection attaching to bodily life.'²² Referring to Jouve's 'flexible appropriation of psychoanalysis,' Mary Lewis Shaw has indicated that he 'manages to integrate very pointed aspects of Freud's psychoanalytic theory into his poetic world, even as he builds its themes and structure around Catholic imagery and doctrine,'²³ but Shaw goes further, suggesting that 'even poems adhering to "traditional" religious doctrine can subvert the parallels and connections they set forth between poetry and the word of God.'²⁴

*

Jouve saw the writer's task as 'the unceasing transformation of personal matter,' explains Gascoyne:

His objectivization of his personal experience – both of the vicissitudes of sexuality and of the spirit's wrestling for faith – often took the form in his poetry of an approximation to musical composition. The poems consist largely of inventions, of suites and of variations on themes, and one of the forms of 'personal matter' transformed by Jouve in this way resulted from an exceptionally acute response to the power of music. A frequenter from the inception of the Salzburg festivals, an admirer and friend of Bruno Walter, Jouve found inspiration for poems above all in the works of Mozart and Alban Berg.²⁵

Between 1935 and 1939, Jouve was the music critic of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, and on one occasion was given tickets by the composer and

his wife for the first performance in France of Béla Bartók's *Suite for Two Pianos and Percussion*. Gascoyne was one of the few people asked to accompany Jouve. After the concert, Bartók returned with them to the rue de Tournon apartment. For the rest of the evening, Bartók – 'very reserved and hardly speaking French – returned many times to the Jouvés' grand piano to play pieces from his 'Mikrokosmos' series which he had then only just completed.²⁶ He seemed at home,' Gascoyne recalled, 'realizing that Jouve truly appreciated his music, then still reputed to be impossibly dissonant and rebarbative. Rare and unforgettable occasion!'²⁷ In his capacity as music critic, Jouve wrote on Mozart and Alban Berg, as well as Bartok.²⁸ Gascoyne's translation of one of these essays, 'La grandeur actuelle de Mozart', appeared in *Horizon* in 1940 as 'The Present Greatness of Mozart'.²⁹ He writes:

It was to this essay that I owe my first mature appreciation of the true significance and exceptional greatness of Mozart, as like so many supposedly musical people in the thirties, my idea of his music was very much the conventional one, in which the aspect of sunny charm and the pathos of prematurely carried-off genius combined to hide the profundity and sublimity that characterize the true Mozart. [...] I know very well I could never hope to approach the quality of understanding and the beauty and aptness of language that Pierre Jean Jouve achieved whenever he wrote about music.³⁰

Gascoyne's poem, 'Mozart: Sursum Corda'³¹ sets 'supernal voices' in the 'sostenuto of the sky' against 'mortal deafness', and ends with these beautiful lines corresponding to the imagery of the Metaphysical poets:

Beyond our speech
To tell what equinoxes of the infinite
The spirit ranges in its rare utmost flight.

It is difficult not to see here an echo of Jouve's own poem, 'Mozart', in *Les Noces*.³²

One reason perhaps why I always felt a particularly strong affinity with Jouve is that I had a musical education myself (as a Cathedral chorister) and early developed a passionate interest in contemporary music. Before meeting or even having heard of Jouve I had attended the first

English concert performance of Berg's *Wozzeck* in the old Queen's Hall [...]. After the war I was glad to be able to take with me on a visit to the [Jouves'] rue Antoine-Chantin apartment a then new recording of Berg's concert aria *Der Wein* (setting of Stefan George's translation from Baudelaire). Jouve had never heard it before listening to it on his record-player.³³

Gascoyne always believed that one of the strongest links in his friendship with Jouve was their admiration for Mozart and Bartók but, more particularly, their shared passion for Berg. Shortly after the latter's death in 1935, Gascoyne had written two drafts of the 'Elegiac Stanzas in Memory of Alban Berg' which he considered 'unsatisfactory' in English.³⁴ The long poem was rewritten in French in 1939 after his return to his parents' home in England, as *Strophes Élégiaques à la mémoire d'Alban Berg*.³⁵ Why Gascoyne chose to return to the abandoned project some three years later and then composed the long poem in French is difficult now to ascertain. When I put this question to him on his eighty-fifth birthday in 2001 he answered straight away: 'Because there were things that I wanted to say in French at that time.'³⁶ The poet, translator and essayist Michael Hamburger offered a most perceptive observation touching on this question in a letter he wrote to me on 22 February 2002. Hamburger suggests that in Gascoyne's case the struggle 'to incorporate the whole of a truth in poems [...] was exacerbated by the pull between French and English exemplars. [...] In his English poems there was a tension between traditional rhetoric (and rhythms and metres) and the colloquialism established by his immediate predecessors, Auden and the rest. Although Verlaine thought he wrung the neck of rhetoric in French the rhetoric re-asserted itself even in Surrealism and all the other modernisms. [...] Somehow French is a more abstract language than English; therefore perhaps more congenial to David in his search for transcendent spirituality.'³⁷

In a searching and illuminating essay, 'Tombeau du musicien. Les poèmes de Pierre Jean Jouve et de David Gascoyne sur Alban Berg', Jean-Yves Masson argues that 'the question of the superiority of poetry to music, or of music to poetry, preoccupied [...] Gascoyne for whom

Surrealist group in France, 'there was a connection that he too [like them] used the unconscious as a source of poetry.'⁴⁵

One of the most characteristic features of Pierre Jean Jouve as a novelist and as a poet has always been his highly developed awareness of the Unconscious, of the guilt by which the Unconscious is dominated in all men, and of the struggle in the Unconscious of the instincts of life and death, which always seem to be locked inextricably together. Poetry, like the works of the great mystics, Jouve regards as proceeding from Eros, or rather, as representing the highest degree of sublimation of the erotic instinct [...].⁴⁶

Jouve himself wrote retrospectively in *En Miroir* that after rejecting all his early work up to 1925, he was seeking 'for an order that was my own. Beyond the defined instinctive structures [...] one must be able to imagine the existence of an area of images which I called the poetic unconscious, the area that generates and holds together the inspiration within the two main fundamental schemes of Eros and Death.'⁴⁷

Three of Jouve's poems: 'Gravida', 'Sur la Pente', 'La Bouche d'ombre', were published in the Surrealist periodical, *Minotaure*, No. 6 (Winter, 1935). Gascoyne told Lucien Jenkins that 'Jouve uses the material that the Surrealists used. His poetic art is the cultivation of spontaneity to obtain contact with the unconscious.' He added, 'He would not have known what he was going to write when he sat down to write.'⁴⁸ An unpublished 'Note' in one of Gascoyne's notebooks dating from the early 1950s, now in the McFarlin Library at the University of Tulsa, took this last point further:

Jouve cannot always recognize himself speaking in what he has written. Another voice, the Other voice, ventriloquizes through him. He is capable of allowing the subliminal message to inscribe itself at the heart of his poetry in this way, because of the long, utterly disinterested toil which he has devoted to the perfecting of a technique of imaginatively transcendental discursivity (his intention meanwhile often seeming preoccupied with private aesthetic-erotic autosatisfaction).⁴⁹

Gascoyne stresses, however, the importance for him that 'at the same time there was [in Jouve] a spiritual dimension lacking in Surrealist

music and poetry were always two complementary expressions of the absolute thirst which lies at the heart of the human condition [my translation].’ He goes on to discuss the examples of the Orpheus figure in Hölderlin’s *Madness* and the angelic voices in the poem ‘Concert of Angels’. Masson contends that Gascoyne ‘needed to use the French language in his “Strophes élégiaques à la mémoire d’Alban Berg” to explain what Berg’s work signified for him: perhaps he wished to articulate clearly, by distancing it, this rapport with History which, expressed in English, would have been too didactic [my translation].’³⁸

Jouve devoted a poem to Berg in his collection *La Vierge de Paris* (Fribourg, 1944; Paris, 1946),³⁹ and dedicated his collection *Langue* (1952) ‘to the spirit of Alban Berg’;⁴⁰ in 1953 he published with the musicologist Michel Fanu a study of Berg’s opera *Wozzeck*.⁴¹ One section of *Mélodrame* (1957) is entitled ‘Tombeau de Berg’ / ‘Berg’s Tomb’, in three parts. In one of his 1950 notebooks, Gascoyne began to translate an essay by Jouve on Berg’s *Violin Concerto*.⁴² In another from that decade, various entries point to his concern to engage with the persona and role of Lulu in *Wozzeck*, beginning with an incomplete summary of the plot of Berg’s opera. Gascoyne amused himself by making a note in a ‘Commonplace Notebook’ dated 1948:

The connection with Stravinsky is striking, but seems to have struck no-one but me – I should think Pierre would repudiate it with colère and irritation – but ‘Noces’ – ‘Symphonie à Dieu’ – the ‘Porche’ and S’s ‘Mass’, – ‘Gloire’, is not this one of the essential elements of S’s aesthetic ideal ‘to the greater glory of God’ – the super-human light that breaks through in the golden clanging at the end of ‘Les Noces’, for instance? Compare their photographs also. [Compare the photographs of Bartók and Klee].⁴³

*

By 1938, there is a ‘renewal of vision’⁴⁴ with the attendant change of sensibility in Gascoyne’s approach to poetry, now centred on the conscious and the metaphysical rather than on the un-/sub-conscious and the illogic of the practising Surrealist he no longer wished to be. He observed many years later that although Jouve was not a member of the

impact of the German poet was modified by two translations: a feature which would lead us to expect a certain anaemic quality in the work. Nothing, however, is farther from the truth: power of image, clarity of language, and simplicity of music characterize the verse [...].⁶³

Gascoyne interpolated four original poems in *Hölderlin's Madness*: 'Figure in a Landscape', 'Orpheus in the Underworld', 'Tenebrae' and 'Epilogue'. The influence of Jouve's 'mystical religious intensity'⁶⁴ is unmistakable in 'Tenebrae', a luminous poem charged with tension and feeling, and concern for the human condition. The central figure in each of the four poems is a composite of Hölderlin-Gascoyne, but with the addition in 'Epilogue' of the supremely suffering Orpheus,⁶⁵ imprisoned in his own madness. At the end of his introductory essay to *Hölderlin's Madness*, Gascoyne writes emphatically: 'His poetry is stronger than despair and reaches into the future and the light.' However, Michel Rémy rightly points to the underlying problem: 'the mystery for Hölderlin of the Gods' distance, and for Gascoyne and Jouve the mystery of God's absence.'⁶⁶

Gascoyne has described how, by 17 October 1938 after the Munich crisis, he had lapsed into a terrible state of depression and inertia: 'complete paralysis, surrounded by walls entirely black as in a dungeon.'⁶⁷ At 2 a.m. he decided to go to see Mme Jouve who told him: 'I can't perhaps make you better but I can certainly help you a little.'⁶⁸ Analysis began shortly afterwards on 22 October. On 27 October he got up at ten o'clock and 'went out to analysis at eleven.' Later that day, he was writing in his journal in the Café Rotonde: 'Rather a difficult session today: tried to talk about a scene in a film [...] Also talked about my "subterranean" fantasies. Ended up by describing a little dream which I thought was quite uninteresting but which apparently is simply fraught with significance.'⁶⁹ He saw her every two days and had the fullest confidence in her.⁷⁰ On 29 October he recorded: 'Miserably restless night. Went out to analysis late and unshaven, with a thick cold in the head. Difficult and inarticulate hour with Mme. Jouve. Too worried by the money situation to be able to talk much.'⁷¹ Recording on 31 October the course of his analysis with Blanche, Gascoyne wrote:

poetry.⁵⁰ He comments: 'the Surrealists, of course, hardly appreciated the mystical⁵¹ Christian element expressed [by Jouve] in *Le Paradis perdu* and *Les Noces*, intensified in all his work after *Sueur de sang*.'⁵² Quoting Jouve, Gascoyne explains that one of the basic aims of his poetry was 'to arrive at a poetic language which justifies itself completely as song, and to find a religious perspective in the poetic act, – the only response to the nothingness of time.'⁵³ But he acknowledges that, though brought up as a Catholic, the French writer 'escapes all easy categorization as a religious poet', recognizing in himself a 'residual puritanism' and being referred to by one of his critics as 'Jansenist'.⁵⁴

Jouve's Catholicism (aside from his interest in Freud) which is expressed in terms of that 'mystical religious tendency'⁵⁵ [the influence St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross], may well have opened up for Gascoyne a new route from Surrealism to, at least, a broad Christianity, and the growing belief that the acute and frightening awareness of the void, foregrounded so frequently and unequivocally in the *Collected Journals 1936–1942*, could only be countered by religious faith.⁵⁶ Jean Starobinski, Jouve scholar and explorer of psychoanalysis and literature, points out that 'the image of the interior void [...] is repeated and revived as an integral part of the preface to *Sueur de sang*.'⁵⁷

If Hölderlin 'found his own poetic voice when he met Susette [Gontard],⁵⁸ as David Constantine suggests, then Gascoyne began to find his when he discovered Jouve's translations of the German poet and met Jouve himself.⁵⁹ In *Hölderlin's Madness* (1938) Gascoyne provided versions of twenty-two poems from Jouve and Klossowski's *Poèmes de la Folie de Hölderlin*.⁶⁰ There is a clear affinity between Gascoyne and Hölderlin in their double vision: the conflation of both private and external worlds in their poetry. Francis Scarfe reviewed *Hölderlin's Madness* in *Twentieth Century Verse*, welcoming the publication: 'In revealing us Hölderlin, Mr Gascoyne has done his generation a service.'⁶¹ *The Criterion* reviewer found that '[...] in submitting himself to Hölderlin's vision he [Gascoyne] has achieved a clearness and a wholeness that he never reached in his first book.'⁶² Derek Stanford referred specifically to the use Gascoyne had made of Jouve's versions, which 'meant that the

At present I have no clear idea of what is happening; today brought out what seemed only a muddled collection of images. Talked about the intermittent bursts of creative enthusiasm I have, which so often fall flat because I feel incapable of fulfilling them. “*La mariée est trop belle*”, as the proverb says,’ Mme. Jouve remarked.⁷²

Gascoyne recalled in 1992: ‘I have never forgotten this sentence, because it harbours the fundamental explanation of my problems.’⁷³ His analyst had told him that he had ‘an exceptional faculty of transformation’, and he supposed that included ‘a particular aptitude for sublimating sex urges.’⁷⁴ On 3 November 1938, he wrote: ‘My unconscious appears to have a very hostile opinion of Mme. Jouve, representing her as a witch with a pointed hat, a beard and horns! I am too polite, of course, to tell her so to her face.’⁷⁵ Four days later [7 November] he confided: ‘Have got the jitters again today. Holding on by my teeth. Can see the future only as a black and bottomless pit. If it weren’t for analysis I positively shouldn’t be able to go on any longer’ (p. 211). On 9 November Gascoyne reported:

Mme. Jouve said yesterday that I was living through again at present a childhood nightmare. It certainly seems that I have been living in an abnormal state for some while past. The sense of suspense and unrelenting strain, the exaggerated proportions of small events, the violent inner ups and downs, all belong to nightmare rather than to everyday life.

The following evening, ‘an important session’ with Mme. Jouve suggested that they were ‘beginning to get at things now. Apparently my censor is on too low a level, my aggressivity is too repressed, and I have a masochistic attitude towards my father, whom I imagine to be punishing me all the time’ (p. 213). But progress was slow and a negative note was registered in the entry for 16 November:

Have reached the sort of check in analysis as I am accustomed to meeting in my life. Feeling that there is a barrier between my conscious mind and the part that is being analysed. Lay on the couch this evening associating words and images *around something that was hidden* and which I could not get at. Then silence. ‘*Est-ce que ce n’est pas l’orgueil qui vous empêche de parler?*’⁷⁶ demanded Mme. Jouve (p. 219).

On the last day of the year Gascoyne had been reading a book by an unnamed Viennese psychiatrist on *Character and Physique*, from which he deduced the fact that he belonged to the 'cyclothymic schizoid' group. 'I wonder,' he wrote, 'whether Mme. Jouve can ever really cure this? I suppose not. She can probably only diminish the worst effects' (31 December 1938, p. 235).

By 13 January 1939 Mme Jouve saw him daily after he had missed a session during what had been another difficult time. 'It's going better at present,' he recorded; but then surprisingly, on 22 January, he stated matter-of-factly that he had finished with analysis.⁷⁷ An interesting entry in *The Sun at Midnight* (1970) engages with the issue of illness, more particularly with Gascoyne's own mental problems, and relates specifically to Blanche Jouve's diagnosis, though she is not named:

There is a sure and certain cure to all human maladies. Physician, cure thyself, is said to Everyone. This is possible. I know. My own psychoanalyst told me long ago that my chief trouble was to be diagnosed as an obsession with the old French adage: '*La mariée est trop belle*' [my emphasis]. It has taken me about thirty-one years to realize and understand how wise and true this was. My analyst, needless to say, is a woman.⁷⁸

On 23 January, 1939 he received from Jouve a copy of his new collection, *Kyrie*⁷⁹, which he read with excited admiration:

There was something miraculous in his being able to create poetry so intense and pure at a time like this [...]. Few writers' work could at first sight appear so remote from the world of politics, yet few poets have so profoundly suffered the events of current history, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Spain [...].⁸⁰

In August, six months out of analysis, Gascoyne was agonizing again over the demands of his work: 'Alas! I cannot help being seriously worried by the flagrantly *schizophrenic* aspect of the whole business [of writing] – an aspect of which I am only too well aware. *Should like to consult Mme Jouve about this* [...] [my emphases] 22.VIII.39.'⁸¹

Two days later, the uncontrollable tension in Europe and within Gascoyne himself was mounting unbearably:

24.VIII.39. Beastly, bloody nightmare of a world. Another crisis. We're

in for it now [...] Something's got to happen. I don't mean only the war. I've got to get away soon, somewhere. *Must write to Blanche Jouve* [my emphasis]. Make a lot of effort, I'm becoming gradually more and more dotty, fanatical, otherworldly (p. 258).

*

Since their first meeting, Gascoyne had begun translating poems by Jouve, and they appeared before, during and after the war in various periodicals: *Delta*, No. 1 (Easter 1939), *Folios of New Writing* (Spring 1940), *Poetry* (London), No. 5 (March–April 1941), *Kingdom Come*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (November–December 1941), *New Directions* 7 (1942), *New Road* 4 (April 1946), *Poetry* (London), No. 11 (September–October 1947). It is fascinating to examine the surprising number of revisions, probably because of the complexity of the original French poem. In addition, 'The Two Witnesses' shows significant modifications, mainly to his choice of adjectives and adjectival phrases.⁸²

In addition to Jouve's essay on Mozart in *Horizon* (1940), Gascoyne's translation of the 'avant-propos' [preface] to *Sueur de sang*, 'Inconscient, spiritualité et catastrophe' / 'The Unconscious, Spirituality, Catastrophe', appeared in *Poetry* (London), Vol. 1, No. 4 (1941).⁸³ He had written to its editor, Tambimuttu, in 1940:

Dear Tambi,

I have the pleasure of sending you a translation I have just done of an essay of Jouve's which seems to me to be very much up your present street. I very much hope that you will like it well enough, and find it sufficiently relevant to the ideas you are now engaged in putting across, to include it in your next number. It's an essay I've vaguely been meaning to translate ever since I first read it about three years ago – at which time it helped me considerably to clarify several problems which were then bothering me about my own writing –; and then, after our last conversation about possible material for *Poetry*, it suddenly occurred to me that it was probably just the sort of thing you wanted, and I sat down and started the English version right away. (If the style seems a bit heavily baroque, I must explain that, if anything, the original French is more so; though personally, I don't like it any the less for that).⁸⁴

In the same issue of *Poetry* (London), Tambimuttu devoted the whole of his prefatory 'Fourth Letter' to an enthusiastic welcome for Gascoyne's

translation and examined Jouve's essay in some detail: 'In this number we publish an important statement by Pierre Jean Jouve,' he wrote, 'on poets, poetry, and the nature of creative thought, in the light of modern psychology and "meta-psychology". Thank you, David, for placing it at my disposal.'⁸⁵ In the list of contributors on the inside rear cover, Pierre Jean Jouve is that 'well-known French poet, known in England chiefly through the efforts of his friend and translator, David Gascoyne.'

In a notebook dating from that same year, Gascoyne planned the following publication: 'Pierre Jean Jouve: Selected Verse and Prose, translated into English by David Gascoyne'. There were to be seven sections:⁸⁶
Introduction: biographical and critical essay (5,000 words);
Selected poems (about 20/30) with French text;
'The Present Greatness of Mozart';
'The Unconscious, Spirituality, Catastrophe';
Preface to *Histoires sanglantes*;
A short tale (('Le Château' or *Dans les années profondes*);
Prose piece published in *Fontaine*.⁸⁷

Section II of *Poems 1937-42*, classified by Gascoyne as 'Metaphysical (or 'metapsychological'),⁸⁸ included five translations from Jouve's *Matière céleste* (1937) and *Kyrie*.⁸⁹ There is a pattern to the diction of Gascoyne's own poems here: 'mountains', 'peaks', 'rock' and 'valley', are set against 'desert', 'plain', 'fields', and both against 'sky/skies', 'cloud', 'moon', 'star(s)', so that at times there is a definite cosmic element. Glyn Purs-glove refers perceptively to 'the astronomical infinities of the spirit's range' as one of 'the recurrent symbols in Gascoyne's poetic language.'⁹⁰ 'Light', 'sun(light)' are opposed by 'night', 'dark', 'black(ness)', 'fire' and 'red' are balanced by 'ice', and the world of the spirit with that of 'flesh' and 'blood'; Daniel E. Rivas points to Jouve's concern to 'harmonize' antinomies in his own poems.⁹¹ 'Pain', 'grief' and 'anguish' resonate throughout this section of Gascoyne's *Poems 1937-42*, where the void or abyss is ever present, associated but not synonymous with 'hell', 'descent' and 'depths'. In Jouve's own collection of poems, 1939-1944, *La Vierge de Paris*, his 'Nuit des Saints' includes the line: 'Nous avons entendu le discours de l'abîme / Nous avons écouté ses premiers mots de sort /

Funeste et avons vu les anges sur la ville / Nous lui devons notre mort très
farouche / Et ce n'est rien encore' / 'We have listened to the abyss's
discourse / We have heard its first words of grievous fate / And have seen
the angels above the city / We owe them our savage death / And it is
nothing yet.'⁹²

*

The poet Thomas Blackburn is struck by the 'lurid glare and sense of apocalyptic revelation' in Gascoyne's 'Metaphysical' poems.⁹³ In the second half of the 1930s there were clear indications of an apocalyptic finale to the decade in the rapidly deteriorating political situation in Europe with the rise of the fascist dictators and the horrors of the Civil War in Spain. And England in 1940–41, especially London, confronted a real apocalypse: systematic bombing and a threatened invasion by Hitler. The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer of *Poems 1937–42* suggests that Gascoyne's volume might well indeed have been called 'Inferno'.⁹⁴

Gascoyne himself had noted of Jouve in 1938: 'I know of no one who has so fully expressed the *apocalyptic* atmosphere of our time or with so strong an accent of the "sublime".'⁹⁵ Callander considers that the French writer had developed 'his apprehension of the triumph of the self-destructive elements in European civilization, until in *Kyrie* the conviction bursts forth in apocalyptic and prophetic language.'⁹⁶ The connection here with Gascoyne is strong. It would be difficult to disagree with Stephen Romer's contention that there is a marked sense of the apocalyptic in regard to the imagery, tone and content of several of the poems and journal entries from 1938 onwards.⁹⁷ Both poets pursue a burning spiritual quest for renewal; their role was to testify to the truth at a time of national danger. For Jouve, 'the creator of living values (the poet) must be against catastrophe.'⁹⁸ Callander states that when Jouve referred to a 'catastrophe' he did so 'by adopting Freud's method and diagnosing the spiritual diseases of our age as though psychoanalyzing an individual.'⁹⁹ According to Gascoyne, who extends her argument, Jouve's essay, 'Inconscient, spiritualité et catastrophe', amounts to a manifesto announcing the kind of poetry that had

emerged from a full awareness of the unconscious mind as conceived by Freud,¹⁰⁰ and of its relation to both the basest and most sublime levels of the human psyche.¹⁰¹ In Jean Starobinski's view, the preface to *Sueur de sang* 'testifies to the poet's interest in psychoanalytic discovery, but it isn't by any means an act of allegiance [...]'; he goes on to emphasize that Jouve sought 'to establish similarities between the primitive material of poetic work and the interior universe described through psychoanalysis.'¹⁰² The opening couplet of *Sueur de sang* sheds light both on this underlying dualism and on the fascinating pair of novels [*Hécate* and *Vagadu*].¹⁰³ Jouve had been engaged in writing: 'Les crachats sur l'asphalte m'ont toujours fait penser / A la face imprimée au voile des saintes femmes.'¹⁰⁴

Jouve's message in 'The Unconscious, Spirituality, Catastrophe' was an urgent one:

At this very hour, civilization is faced with the possibility of the direst of catastrophes; a catastrophe all the more menacing in that its first and last cause lies within man's own inner depths, mysterious in their action and governed by an independent logic; moreover, man is now as never before aware of the pulse of Death within him. The psycho-neurosis of the world has reached so advanced a stage that we can but fear the possibility of an act of suicide. Human society is reminded of the condition in which it found itself in the time of St John, or round the year 1000; it awaits the end, hoping it will come soon.¹⁰⁵

And he employs heightened language in his reference to the Book of Revelation and medieval visions of the apocalypse:

[...] we find ourselves heavy laden with the accumulated weight of instruments of Destruction; the noisome iniquities of its nations make of Europe 'the great harlot ... seated upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns...' (p. 114).¹⁰⁶

While Jouve alone¹⁰⁷ made clear references to the demonology of the Antichrist and the associated beasts in a number of poems, both he and Gascoyne balanced the destructive and the redemptive elements of Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation.¹⁰⁸ In a 'post-face' [afterword] to *Les Témoins: poèmes choisis de 1930 à 1942* (1943), Jouve explains that 'the

poems in this anthology have been chosen as “witnesses”, that is to say, according to their relationship with the catastrophic, or strictly speaking, apocalyptic event of the War.¹⁰⁹ That same year he wrote a preface, ‘Poésie et catastrophe’, to Pierre Emmanuel’s *La Colombe*:

Within, yet in opposition to the catastrophe, the poet represents that which is most permanent and sacred in all political action. His ultimate seriousness is surpassed only by that of the man who fights and puts his life at risk. [...] The true poet, the poet of the essential, draws on the forces of the soul and renders them in an eternal act, and thanks to that very act, engages with his times, engages with events [...].
The poet is the only one who can possess the body and soul of truth; he is the only [...] one whose task it is to revive the deep instincts of love in opposition to the seductive instincts of death.¹¹⁰

Callander argues that ‘If we except the work of Pierre Emmanuel, who acknowledges himself to have been directly influenced by Jouve himself [in *Qui est cet homme?*] we may say that Jouve is unusual in his adherence to and adaptation of the spirit of the Apocalypse.’¹¹¹

*

A. T. Tolley has suggested that in some of the poems in Section II of *Poems 1937–42* Gascoyne ‘was merely trying to reproduce the rhetoric of Jouve’s poetry,’ and that ‘the violent, often conventional and decidedly unresonant diction was that of his model.’¹¹² The poet and critic Peter Levi rightly points to Gascoyne’s ‘ability to imbibe the essence of another poet and produce it as one’s own: he has been through this mysterious process with Eluard, Jouve, Eliot, Wallace Stevens [...]’.¹¹³ Philip Gardner has observed with some acuity that the language Gascoyne uses in his translations of Jouve ‘has sometimes a marked resemblance to his own densely packed lines in *Poems 1937–42*.’ Certainly Gascoyne’s mastery of the alexandrine – a difficult line-length to manage in English – derives from his knowledge of French poetry.¹¹⁴ This accords with Yves Bonnefoy’s view, expressed in his essay ‘Translating Poetry’, that while ‘the translator need [not] be . . . a “poet” [. . .]’ there is the implication ‘that if he himself is a writer he will be

unable to keep his translating separate from his own work.¹¹⁵ Tolley writes: 'Indeed, it is the over-ripe, archaic diction of *Poems 1937-42* that Gascoyne uses in translating Jouve.' His argument is that 'Jouve's *Kyrie* may have triggered for Gascoyne the conception of a body of visionary poems with a traditional religious centre. Certainly, poems from *Kyrie*, translated without the filter of Gascoyne's sensibility, could well be mistaken for pieces from *Poems 1937-42*.'¹¹⁶ Tolley quotes a version by Keith Bosley of one of Jouve's poems in the section 'Les Quatre Cavaliers',¹¹⁷ but it does not provide a viable illustration of the point he is making since there is no immediate or close association with Gascoyne's own diction. However, his reasoning is valid, and I would suggest that a line like the following from *Sueur de sang*, 'Space stricken with human sickness beneath the sky' (in Gascoyne's translation),¹¹⁸ could serve as a more apposite example. It would hardly be surprising if Gascoyne's response to Jouve and to the poems he was translating at the end of the 1930s, had directly influenced his own work as he struggled to develop and refine a new poetic language. Gascoyne himself makes that point:

The use of lines quoted from Jouve as epigraphs to certain sections of *Poems 1937-42* is insufficient indication of the enormous influence that his poetry, outlook, and conversation were to have on me for many years to come. Anyone familiar with Jouve's *Sueur de sang*, *Matière Céleste* or *Kyrie* will recognize this influence in such poems of mine as 'World Without End', 'The Fortress', and 'Insurrection'.¹¹⁹

He told Lucien Jenkins in the *Stand* interview that 'The poems after *Miserere* are all strongly influenced by Jouve. Even the poem which was originally titled "To Benjamin Fondane" and which is now "I. M. Benjamin Fondane"' [op. cit., p. 22]. There are, too, several examples of poems whose titles chime with those of Jouve's own.¹²⁰ When I showed Gascoyne the unpublished poem, 'Post Mortem', which I had transcribed from a notebook in the British Library, he immediately acknowledged Jouve's influence, but grimaced when he re-read, some fifty-five years on, the attempt to bring out the link between eroticism, the unconscious and death.¹²¹

Section V of *Poems 1937–42* begins with two lines from Jouve: 'Au temps ou la douceur / Est cruelle et le désespoir est brillant' / 'At a time when gentleness / Is cruel and despair is resplendent' (my translation); but the most significant appropriation occurs in the epigraph to Section I, *Miserere*:

Le désespoir a des ailes
L'amour a pour aile nacré
Le désespoir
Les sociétés peuvent changer

'Despair has wings / Love has despair / For shimmering wing / Societies can change', in Gascoyne's translation. Another of Gascoyne's 'ghost' collections of the 1930s was entitled *Despair Has Wings*,¹²² also subsumed into *Poems 1937–42*. Almost seventy years on I have chosen his title for this volume of homage to both writers. Gascoyne broadcast a selection of his own poetry in 1949, and referred in his introduction to 'the octet' of poems, *Miserere*, with which the programme began:

The title [...] is intended to indicate that the poems relate to a period of spiritual death and anticipation of rebirth – of spiritual rebirth and not of religious revival – and not only to such a period in the life of an individual, but to the present moment in the history of Western civilization, as is indicated also by the four brief lines from the French poet, Pierre Jean Jouve, chosen as an epigraph to the sequence [and quoted in French, as above].¹²³

With reference to these four lines which underscore Gascoyne's profound empathy with Jouve's poetry, Brian Merrikin-Hill has pointed to 'the need to escape from the world into the territory of the spirit and the freedom (even dangerous freedom) in which the spirit belongs.'¹²⁴ He argues earlier in his penetrating essay that 'Gascoyne had learned from Berdyaev that freedom was the natural milieu or environment of the human spirit', and that from Chestov and Berdyaev 'comes also the realization that in this freedom one faces the black holes in oneself, one's own devil, the Jungian "shadow".'¹²⁵ An observation by Benjamin Fondane in his letter to Gascoyne of July 1937 (see endnote 59) is also pertinent to the chosen title for this celebration of Gascoyne and Jouve.

Fondane comments: 'There is something positive in despair, and you have recognized it.'¹²⁶ In the penultimate paragraph, he qualifies despair as 'an extreme way of thinking, radical, positive, with the possibility of liberation.'¹²⁷

Three of Jouve's lines form the epigraph to Gascoyne's *Requiem*, written between 1938 and 1940, dedicated and presented to the South African composer Priaulx Rainier¹²⁸ in Paris just before the war:

Permetts que nous te goûtions d'abord le jour de la mort
Qui est un grand jour de calme d'épousés,
Le monde heureux, les fils réconciliés.¹²⁹

Other lines from poems by Jouve are quoted in the *Collected Journals*:

Le coeur divin en haut
Tout devenant immense et irradié
En haut plus près du bas
Seulement si l'on est à l'intérieur et si l'on joue
Tout pour le tout¹³⁰

from *Matière céleste* in the entry for 12 February 1938; 'Nous avons étonné par nos grandes souffrances / L'inclinaison des astres indifférents' from *Kyrie*: 'Les Quatre Cavaliers', 23 January 1939, as mentioned above; and under the entry for 4 March 1940 Gascoyne inserts, also from *Kyrie*:

Sans contact aujourd'hui je suis, sinon
Avec le sein de Dieu
Sans amour aujourd'hui je suis, sinon
Dans les vallées de Dieu
Et le soleil emprisonné par les forêts
Le coeur, emprisonné par le ciel de la guerre.¹³¹

T. S. Eliot had intended to publish four of Gascoyne's Jouve translations facing the French originals in *The Criterion*, just before the war, but in the event he sent on the manuscript to Anthony Dickins at the *Poetry* (London) office, together with some of Gascoyne's own poems. Dickins mistakenly supposed (not unreasonably, as I have indicated) that the latter were also translations from Jouve. Gascoyne's letters to Dickins, 31 March 1939, and to Tambimuttu, 8 May 1939,¹³² corrected the misun-

derstanding: 'The poems "De Profundis" and "Lachrymae" are not translations,' he pointed out. In the event, the first of his Jouve translations in *Poetry* (London) did not appear until Number 5, two years later.

In a manuscript notebook dating from 1941 (though some entries are as late as 1944) one of the pages is headed 'Pierre Jean Jouve: The Resurrection of the Dead', with the titles of ten poems Gascoyne has translated or intends to translate: 'Insula Monti Majoris', 'Nada', 'Brow', 'Woman and Earth', 'Gravida', 'March 28th', 'Helen's Land', 'The Mother', 'Interior Landscape', 'The Two Witnesses', 'Kyrie'.¹³³ On an earlier page in the notebook, dated 20 February 1942, Gascoyne has listed 'Poems 1938[sic]-42' under the heading 'New Project for a Collection' where 'The Five Poems After Jouve' are: 'Woman & Earth', 'The Moths', 'Brow', 'Nada', 'Insula Monti Majoris'. However, in *Poems 1937-42* (1943) the last named poem is replaced by 'The Two Witnesses'.

*

Certainly, Gascoyne's passionate commitment to search for truth in his poetry chimes with that in prose of the existentialist philosophers Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre who were preoccupied by the possibility of authenticity. What Gascoyne particularly admired in Pierre Jean Jouve is clarified in an incomplete, unpublished draft in a notebook from c. 1950 in which he stresses his concern for the authenticity of being, allied to the notion of poetry as 'newly realized truth':

Even among the poems that Jouve would now prefer to be forgotten, anterior to the first volume of his Poetic works, the long *Prayer* of 1923, written when this poet was thirty-five, remains still remarkable and valuable because of the blunt unhesitating force of robust sincerity that fills each line. It will always keep the freshness of a genuine immediate utterance of newly realized truth.¹³⁴

Gascoyne emerges through this series of 'Metaphysical' poems in *Poems 1937-42* as a cartographer of man's spiritual crisis, his primary concern, while engaging at the same time with the severe crisis provoked by the ineluctable fact that the world was at war. On the very day that W. H. Auden was sitting in the Fifty-Second Street 'dive' composing his poem

'September 1, 1939', Gascoyne had articulated his despair in apocalyptic terms: '[...] but to witness the irredeemably tragic spectacle of mankind rushing blindly and incoherently, like the Gadarene swine, into a sea of horror and obliteration.' His poem 'Lowland' with its plain and valley depicts the lowest point or nadir that mankind has reached. The speaker's invocation: 'out of our lowland rear / A lofty, savage and enduring monument!' echoes the violence that is stressed in the metaphorical geological fission in 'Mountains': 'Pure peaks thrust upward out of mines of energy / To scar the sky [...]. Schismatic shock and rupture of earth's core', give way to the apocalyptic: 'Preach to us with great avalanches, tell / How new worlds surge from chaos to the light'. His concern, however, extended to the future, too, and 'the coming spiritual revolution'.¹³⁵

Consciously or unconsciously, Gascoyne's Surrealist imagery reappears in *Poems 1937-42*. The reader is aware of the ubiquity of the eye (sometimes disembodied) which witnesses all. This constant in the iconography of Surrealist writing and art is presented as 'both visual and poetic, as a site of confrontation, conjunction and communication. The eye,' Fiona Bradley explains, 'links inner and outer.'¹³⁶ In Gascoyne's 'Metaphysical' poems, the eye is 'hovering', 'a socket-free lone visionary eye';¹³⁷ 'searchlight eyes'. However, there are other equally relevant ways of interpreting the unmistakable presence of the eye(s). In his journal there is a reference to the 'absence of images' because 'the essential nature of the experience [is] negation',¹³⁸ Gascoyne comments that 'practically the only image that presents itself at all strongly is a black vacuum in (or through) which two eyes are fixedly staring' 22 August 1939.¹³⁹ Just as significant is a passage in Jouve's 'The Unconscious, Spirituality, Catastrophe' that foregrounds the notion of the all-seeing penetrating eye:

Incalculable is the extension of our sense of the tragic that is brought us by meta-psychology, and even more incalculable [is] the extension of the knowledge gained by that eye which gazes into our secret parts – which eye is none other than our own.¹⁴⁰

Gascoyne's principal concern is with that inner searching eye. C. A.

Hackett is in no doubt that 'With the examples of Baudelaire and Rimbaud before him (his debt to both is great), and equipped with the technique of Freudian psychology, Jouve has come to consider himself as fulfilling a prophetic function, as "l'oeil de la catastrophe", an eye which reveals and explores the tragic atrophy of both man and his civilization.'¹⁴¹ Gascoyne had also written in his journal on 22 August: 'For the world a week of severe crisis has begun. For me, the interior crisis continues, more intense than ever. [...] Am I to become a sort of *Prophet* [my emphasis] after these days in the Wilderness?' On 31 August he had added, 'Having accepted the idea of myself as a kind of "prophet", I find the weight of this rôle increasingly overwhelming.'¹⁴²

*

Tambimuttu wrote twice to Gascoyne in June 1945. In his letter of 8 June he sympathizes with the recipient: 'I understand how you must feel after this period of nerve strain and attrition and I do see that we must arrange for you to have a rest.' Tambi writes in the second letter, three days later, that he has arranged a two months' holiday in the Scilly Isles for Gascoyne, all expenses paid. 'I hope,' he continues, 'during that time you will be able to complete some of the books that we have commissioned from you – *for example, Pierre Jean Jouve translations*' [my emphasis].¹⁴³

Tambimuttu wrote again to Gascoyne on 6 July 1945:

Dear David,

Will you let me have your translation of the Jouve poem during the next week? We want to publish this anthology as soon as possible, and I would greatly appreciate it if you will do this for me.

Yours,

T.¹⁴⁴

The following year, Jouve inscribed to Tambi a presentation copy of *La Vierge de Paris*.¹⁴⁵

Derek Stanford noted in December 1946: 'Meanwhile the poet [Gascoyne] is said to be preparing a volume of translations from Pierre Jean Jouve.'¹⁴⁶ But this did not materialize, although the intention

was still there as drafts of translations and an incomplete preface to Jouve indicate in several notebooks dated c. 1950. In January 1946 Jouve's poem 'L'Espérance' (from *Hymne*, 1947) appeared in the original French in *Horizon*, No. 73; later in the year Jouve published his collection *La Vierge de Paris* (1939–44) which was inspired by a medieval statuette of the Virgin and child which 'he had kept in a recess in his study adjacent to his wife's consulting-room' in their rue de Tournon apartment.¹⁴⁷ The statuette figures in Gascoyne's poem, 'The Fabulous Glass' in Section IV of *Poems 1937–42*, dedicated to 'Mme B.R.-J.' (Dr Blanche Reverchon-Jouve):

In my deep Mirror's blindest heart
 A Cone I planted there to sprout.
 Sprang up a Tree tall as a cloud
 And each branch bore a loud-voiced load
 Of Birds as bright as their own song;
 But when a distant death-knell rang
 My Tree fell down, and where it lay
 A Centipede disgustingly
 Swarmed its quick length across the ground!
 Thick shadows fell inside my mind;
 Until an Alcove rose to view
 In which, obscure at first, there now
 Appeared a Virgin and her Child;
 But it was horrid to behold
 How she consumed that Infant's Face
 With her voracious Mouth. Her Dress
 Was Black and blotted all out. Then
 A phosphorescent Triple Chain
 Of Pearls against the darkness hung
 Like a Temptation; but ere long
 They vanished, leaving in their place
 A Peacock, which lit up the glass
 By opening his Fan of Eyes;
 And thus closed down my Self-regarding Gaze.¹⁴⁸

Five poems by Jouve from *Les Quatre Cavaliers* were published in the original French in 1946 in *Adam International Review*, No. 156–157.¹⁴⁹ In 1947¹⁵⁰ Jouve himself came to London (Allied Circle, 14 May) and Oxford (The

Taylorian Institute, 12 May) to give a lecture, *Apologie du Poète*,¹⁵¹ and Gascoyne returned to Paris for the first time since 1939, staying for a year. During that period he submitted to Tambimuttu an essay that would be published in *Poetry* (London) as 'New French Poetry: A Paris Letter'.¹⁵² 'Among the new collections of poems published during 1947,' he wrote:

the most important is probably *Hymne*, the latest volume of the *Oeuvres Poétiques* of Pierre Jean Jouve (I can only say 'probably' in order to avoid seeming too uncategorically dogmatic on the subject) [...] (p. 32).

In the manuscript notebook, 'Poetry and Transcendence'¹⁵³ dated 1947, Gascoyne drafted anthologies under the headings 'The Return of the God-Conscious' and 'Poésie et Métaphysique Existentielle'. Authors represented included Jouve together with Apollinaire, Von Hofmannsthal, Tagore, Wahl, Cavalcanti, Claudel, Otto Rank, Valéry, Hölderlin, and Heidegger. The passages copied out for his Jouve entry are taken from the first section of *Apologie du Poète* (1947).¹⁵⁴ Later in the same notebook, another heading reads: 'Pages Copiées. A Common-place Book Miscellany', comprising extracts selected from works by Valéry, Rank, Pierre Jean Jouve, Michel Carrouges, Henri Thomas, Jankélévitch, Nicolas Berdyayev, Georges Bataille, Ramón J. Sender, René Char. For Jouve's contribution, Gascoyne has taken four paragraphs from the end of the last section of the lecture¹⁵⁵ and has also transcribed the poem 'Rôle du poète' from the collection *Hymne* (1947) on five pages.¹⁵⁶

Gascoyne often visited Jouve who now lived in a studio near the Porte d'Orléans at 7 rue Antoine-Chantin, and first met the poet Yves de Bayser there. Margaret Callander has commented on Jouve's 'sustained preoccupation with all aspects of Baudelaire's life and work',¹⁵⁷ and she has emphasized his 'intimate and lifelong relationship' with the nineteenth-century poet.¹⁵⁸ Jouve's appreciation of Baudelaire in various publications during the war and after revived and increased Gascoyne's own interest.¹⁵⁹ In his contribution to *L'Autre* in 1982, Gascoyne comments: 'During the war I had had serious psychological problems'¹⁶⁰ and when I resumed analysis [for a few sessions] with Blanche, I told her about the interior voices that attacked me, haunted

me constantly and repeated, "The gods...the gods...the gods...the gods". But she couldn't do anything for me.¹⁶¹ It wasn't until 1960 that the voices finally left him, as he told Jeremy Reed.¹⁶² Even in February 1995 he could say to his interviewer, Dennis Egan, 'Everything about me is a "case history".'¹⁶³

*

If Gascoyne never completed that projected 'biographical and critical essay (5,000 words)', he did leave the fragments of a preface in two notebooks now in the British Library. In the first, a draft entitled 'The Genius of Pierre Jean Jouve', Gascoyne describes him as

probably by far the most impeccable and fastidious of all living writers. He has never written an insensitive or carelessly expressed or superfluous paragraph in his life; in his way he is a perfectionist,¹⁶⁴ yet he would no doubt deny that he had ever achieved perfection, as all perfectionists will. [...] His aim has always been to focus and communicate the *essential*.

Gascoyne goes on to highlight in the *Oeuvres Poétiques*

the rare quality of density. [...] He is one of the most cultured and sober minds in Europe'. Balthus told journalist Françoise Jaunin that 'His [Jouve's] poetry was as pure as his personality was complex and difficult'.¹⁶⁵

During the German Occupation a poetry of Resistance had emerged in France, 'a turning-point in the development of modern French poetry'.¹⁶⁶ In the much longer fragment, 'Jouve, Preface', Gascoyne focuses on *La Vierge de Paris*. 'The magnificent opening poem, "La Chute du ciel,"¹⁶⁷ is a prophetic apostrophe written immediately before the outbreak of war:

Mais tu n'as pas perdu. Les anges de la guerre
Les exterminateurs! ont mesuré ta face
Mourante et animale auprès du flanc des tours
Dans les rues balayées par l'éventail de pierre...

and surely nothing was written then or has been since that summed up the essential significance and inmost development of the historic events of the period that it announced. Further on,' he continues, 'the book

contains, among several other long poems and sequences of interlinked short pieces, three series of poetic meditations which represent perhaps the greatest mystical poetry that Jouve has written; and this poetry will, I believe, be seen to take its place among the greatest and most authentic religious poetry in French literature.'

Looking back in the immediate post-war years on the period 1939–45 reflected in Jouve's *La Vierge de Paris*, Gascoyne is disturbed by the common currency of particular words and their general debasement:

While throughout the whole of Christendom, and no less throughout Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, discourses, exhortations and patriotic 'religious' utterances without number were using the words *sacrifice*, *renunciation*, and similar terms and expressions, the whole time that the war lasted, there were in Europe, here and there, a very few [...] men using the same words without at the same time blaspheming against the spirit without which language becomes in the end the instrument of a curse which man brings on himself.

Sacrifice and *renunciation* refer to an inner experience entailing an essential movement and change of attitude in the very soul of the individual, and it is the lesson of what it is really to experience this movement that is mediated and grasped and given articulate expression in these poems.

Gascoyne is speaking specifically here about 'Nuits des Saints I & II' and 'Innominata', and concerned to underscore the great significance which 'must be attributed to the task the poet fulfils when he uses language as the French language has been here used by Pierre Jean Jouve.' That is to say, with its 'vigorous purity' when 'properly employed.'¹⁶⁸

Another attempt to articulate his approving post-war response to Jouve's *La Vierge de Paris* is also incomplete, and again examines the nature of genius in relation to its subject:

Pierre Jean Jouve: uncompromising, uncompromised witness to the eternal values, purest representative in our time of the most profound French genius. We speak of geniuses, but the most individual and solitary geniuses are paradoxically the agents of a single and identical genius, that of the national literature of their country. In modern France, who does not recognize this voice in Péguy, in Bernanos, in the passionate sobriety of Gide, in the patriarchal majesty of Claudel, – in

Pierre Jean Jouve, a man who stands apart from all political parties, all religious dominations, all literary schools, and has thus been able to speak of patriotism, of God, of cultural values with an authority which only those blinded by partisan prejudices can fail to recognize.

'Songe', 'Récitatif', 'La Chute du Ciel', 'Terres Promises', 'A Une Soie', 'Ode Funèbre': these six poems are surely among the greatest expression of the spirit of French religious patriotism and at the same time of the lonely man's longing for God and His Kingdom, in all the French poetry of this century. These are more truly poems of prophecy than anything to be found in the ...' [Essay ends here]¹⁶⁹

There is a stylistic difference in the work of each poet after the war; it is clear that both were disillusioned. Callander describes Jouve's response after the defeat of Germany 'to the spectacle of a divided, suspicious, hesitant Europe in which France failed to set an example of decisive, united action. He made no public expressions of reproach and bitterness,' she writes, 'but there are a number of small indications of anxiety and disappointment in his work at this time.' She argues that *Génie*, his first collection after *La Vierge de Paris*, is 'puzzling. It is very short, and yet the reader finds a great difficulty in picking out the main themes and the important images.'¹⁷⁰ Writing in 1988, Gascoyne recalled his increasing disappointment with 'post-war governments' failure to implement the dreams and promises of a radically improved new future that had helped the Allies bring the Third Reich to an end.¹⁷¹ In his case, he had had to accept his inability to write with the same facility. *A Vagrant and other poems* (John Lehmann, 1950)¹⁷² represents a further stage in a developing vision. There is a readiness to experiment and a loosening of emotional tension in his acknowledgement of human frailty. The title poem is dedicated to marginality and solitude; the authenticity of what we read here is never in doubt.

Gascoyne contributed three unpublished translations of poems by Jouve to John Lehmann's BBC Third Programme series, *New Soundings* 12, broadcast on 11 March 1953: 'Young Spirit', 'Landscape in Another Direction' and 'Interior Landscape'.¹⁷³

*

There is no record of the (in)frequency of correspondence between the two writers before or after the 1950s. However, two brief letters from Jouve to Gascoyne have survived, dated '14 décembre 1956', and '5 février 1957'.¹⁷⁴ In the first, Jouve had previously sent for comment a copy of his translation of *Macbeth*.¹⁷⁵ Gascoyne kept a letter and a note from Blanche: the first is dated '7 août' [no year], the second is undated but certainly written post-war as the first line only of the location of the Paris apartment indicates: '7 rue A[ntoine-] Chantin'. Without other evidence, it can only be tempting to speculate that the year was 1947 and that Gascoyne's impending visit to the Jouvés would have been his first since 1939. It is interesting that while the writer addresses him as 'Mon cher ami', and 'Mon ami' respectively, she signs the letter quite formally as his analyst, 'B. R. Jouve', rather than 'Blanche'.¹⁷⁶

During that decade Gascoyne, together with other poets such as Yves Bonnefoy and Yves de Bayser shared an intense admiration for Jouve, but they were concerned that he wasn't well enough known. Gascoyne ends his contribution to the *L'Autre* volume as follows: 'It seems to me that he rejected the glory which at the same time he desired.' In 1951, while he was in America with Kathleen Raine and W. S. Graham, Gascoyne made a recording for the Library of Congress in Washington of translations of six poems by Jouve.¹⁷⁷ His essay, 'A New Poem by Pierre Jean Jouve: "Language"', which includes two translations (the first of which has remained uncollected until now), was published in the *London Magazine* in 1955.¹⁷⁸

In 1964, as he described in the Lucien Jenkins interview, Gascoyne suffered a serious breakdown¹⁷⁹ in Paris, where he had been staying with Meraud ['Mérode']¹⁸⁰ Guevara, the widowed painter. He had tried to get into the Elysée Palace, feeling he had a mission to see de Gaulle to warn him of a plot.¹⁸¹ He was arrested in the Elysée Yard, forcibly taken to the *gendarmerie* and kept there for a whole afternoon. The police commissioner, M. [Jean] Rousselot, a poet himself according to Yves de Bayser, telephoned the British Consulate, then saw Jouve's name in Gascoyne's *carnet*. Blanche arrived, as did the Consulate representative who Gascoyne slapped in the face. Gascoyne was treated very gently.¹⁸²

and taken to the *préfecture* psychiatric hospital in a straitjacket. She was one of the few people to visit him there, and 'This was in fact the last time I saw her,' wrote Gascoyne. 'She had been intermittently my analyst since 1938. I should perhaps rather say "counsellor", as she never undertook to "cure" me, and I never paid her a sou.'¹⁸³ Meraud Guevara had provided Gascoyne with accommodation at her homes in Paris and Aix-en-Provence for the previous ten years. Blanche Jouve advised her that 'it was very important that he should be released into the care of his mother and that he should not live alone.'¹⁸⁴ In his unpublished diary, 'My First Post-Apocalyptic Notebook', which he kept religiously during this enforced stay in the Vaucluse mental hospital on the outskirts of Paris, there is an entry for 'April 16th or 17th?' which reads: 'Blanche R.-J. is for me one of the true 20th Century Scientific (Freudian) Sybils. And a Sybil is an incarnation of the Divine Total(ly) Human (or Collective) Unconscious.'¹⁸⁵

*

Gascoyne told Michèle Duclos in his interview with her that 'At times when one can't write poems oneself, [translation] represents a way of creating equivalents of poems that one likes or admires. Rarely have I translated a poem that I haven't liked.'¹⁸⁶ (In the essay 'Translating Poetry', Yves Bonnefoy makes the observation, 'If a work does not compel us, it is untranslatable.') Gascoyne continued, 'Above all, I like to translate poems by poets whom I know personally, because it seems easier to put myself into their frame of mind with that background knowledge.'¹⁸⁷

Gascoyne's contribution to the First Cambridge Poetry Festival in 1975 was a reading of 'The Two Witnesses' by Jouve,¹⁸⁸ and after Jouve's death in 1976,¹⁸⁹ he would return to his work on many occasions, producing translations, articles and reviews. He translated four 'Mozart' poems in 1980 for *Adam International Review* No. 222/24 at the request of the editor, Miron Grindea, and contributed the short piece, 'My Indebtedness to Jouve', with its particular and apposite reference to music.¹⁹⁰ A handwritten list of items for a 'Possible Collection of Prose

Writings, criticism', dated 26 February 1983 in a red and black notebook, includes 'La rue de Tournon (to be written)'; it may have been the basis for Gascoyne's contribution, 'A Paris en 1937', to the special Jouve number of *L'Autre* (1982). The magazine *Spectrum* 3 published Gascoyne's translation of Bernard Groethuysen's preface to Jouve and Klossowski's *Poèmes de la folie de Hölderlin* in 1983. When Jouve's *Folie et génie* was published posthumously that same year, Gascoyne told the poet Jeremy Reed just how much he admired and valued the final text, 'Hölderlin', in the collection of radio broadcasts transmitted in 1951.¹⁹¹ Two of Gascoyne's previous Jouve versions were included in *The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry*, edited by Paul Auster in 1982¹⁹² and Gascoyne contributed in Spring 1984 to a series of radio programmes by O. Germain Thomas commemorating Jouve, broadcast by France-Culture.¹⁹³ In 1988, 'The Unconscious, Spirituality, Catastrophe' was reprinted as a pamphlet by Words Press, forty-seven years after its first appearance in Tambimuttu's *Poetry* (London).

The *Times Literary Supplement* issue of 6 May 1988 included Gascoyne's important review essay, 'The ascetic sensualist', on Jouve's *Oeuvre*, Volumes I, II. It was an opportunity, many years later than he had intended, to produce what is a penetrating, empathic and closely argued assessment and analysis of both poet and novelist. But while Gascoyne approached this task with some trepidation, as his letter to Alan Jenkins the commissioning editor makes clear,¹⁹⁴ he found himself reassured that the piece at the proofs stage was 'as it now stands exactly the article I intended to write.'

In 1996 Delos Press reprinted his translation of 'The Present Greatness of Mozart'. *Selected Verse Translations*, which appeared that same year, included twenty-two versions of Jouve, superseding the twelve in the *Collected Verse Translations* of 1970. Gascoyne was presented in London by the French Minister of Culture with the prestigious award of Chevalier dans l'Ordre National des Arts et Lettres in recognition of his services to literature and art in France. Sean Street visited him at his Isle of Wight home to talk about the art of translating verse; an edited recording was broadcast in the BBC Radio 4 Kaleidoscope feature, *The*

Cartographer of Thought, in September 1996.¹⁹⁵ When asked how he sees the role of the poet as translator, Gascoyne replied:

Well, to make a poem which sounds like an English poem, but at the same time not to betray the image or the meaning too much. 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' most people would agree with Keats, but truth is not the same as accuracy. There are translators who simply take the translation as a stepping stone to write a poem of their own. I try to make a poem that sounds good and corresponds to some extent to the original musical rhythm. French music is totally different.

As for Jouve's 'voice', he commented that 'he is a difficult poet to appreciate, I think, especially for English readers, because it's a very individual combination of sex and mysticism [...],' and through his knowledge of Freud, he was 'very much aware of the connection between sex and spirituality.' He added, 'Modern French poetry – a great many [French] poets are concerned with the question of *being*, which is something that English poetry readers find rather forbidding or pretentious [...]. I think maybe there's a reaction now.' During the course of the programme, Gascoyne read two Jouve translations, 'Woman and Ear' and the brief 'Spittle on the asphalt', observing that Jouve 'makes a very strange connection between spittle and spirituality.'

*

Asked in 1998 to evaluate the impact of Jouve on Gascoyne's life and work, Yves de Bayser, a friend of both men since the Liberation, replied 'Elle était capitale' / 'It was of cardinal importance.' He continues:

But if you want to talk about Pierre's influence on David's poetry, it seems to me that it can only be considered from a thematic point of view, as a development towards a holy spiritualism, since David's Christ is 'of Revolution and of Poetry', and retains a great autonomy. He quotes Jouve in the epigraph to *Misère*, but on the theme of spiritual suffering. One thinks, too, of the poem dedicated to Blanche Reverchon-Jouve ['The Fabulous Glass'] which is the expression of a poeticized sacreligious dream, but he is closer to the truth than Jouve when he talks of the influence of psychoanalysis on his [Jouve's] work. In Jouve's case it is obvious.¹⁹⁶

Gascoyne commented to Duclos that Jouve 'was admirable and very difficult but always very kind to me, very encouraging,'¹⁹⁷ but it is the last paragraph of his letter to Jenkins that represents, in effect, his final word on the man who had meant so much to him:

I have known quite a few poets/writers in my time, some of them well-known, but None have inspired in me the respect and admiration I felt before long for Jouve and his utter devotion to his craft and calling, his passion for the impeccable, his disdain for the inauthentic; at the same time his generosity and openness. So it is a considerable satisfaction to me to have got this article off my chest at last!¹⁹⁸

In a letter dated 15 February 1940, Balthus addresses his friend Jouve as 'a voice that is the last refuge of light in this dark night, a glimmer of the dawn to come.' How appropriate this is as an expression, too, of the very essence and promise of David Gascoyne's work.

Dr Roger Scott
Northumbria University

NOTES

- 1 'Introductory Notes' to *Collected Poems 1988* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xvii.
- 2 'L'imagination vorace de David Gascoyne' (16 February), my translation. 'Gascoyne a ses maîtres. Au zénith: Rimbaud et Hölderlin. A un de moindre: Pierre Jean Jouve. Il a un gourou: Jacob Boehme. Il a trouvé guides, fort inconfortables il est vrai: Kierkegaard, Chestov, Fondé Berdiaev'.
- 3 Skoob Books Publishing Ltd., 1991, pp. 283, 399. Elsewhere, Gascoyne notes the influence of Martin Buber.
- 4 'L'Étrange Mister Gascoyne' in *Libération* samedi et dimanche (22 January 1984). My translation. He told Margaret Callander, author of *The Poetry of Pierre Jean Jouve* (Manchester University Press, 1965), that 'Journal entries seem determined by imponderable contingencies': letter dated 22 April 1989, p. 3. I am very grateful to her for photocopies of this and a letter dated 6.VI.89, and for permission to quote from them.
- 5 *Poèmes de la folie de Hölderlin*, Pierre Jean Jouve, avec la collaboration de Pierre Klossowski. Avant-propos de Bernard Groethuysen (Paris: J. O. Fourcade, 1930). Groethuysen's preface, 'Concerning the Poems Hölderlin's Madness', was translated by Gascoyne in *Spectrum* 3 (1988). See SECTION 2.
- 6 As he had no German, Gascoyne's own versions of the poems were made with the help of two German friends who were living in Paris at the time. See 'A Paris, en 1937...' in *L'Autre*, Jouve number (June, 1988), p. 11.
- 7 'Introductory Notes', p. xvii.
- 8 'Le Surréalisme et la Jeune Poésie Anglaise: souvenirs de l'avant-guerre' in *Encrages* (Université de Paris VIII-Vincennes, Summer, 1981), p. 16. I discuss 'the attraction which Jouve's poetry exerted over me, and its determining influence subsequently on my development', p. 17. My translation here. Samuel Beckett before him had been drawn to Jouve's work during the late 1920s. James Knowlson records that Beckett later confessed to a 'passion' for Jouve's earliest poems written before the First World War, prior to Jouve's conversion to Catholicism [and the rejection of all twenty of his pre-1924 published texts, as he explained in his postscript to *Noctes* (1928)], and had read 'at least two' of the novels, *Le monarque du désert* and *Paulina*. See *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1996), p. 75. While he was at the École Normale in Paris, Beckett had met Jouve but, according to John Pilling, 'had not